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Kumiko Takeuchi

DEATH AND DIVINE JUDGEMENT IN ECCLESIASTES

Abstract

The current scholarly consensus places Ecclesiastes' composition in the postexilic era, sometime between the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods, leaning towards the late fourth or early third centuries BCE. Premised on this consensus, this thesis proposes that the book of Ecclesiastes is making a case for posthumous divine judgement in order to rectify pre-mortem injustices. Specifically, this thesis contends that issues relating to death and injustice raised by Qohelet in the book of Ecclesiastes point to the necessity of post-mortem divine judgement. Judging from its implied social and historical context, the book of Ecclesiastes also may have served as perhaps a provocative voice for, or as a catalyst to, the emergence of apocalyptic eschatology and later sectarian conflicts within Judaism during the mid-Second Temple period.

Some people in postexilic Israelite society began to raise questions about traditional views of death, Sheol, and divine judgement at a time when retributive justice appears not to be assured or to be absent. One may well ask: what is the book of Ecclesiastes doing, if it appeared on the cusp of the Persian-Hellenistic transition period when the traditional idea of theodicy was perhaps becoming a serious issue in Israelite society, before full-blown apocalyptic eschatology surfaced?

The answer seems to be inseparable from questions of how best Ecclesiastes as a book is to be read. Contemporary approaches to reading the book as a unified whole are examined, and a "frame-narrative" reading is argued to be the best approach. The key to unravelling the book's puzzle lies in realizing that the author probably intended the frame-narrator to have the last say. The role of this "third person" is pivotal for explaining the paradoxes within Qohelet's monologue and its relationship to the epilogue and uncovering the book's overall purpose.

DEATH AND DIVINE JUDGEMENT IN ECCLESIASTES

By

KUMIKO TAKEUCHI

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion

University of Durham

2015

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations and the format in this thesis follow the forms and conventions laid out in The SBL Handbook of Style, 2nd Ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and no part of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or in any other university for a degree.

Kumiko Takeuchi

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published in any format, including electronic, without the author's prior written consent. All information derived from this thesis must be acknowledged appropriately.

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Finally I wish to dedicate this thesis to memory of the late Dr William J. Larkin, Jr (1945–2014), mentor, friend, and Durham (Ustinov College) alumnus.

Soli Deo gloria

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ecclesiastes[1] has long been regarded as "an anomaly"[2] or "the most obscure book"[3] in canonical Scripture by both Jews and Christians.[4] Words such as puzzling, enigmatic, paradoxical, contradictory, or subversive are what readers often ascribe to Ecclesiastes. Polar structures,[5] irony,[6] cynicism,[7] and scepticism[8] are also mentioned as characteristics of the book. Some call Ecclesiastes' message radical or shocking, while others have tried to find more positive aspects in the book than are probably warranted.[9] Ecclesiastes has frustrated and exasperated scholars attempting to make sense of its message, content, and purpose through the centuries. Nevertheless, the book at the same time captivates scholars and laity alike with its existential tone and enduring appeal to the reader through the ages, despite its complexities and lack of apparently logical structure.[10] Many unanswered questions have been raised and debated concerning this little book in canonical Scripture.

This thesis starts with a few key problems and issues that one needs to recognize before presenting the main theme in this research.

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[1] The terms Ecclesiastes and Qohelet are differentiated in this thesis, the former being the book's name and the latter the persona who is the main speaker in the book. Scripture verse numbers are based on the Hebrew Bible (BHS) with the English version added as in 4:17 [ET 5:1] or 5:1 [ET 2] where the verse numbers are different in the English translation. English translations of the original texts are mine unless noted otherwise.

[2] Philip B. Helsel, "Warren Zevon's *The Wind* and Ecclesiastes: Searching for Meaning at the Threshold of Death," *JRH* 46 (2007): 206.

[3] Ernest Renan, "L'Ecclésiaste: traduit de l'hébreu: étude sur l'age et le caractère du livre 1882," in *Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan, tome 7* (ed. Psichari; Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1955), 536; ET Ernest Renan, *Cohelet, or, The Preacher. Translated from the Hebrew. With a Study on the Age and Character of the Book* (London: Mathieson, [n.d.]), 12.

[4] In this thesis the term "Scripture" is used to signify either Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament.

[5] J. A. Loader, *Polar Structures in the Book of Qohelet* (BZAW 152; [Berlin]: de Gruyter, 1979).

[6] Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Rev. ed.; BibLit; Sheffield: Almond, 1981).

[7] Morris Jastrow, *A Gentle Cynic: Being a Translation of the Book of Koheleth* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1919).

[8] E. J. Dillon, *The Sceptics of the Old Testament: Job, Koheleth, Agur: With English Text Translated for the First Time from the Primitive Hebrew as Restored on the Basis of Recent Philological Discoveries* (London: Isbiser, 1895), 85–129; Martin A. Klopfenstein, "Die Skepsis des Qohelet," *TZ* 28 (1972): 97–109; however, see Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (LHBOTS 541; New York: T&T Clark International, 2012).

[9] R. N. Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *JSOT* 23 (1982): 87–98.

[10] For Ecclesiastes' reception history in both academic and cultural milieux, see Eric S. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries* (BBC; eds. Sawyer, et al.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

0.1 Problems and Issues

Strangely, what anyone actually knows about the formation of Ecclesiastes, its context of origin, and impact in ancient Israel is minimal or debatable. Almost from its inception serious readers have discovered that Ecclesiastes poses historical and interpretative problems when trying to understand its content or message. This section presents (1) The Problem of how best Ecclesiastes is to be read and issues relating to (2) Dating in relation to developing the thesis in this dissertation.

0.1.1 The Problem of How Best Ecclesiastes Is to Be Read

Although recent scholarship has moved towards reading Ecclesiastes as a unified whole, various approaches do not yet yield satisfactory answers to the problems with a number of incoherences in the main body of the text. The dynamics of the epilogue in relation to Qohelet's monologue or the book's overall purpose in such complexity remains elusive.

The problem arises in reading Ecclesiastes itself as a book when one tries to interpret or understand it. More specifically, the problem that the book poses is how one is to understand many different and apparently inconsistent or contradictory statements in it. This general problem may be attributed to the following factors. Some of the most consistent differences in content relate to a difference in form: the difference between the "I" passages, in which Qohelet speaks, and the third person passages. Another issue is that the boundaries between the two narratives are not always clear. For example, some scholars interpret the first person passages starts with the explicit "I, Qohelet" statement in 1:12, while others think they start with his famous *hebel* statement in 1:2. The third person passages appear in 1:1-2, 7:27, and 12:8–12. The distinction between the first and the third person narratives and that between Qohelet's monologue (1:2– or 1:12–12:8) and the epilogue (12:9–14) in particular, presents a problem. Some scholars also think the epilogue may have been spoken by more than one person, which raises questions about the book's composition.

Another difficulty lies within Qohelet's monologue, which occupies most of the book. Qohelet presents different topics in ways that often appear to be haphazard, inconherent or contradictory. A clear structure or organization of the content in Ecclesiastes is indiscernible or fragmentary at best. The next subsections will briefly describe how scholars have dealt with these problems in interpreting Ecclesiastes.

0.1.1.1 A Brief Summary of Historical Approaches

Today there are very few scholars, even among the "conservative," who still hold the traditional view of Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes. The debate regarding the compositional unity of Ecclesiastes began when doubts were raised about Solomonic authorship and continues to rage today. The question of the book's authorship apparently began to surface as early as the fourth century by Didymus the Blind.[11] Although Martin Luther is widely, but likely erroneously, held as the first person to challenge the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, it is Grotius's work in 1644 which began to make an impact.[12] Before the rise of critical scholarship, however, the juxtaposition of "scepticism" in Qohelet's monologue and "moralism" in the epilogue was not apparently felt to be particularly puzzling, or requiring explanation.[13]

New critical views of the book as a sceptical work with many hands and glossatorial emendations came to the fore around the turn of the twentieth century.[14] For example, Siegfried identified as many as nine hands (5 compilers, 2 epilogists and 2 editors) in the composition of Ecclesiastes,[15] and Haupt treated less than half of the 222 verses in the book as genuinely original.[16] Those source-critical approaches based their interpretation on a reconstructed text rather than the final form of Ecclesiastes because of the inconsistencies and discrepancies that they observed in the main body of the text. They argued that a single hand could not have produced such a book that "so mixed radical scepticism with conventional aphorisms," recognition of tensions within wisdom books in general notwithstanding.[17] Such a radical source-critical approach to Ecclesiastes, however, eventually subsided as the twentieth century unfolded. Among others, McNeile, Barton, and Podechard took a more restrained

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[11] Christianson, ibid., 95.

[12] For detailed account and clarification of this historical development, see ibid., 95–98.

[13] John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (2nd ed.; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), 62.

[14] For a history of the source critical approach, see George A. Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 18–43; see also Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester: Inter-Versity Press, 1983), 36–40 for a succinct account which includes later history of interpretations; Christianson, *Ecclesiastes*, for the most recent, comprehensive reception history in literature and arts.

[15] D. C. Siegfried, *Prediger und Hoheslied* (HAT 2; ed. Nowack; vol. 3/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898), 2–12; see Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 28, for a concise summary of Siegfried's analysis. Barton remarks: "It is built upon the supposition that absolutely but one type of thought can be harbored by a human mind while it is composing a book."

[16] Paul Haupt, *The Book of Ecclesiastes: A New Metrical Translation with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1905).

[17] Barton, *Method*, 66.

source-critical approach to the text, and their views were taken more seriously[18] than the earlier extreme redactional approach by their predecessors. Childs summarizes the trend:

> Increasingly, modern scholars have returned to the position of seeing the book as basically a unified composition of one author. The earlier theories of multiple authorship or of extensive interpolation have not been sustained. However, some editorial work is generally recognized in the prologue and epilogue.[19]

0.1.1.2 Advance towards Reading Ecclesiastes as a Unified Whole

Historically, most scholars interpreted the epilogue as a later editorial addition. Two approaches to cultivate reading Ecclesiastes as a unified whole independently appeared in the 1970s. One considers the book to be a type of editorial work, and the other the work of an author.

Dissatisfied with restrictive historical-critical approaches to Scripture, Childs proposed a new approach for reading the final received form of Scripture for canonical shaping.[20] Childs and his student Sheppard applied the canonical approach to Ecclesiastes with a canon-conscious reading of the epilogue.[21] They believe canonical redactor(s) shaped the epilogue to hold the book together as part of canonical Scripture.

Conversely, Michael Fox recognized Ecclesiastes as a "product not of editorship but of authorship" in his 1977 essay.[22] He adduced a unity of the book with a frame-narrative structure by the author. Fox has significantly influenced subsequent scholars' view of the mainstream historical-critical consensus and their reading of Ecclesiastes.

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[18] Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 38; A. H. McNeile, *An Introduction to Ecclesiastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904); Barton, *Ecclesiastes*; E. Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1912).

[19] Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 582. See e.g., Robert Gordis, *Koheleth–the Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes* (3rd aug. ed.; New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 73; R. N. Whybray, "The Social World of the Wisdom Writers," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (ed. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 242; and many others as most recently, Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 828; for review and discussion on the subject, see Craig G. Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory* (AnBib 139; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998), 44.

[20] Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970); Childs, *Intro to OT*.

[21] Childs, *Intro to OT*, 580–89; Gerald T. Sheppard, "Epilogue to Qoheleth as Theological Commentary," *CBQ* 39 (1977): 182–89.

[22] Michael V. Fox, "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet," *HUCA* 48 (1977): 83–106.

The canonical approach by Childs and Sheppard is a significant development of the conventional appeal to editorial work, while Fox pioneered a new literary approach. These two distinctive approaches currently represent the main options available for best making sense of the book as a whole. This thesis will evaluate and determine which may be the best method. An alternative or modified approach for understanding the book's overall message and its implication will be advanced in this dissertation.

0.1.2 Historical and Social Contexts of Ecclesiastes

0.1.2.1 Dating of Ecclesiastes

The question of when Ecclesiastes was written is neither simple nor straightforward from either internal or external evidence because both the book's author and the main character Qohelet are unidentifiable, and its message is universal and typical of wisdom literature, which often can fit into any age or era, even if many scholars view the content of Qohelet's message as radical or enigmatic. The date of the composition of Ecclesiastes has eluded scholars since the case for traditional Solomonic authorship collapsed. Based on linguistic grounds, the majority of current scholarship places the book sometime during the postexilic period, with few dissenters. Granted that linguistic data are still insufficient to confirm the dating,[23] coupled with scarce direct external evidence, linguistic analysis still seems to be the best tool currently available. With this caveat in mind, the current status of the dating will be examined.

Since the 19th century many scholars have dated the book to the Persian period;[24] Hengstenberg, for instance, mentions that the internal and external conditions correspond to the Persian period from the descriptions given in the book.[25] More recently Seow has analysed the Hebrew text and argued that it is coloured with many Aramaic features and Persian loanwords,[26] further promoting a Persian dating.[27]

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[23] Eva Mroczek, "'Aramaisms' in Qohelet: Methodological Problems in Identification and Interpretation," in *The Words of the Wise Are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century* (eds. Boda, et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 343–63; Ian Young, et al., *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (BW; 2 vols.; London: Equinox, 2008); Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew* (FAT 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993).

[24] Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 22, lists fifteen scholars, e.g., Ewald, Knobel, De Wette, Ginsburg, Delitzsch, Wright, and Driver among others.

[25] E. W. Hengstenberg, *Der Prediger Salomo* (Berlin: Oehmigke, 1859), 6; ET E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes, with Other Treatises* (CFTL 6; trans. Simon; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1860), 6.

[26] פרדס (2:5) and פתגם (8:11). Along with these words C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18C; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 11–36, places Aramaism

Another trend since the mid-19th century is to push down the dating of Ecclesiastes further to the Hellenistic,[28] or more specifically the Ptolemaic[29] period. The reason is that initially many, and still some, have argued for Greek influence, although this has been challenged.[30] Barton and others have not observed either Greek philosophical or Greek linguistic influence on the writer of Ecclesiastes.[31] The fragments of Ecclesiastes among the Dead Sea scrolls have rendered a *terminus ante quem* for the book's composition based on the palaeographical dating of 4QQoh[a] to 175–150 BCE.[32] Furthermore, Goff points out that "4Q109 and 4Q110[33] comprise evidence that Jews in the late Second Temple period were reading and copying

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in Ecclesiastes to Persian rather than the later period. Also in C. L. Seow, "The Socioeconomic Context of 'The Preacher's' Hermeneutic," *PSB* 17 (1996): 168–95, he regards many economic terms from Persian loan words flourished, owing to a lively commercial environment during the Persian period.

[27] C. L. Seow, "Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet," *JBL* 115 (1996): 643–66; C. L. Seow, "The Social World of Ecclesiastes," in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World* (ed. Perdue; FRLANT 219; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 189–217. Seow analyses and concludes that Qohelet's language is postexilic but prehellenistic before Ben Sira and Qumran. He recognizes its affinities with Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Esther and places the dating of the book around 450–350 BCE. Seow, "Socioeconomic," 171; more recently, however, he feels his upper end at mid-5th century BCE is too early and modifies his dating to the 4th century BCE, still maintaining it within the Persian period (Seow, "Social," 193).

[28] Rainer Braun, *Kohelet und die frühhellenistische Popularphilosophie* (ZAW 130; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973); Harry Ranston, *Ecclesiastes and the Early Greek Wisdom Literature* (London: Epworth, 1925); contra Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 43; C. Robert Harrison, *Qoheleth in Social-Historical Perspective* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1998), v.

[29] I.e., 301–200 BCE. James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1988), 50; Mark R. Sneed, "The Social Location of Qoheleth's Thought: Anomie and Alienation in Ptolemaic Jerusalem" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1990); Mark R. Sneed, "The Social Location of the Book of Qoheleth," *HS* 39 (1998): 41–51; W. E. Staples, "Vanity of Vanities," *CJT* 1 (1955): 142; Stephan de Jong, "Qohelet and the Ambitious Spirit of the Ptolemaic Period," *JSOT* 61 (1994): 85–96; Antoon Schoors, "Qoheleth: A Book in a Changing Society," *OTE* 9 (1996): 68–87.

[30] E.g., Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh.s v.Chr.* (2nd ed.; WUNT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973), 210–40; ET Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (1st Eng. ed.; trans. Bowden; 2 vols.; vol. 1; London: SCM, 1974), 115–30; more recently, Thomas Krüger, *Kohelet (Prediger)* (BKAT 19S; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2000), 39; ET Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; trans. Dean; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 19; Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary* (CC; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 4–6; Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 220–39.

[31] Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 32–34, 38–39, 43; H. L. Ginsberg, "The Structure and Contents of the Book of Koheleth," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East: Presented to Professor Harold Henry Rowley in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (eds. Noth and Thomas; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 147; Whybray, "Social World," 243; Harrison, *Qoheleth*, v–vi, 343; Joseph Azize, "Considering the Book of Qohelet Afresh," *ANES* 37 (2000): 184; Young, et al., *Linguistic*, 2:63, most recently summarizes as, "it is increasingly recognized that Greek influence in the book's thought and language is trivial at best . . . and perhaps completely absent"; see also Weeks, *Scepticism*, 161.

[32] Eugene Ulrich, et al., *Qumran Cave 4, XI: Psalms to Chronicles* (DJD 16; Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 221–27, pls. XXV, XXVI; Stephen J. Pfann and Philip Alexander et al., *Qumran Cave 4, XXVI: Cryptic Texts and Miscellanea, Part 1* (DJD 36; Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 422, pl. XXIX.

[33] Namely, 4QQoh[a] and 4QQoh[b].

Ecclesiastes."[34] A dating later than the first quarter of the second century BCE,[35] therefore, can no longer be supported. Ben Sira who apparently knew Ecclesiastes wrote his book in Jerusalem around 200–175 BCE, although some scholars argued that Sirach might be earlier than Ecclesiastes.[36] The dating of Sirach is fairly reliable, which is estimated from its Greek translation by his grandson.[37] The writers of 1 Enoch and the Wisdom of Solomon also apparently knew Ecclesiastes (*vide infra*).

0.1.2.2 Sitz im Leben

Many things that Qohelet describes about his society can probably be observed in nearly any period, pre- or postexilic. His general description without specific names or places makes identification of its historical or social contexts very difficult. The whole tone of the book is a sombre and existential mood—if not pessimistic, sceptical, or ironic—and suggests that the writer may have lived in a world that was unstable politically, socio-economically, and perhaps in terms of a newly emerging religio-philosophical ideology. The mood of his society manifests itself in Qohelet's own materialistic and individualistic outlook on life. I shall briefly probe these three areas of social background from Qohelet's own words and observations.

Politically, his society appears to be going through turbulent times by a broken and unstable political system. Prevalent wickedness, oppression, and lack of administrative and judicial competency (5:7 [ET 8]) manifest symptoms of a corrupt society. However, Qohelet's description is too general and vague to point to any specific ruler of his day;[38] neither is it clear whether Qohelet has in mind or is

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[34] Matthew Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism and Intertextuality: The Book of Ecclesiastes and the Sociolect of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (eds. Dell and Kynes; LHBOTS 587; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 223.

[35] E.g., Charles F. Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought* (BZAW 148; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 148, places the book's composition during 152–145 BCE.

[36] E.g., Robert H. Pfeiffer, *History of New Testament Times: With an Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Harper, 1949), 401 (n. 20); cf. F. J. Backhaus, "Qohelet und Sirach," *BN* 69 (1993): 32–55; contra Gordis, *Man*, 46–48; David S. Margoliouth, "Ecclesiastes, Book Of," *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* 5:32, notes: "Ben Sira declares himself a compiler from the Old Testament (xxiv. 28), whereas Ecclesiastes claims originality (xii. 9, 10), it seems certain, in the case of close agreement between the two books, that Ben Sira must be the borrower."

[37] See Sirach Prolog. Jonathan Klawans, "Josephus on Fate, Free Will, and Ancient Jewish Types of Compatibilism," *Numen* 56 (2009): 51; Jeremy Corley, "Wisdom versus Apocalyptic and Science in Sirach 1,1–10," in *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (ed. Martínez; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 271.

[38] In spite of the very general descriptions of kings and political situations, Schoors and others are eager to assign specific names and periods, see Schoors, "Qoheleth," 68–87; contra Whybray who is more cautious to warn that "the saying no doubt reflects the times in which Qohelet lived, although it is not possible to identify the particular situations." See Whybray, "Social World," 156.

pointing to a specific political situation of the postexilic period. He describes the severity of oppression in comparison to the dead or the stillborn being better off than the oppressed. The powerful rulers have sought their wealth and comfort at the expense of powerless people. Qohelet's warning to obey the king and not to curse the king and the rich even in private (10:20) may suggest that people are under a tyrannical regime in which the king has absolute power.[39]

Socio-economically, people have become materialistic (4:8; 5:9–12 [ET 10–13]), and the society is obsessed with the acquisition of wealth and making commercial profits for surplus,[40] as the wealth seems to have become the path to power and security. It is not surprising, then, that people have sought advantage in their labour and toil for economic success. It is clear that making profit (יתרון) in labour and trade for personal gain describes the chief motivation of the socio-economic world of Qohelet. Besides יתרון, Qohelet uses a significant number of terms which relate to economic investment and personal advantage such as כסף (silver, money; 5 times), כשרון (skill, success; 2 times), עשר (riches, wealth; 5 times), חסר/חסרון (deficit, what is lacking; 3 times), נכסים (riches, wealth, assets; 2 times), ענין (business, task, investment; 8 times), עמל (toil, fruit of toil; 25 times) חלק (portion, lot, advantage; 8 times),[41] and סגלה (possession; once).[42] These terms indicate that materialism and economic advantages may have become the focal point for securing one's life and future. Qohelet asks at least six times: "What advantage/profit is there . . .?" (1:3, 3:9; 5:10, 16 [ET 11, 15]; 6:8, 11). Seow remarks: "Indeed, at times Qohelet sounds like a pragmatic entrepreneur ever concerned with the 'bottom line'."[43] However, such pursuit does not necessarily reflect an environment of healthy economic growth when all toil and skill in working are due to jealousy or rivalry between a man and his own neighbour (4:4). Materialism has pervaded the society (4:8; 5:9–10, 12–13 [ET 10–11, 13–14]) where jealousy has become a driving force for mercenary success.

Qohelet extensively lists his accomplishments early in his monologic discourse (2:4–10), knowing his audience's deep anxiety and concern with economic advantage and security in the environment where they reside. By alluding to his

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[39] Elizabeth Stone, "Old Man Koheleth," *JBR* 10 (1942): 101, summarizes and paraphrases Qohelet's warning on the political situation as "obey the powers that be, and not meddle in politics."
[40] Whybray, "Social World," 243.
[41] *Vide infra*.
[42] Seow, "Socioeconomic," 174.
[43] Ibid; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 22.

accomplishments as similar to those of Solomon—his wealth, luxury, and wisdom—Qohelet establishes his credibility to address and give admonitions to his audience, not simply as a sage but also as a successful and wealthy entrepreneur. He knows that this is his ploy to capture the attention of his audience who otherwise would dismiss him, saying, “This fellow, who never owned two cents, presumes to despise all the good things of the world.”[44] The unsuspected negative assessment of wealth, power, pleasure, or wisdom is all the more poignant when it comes out of a mouth of an astute and entrepreneurial “wise king” who apparently has achieved all that man could wish for. This signifies that there lies a deeper uncertainty among his audience underneath the hustle and bustle of selfish pursuit for commercial success and an emerging new attitude against the traditional Israelite wisdom and values that they once held, because an individual’s righteous deeds hardly seem to secure prosperity or a safe and long life in their society any longer.

A newly emerging religio-philosophical ideology may perhaps most clearly be seen in Qohelet’s attitude of notable individualism.[45] The sheer number of Qohelet’s uses of י “my” (25 times), לי “for myself” (10 times), or emphatic אני “I” (29 times out of 88 “I” statements) not only betrays Qohelet’s ambition for his individual accomplishments and gains but also reflects a concern for his own profit and well-being here and now in this life, which probably has become a prime importance to people in his society.[46]

This whole tone of individualism sounds as though Israelites have lost their national identity, which is very different from their traditional view of themselves as the people of God, a chosen nation. There is no hint of national consciousness in Ecclesiastes despite the notion of kings and rulers and Qohelet’s own claim of having been a king. Kings and rulers in the book, including Qohelet himself, are no help to the oppressed and they are described with more negative tones and connotations than positive or constructive. People of Qohelet’s world may have lived in a volatile political world, and both their national identity and personal security may have been at stake under foreign powers. God is silent and His help or judgement has become

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[44] Gordis, *Man*, 40. See *Midrash Koheleth Rabba* 3:11 or *Deut R.* 1:5 for the primary source.
[45] Stone, “Old Man,” 101; Hengel, *Judentum*, 210–40 [esp. 215] (ET 115–30 [esp. 116–17]); Eric S. Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup 280; Sheffield: Sheffield, 1998), 34.
[46] Christianson, *Time*, 33–42; Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPSBC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 13.

non-existent in Qohelet's society. But his observations do not indicate anything of a period of religious persecution because Israelites obviously have had religious freedom and the religious corruption appears to be of their own doing.

The author of Ecclesiastes probably had to address his audience in a precarious situation, when they seriously began to question God's retributive justice, and their primary concern became their individual gain, if they were fortunate enough, or their survival, if they fell victim to the severe oppression or misfortunes that were going around. He needed a clever device to catch their attention and provoke a drastic change in their deteriorated mind-set, if what is described in Qohelet's monologue is any reflection of the social situation in which the author lived.

0.1.2.3 Summary and Conclusion

The above discussions indicate dating Ecclesiastes is hardly straightforward. Bartholomew cautions: "The state of the current debate favors a postexilic date for Ecclesiastes, but more precision will depend on one's interpretation of Ecclesiastes as a whole and of its social setting."[47] Margoliouth pointed out over one hundred years ago: "whatever may be the date of Ecclesiastes, he is at the least pre-Maccabaean. More than that—i.e. at what point of the Persian or Alexandrine [*sic*] period he is to be placed—will probably never be known."[48] Recently, Segal has placed the book in the middle of this period, saying that

> the book of Ecclesiastes dates to the end of the Persian or to the beginning of the Greek period in Israelite history. No other explanation seems realistic, but neither is [*sic*] there adequate grounds for more specificity.[49]

This then places Ecclesiastes' dating around 330 BCE.

This thesis adopts as a working hypothesis that Ecclesiastes may have appeared sometime during the late fourth century BCE to the turn of the next century, in basic agreement with Segal. However, how widely the book may have been circulated is impossible to know.

The Persian-Hellenistic period was the time when not only Israel but the entire ancient Near Eastern world basically came under the dominations of the Persian Empire and then of Alexander the Great with his generals, who divided his conquests

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[47] Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes* (BCOTWP; ed. Longman; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 53.
[48] David S. Margoliouth, "Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus," *Exp* 7/5 (1908): 119.
[49] Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 250.

among themselves after his death. Nations in the ancient world most likely underwent some significant cultural changes under such dominance. Long-held concepts of death, afterlife or divine judgement in Egypt, Greece, and Israel among them apparently shifted from their ancient context to adjust to their new, changing environment. Contextualising this historical background may be needed for us.

0.2 Thesis and Objectives

0.2.1 Thesis

It is widely supposed that uncertainties about traditional views of death, Sheol, and divine justice begin to arise in Israelite society during the mid-Second Temple period. One may well ask: What is the book of Ecclesiastes doing, if it appeared on the cusp of Persian-Hellenistic transition period when the traditional idea of theodicy was becoming a serious issue in Israelite society before full-blown apocalyptic eschatology surfaced? This thesis aims to probe this question.

Premised on the current consensus as a working hypothesis, this thesis proposes that the book of Ecclesiastes is actually making a case for posthumous[50] divine judgement. Qohelet speaks about many different things which happen in life, but he eventually sums them up by saying, "Everything is *hebel*." Death apparently is the reason. Qohelet seems to assess every event in life in terms of death, which occasions injustice. Specifically, this thesis contends that issues relating to death and injustice raised by Qohelet in the book of Ecclesiastes point to the necessity of post-mortem divine judgement. Judging from its undercurrent social and external historical context, this thesis will then tentatively suggest that Ecclesiastes may have served as a catalyst to, or as a provocative voice for, the emergence of apocalyptic eschatology and later sectarian conflicts within Judaism during the mid-Second Temple period.

0.2.2 Objectives

There are three main objectives in developing the current thesis:

1. To devise an alternative/modified approach for how best Ecclesiastes is to be read as a unity and to attempt to resolve incoherences in the book.
2. To identify issues of death and divine judgement in Qohelet's monologue.

[50] The term is interchangeably used with post-mortem, literally meaning "after death" immediately or at some unknown later time.

3. To argue that Qohelet's monologue points to a theological need for post-mortem divine judgement and to suggest a likely role of Ecclesiastes in relation to the emergence of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology.

In order to achieve these objectives, Chapter 1 will start with a survey of the wider ancient Near Eastern context for issues of death and divine judgment to contextualise the specific discussion of these issues in Ecclesiastes. I will analyse, propose, and argue for how best Ecclesiastes may be read as a unified whole, as compared to other approaches, in Chapter 2. I will then expound issues raised and problems arising in Qohelet's monologue in the next two Chapters 3–4. Discussions for making sense of conflicts and inconsistencies within Qohelet's monologic discourse and its relationship to the epilogue will follow in Chapter 5. Lastly I will suggest a plausible purpose and role of Ecclesiastes in relation to the emergence of a uniquely Jewish apocalyptic eschatology in Chapters 6.

Chapter 1

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Concerns related to death, to what happens after death, and to the question of injustice (or rather of divine justice) are uniquely human. Qohelet, the main character in the book of Ecclesiastes, confronts us with the problem of death and reminds us of a deeply acute human yearning for answers to those questions from ancient times, as will be seen in the ensuing chapters. Qohelet's ambivalent attitude in his search for the answer to the meaning of human life leads us to wonder how people in the ancient world confronted and dealt with the issues of death, their curiosity of what happens after death, and where to turn for the answer.

This chapter surveys concepts of death, afterlife, and divine judgement in the ancient Near East and Greece as well as in Israel to contextualise the specific discussion of issues that Qohelet raises regarding death and divine judgement in Ecclesiastes. The chapter will fairly widely cover how Israel's surrounding world dealt with the problem of death and developed concepts of netherworld and afterlife in relation to divine judgement. The survey provides background information and raises the question of possible influences which may have affected Hebrew concepts of death, Sheol, and divine judgement. These in turn may have shaped and stimulated Qohelet's particular view of them in his mid-Second Temple milieu.

1.1 Death, Afterlife, and Divine Judgement in the Ancient Context

History shows that humankind has an innate desire to live perpetually, despite the formidable odds against attaining such a goal. Humankind abhors and fears death and has consciously sought to prolong life. Although unavoidable and inevitable, humankind rarely seems to accept that death is the end of human existence. A survey of the concepts of death, afterlife, and divine judgement in the ancient world[51] shows

[51] The phrase "the ancient world" in this thesis is used as encompassing the ancient Near East and ancient Greece.

a common thread of the human desire to make sense of death and to hope for an afterlife. Although ancient people had varied beliefs regarding death, afterlife, and divine roles, the cult of the dead and rituals surrounding it persisted within each culture across the ancient civilizations. The ancient funerary cults of the dead developed and were sustained by their enduring undercurrent belief that death *cannot* be extinction, the end of human existence. They believed in a post-mortem human existence, an "afterlife," in some form.

This section surveys how the ancients dealt with death and how they defined their belief in continual human existence through their funerary cult practices. The survey will also examine what circumstances may have influenced or led to questioning of traditional religious beliefs when it occurred. It will explore historical underpinnings which eventually led to a significant attitude change and modification to traditional beliefs among ancient people universally around the same period, which most notably manifested itself in the Hellenistic milieu. The background survey of ancient contexts will help clarify not only how the ancient concepts within and without Israel illuminate her religion, but also if and how they may have influenced and shaped it. It may also shed light on the specific historical context of the book of Ecclesiastes, should the book have been written when similar changes began to appear in the Israelite society. The survey will contribute to the interest of this thesis in the kind of impact that Ecclesiastes may have had in the changing world of postexilic Israelite society.

The following subsections cover areas which seem relevant to Qohelet's ideology or nations which have undergone more discernible changes in their religious attitude during the Persian-Hellenistic period.

1.1.1 Egypt

No other nation has left behind such ample evidence of its interest and concern with death and afterlife as ancient Egypt. The massive pyramids, hieroglyphic inscriptions on the walls of graves, coffins, and mummies, and numerous archaeological artefacts speak volumes to the extensive role of mortuary rituals and a cult of the dead in ancient Egyptian culture. Evidence show that Egyptian concepts of death and afterlife "date from the beginning of the fourth millennium BC" and lasted over 3,000 years.[52]

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[52] John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2001), 13. Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011),

Egyptian funerary books remarkably attest and maintain the Egyptian core beliefs and common concepts of death and the afterlife. Texts with colourful vignettes decorate and cover the walls inside tombs and burial sites over different periods of Egyptian dynastic history, and have resulted in the preservation of their funerary cults. Funerary texts are apparently composed according to the changing societal needs in each succeeding period, while relying and based on their predecessors. A new concept or different emphasis was simply added to older texts rather than rewriting, replacing, or (re)synthesizing the old with the new.[53] Because their religion was not built on a specific dogma, ancient Egyptians saw no conflict or need to consolidate their cultic beliefs or practices.[54] They developed various ways and means which were equally valid to accomplish their religious purposes. Flexibility and variability characterized their cultic practice. This highly characteristic Egyptian cultural approach cultivated and blended two main funerary cults: the one based on the solar god Re and the other based on the myth of Osiris. Both rituals were initially developed only for royal families and existed side by side, but later certain elements or functions of each practice were combined when the funerary cult gradually became democratized.[55]

Egyptians believed in an afterlife—a transfiguration, not reincarnation or resurrection—after death to continue life in an "enhanced Egypt" called the Field of Reeds, which could be either subterranean or celestial.[56] It was extremely important for Egyptians to keep the corpse, because the *bꜣ* "soul"[57] and the *kꜣ* "spirit"[58] of the deceased needed to be united in the body in order for one to exist *post mortem*. The mummified body (*sꜣḥ*) was basically to house the *kꜣ* and the *bꜣ*, not expected to rise

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13, notes: "For more than three thousand years, Egyptians maintained generally the same outlook on the world, making theirs one of the most conservative and unchanging societies yet known."

[53] Taylor, *Death*, 25.

[54] Teeter, *Religion*, 199.

[55] Taylor, *Death*, 25; William J. Murnane, "Taking It with You: The Problem of Death and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt," in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions* (ed. Obayashi; CSR 33; Westport: Greenwood, 1992), 44; Leonard H. Lesko, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egyptian Thought," *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* 3:1768, notes: "By the time of the Coffin Texts, the hereafter had been democratized, and any goal, including the solar voyage, was considered attainable by all."

[56] Salima Ikram, *Death and Burial in Ancient Egypt* (Harlow: Longman, 2003), 23.

[57] Not to be confused as the same concept as the "inner essential self" in Greek or Christian thoughts. *bꜣ* means "manifestation" and is depicted as a human-headed bird in the Egyptian iconography. See James Hamilton-Paterson and Carol Andrews, *Mummies: Death and Life in Ancient Egypt* (London: Collins with British Museum, 1978), 18; S. G. F. Brandon, "Life after Death—IV: The After-Life in Ancient Egyptian Faith and Practice," *ExpTim* 76 (1965): 219.

[58] Taylor, *Death*, 18–19, remarks, "It came into existence at a person's birth and was sometimes depicted as an identical copy of the individual," namely "double." It is depicted with a hieroglyphic symbol of a pair of half-way upraised human arms.

for physical activity. The *kɜ* needed to be fed for the deceased's post-mortem existence.[59] To them, afterlife was a continuation of this life, still eating, drinking, working, and serving their gods. Such expectation is expressed in the title of Spell 110 of the *Book of the Dead*:

> Here begin the spells of the Field of Offerings and spells of going forth into the day; of coming and going in the realm of the dead; of being provided for in the Field of Rushes which is in the Field of Offerings, the abode of the Great Goddess, the Mistress of Winds; having strength thereby, having power thereby, ploughing therein, reaping and eating therein, drinking therein, copulating therein, and doing everything that used to be done on earth . . .[60]

Elaborate funerary rites, involving the mummification of the body, the construction of graves and coffins, and offerings of food and gifts to the dead, were all about preparing for the life which Egyptians expected to have after death as an *ɜḫ*, "a transfigured being."[61] Not everyone became *ɜḫ*. The fate of all non-royals for their final destination was determined at the post-mortem judgement in the netherworld, which was ruled and presided over by Osiris, the king of the netherworld.[62] Kings were exempt from the post-mortem judgement because they were considered divine beings and would join their gods when they died.[63] The early funerary rites relating to the sun god Re were designed for the king's passage to heaven.

The third millennium *Pyramid Texts* already attest the idea of the judgement of the dead,[64] but it is during the Second Intermediate Period when the idea of post-mortem judgement was fully established as the culminating passage of the deceased to the next world. Two chapters of the *Book of the Dead*, Spells 30 and 125, are most illustrative of the general post-mortem judgement scenes. According to Spell 125, the judgement takes place in the Hall of the Two Truths (*mɜʿty*), into which Anubis, who is responsible for mummification, escorts the deceased. Osiris usually presides over the judgement, along with his sisters Isis and Nephthys, and the Sons of Horus during

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[59] Ibid., 16, 19.

[60] Spell 110 in R. O. Faulkner, *Book of the Dead: Vol 1—The Texts* (trans. Faulkner; New York: The Limited Editions Club, 1972), 82. Cf. *Coffin Texts* Spell 464 in R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts, Vol 2: Spells 355–787* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1977), 90.

[61] Taylor, *Death*, 31.

[62] For a summary of Osiris myth, see, e.g., Segal, *Life*, 39–41.

[63] See *Pyramid Texts* Utterance 486, in R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts: Translated into English* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 173; see also S. G. F. Brandon, *Religion in Ancient History: Studies in Ideas, Men, and Events* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 104. Brandon notes that "the dead king was magically assimilated to Osiris so as to partake in his resurrection, he also acquired thereby the Osirian title *maa kheru*."

[64] For instance, see Utterance 270 in Faulkner, *PT Trans.*, 78.

the New Kingdom, but Re takes Osiris's place in the later periods.[65] The judicial process appears presupposed in the scene, without codified laws upon which to base or determine the verdict.[66] In contrast to the modern court, the deceased is presumed guilty and he has to declare his innocence before Osiris and the forty-two judges, who represent different aspects of *mꜣ't*. The deceased has to meet forty-two gods, greets each one correctly by name, and gives negative confessions of approximately eighty forbidden acts during his life, enumerating them to claim that he did not commit any of those sins.[67] He concludes his defence, confirming his innocence with positive aspects of his conduct in his life and pleads for justice.[68]

In ancient Egypt *mꜣ't* represented the fundamental law of the universe and the basis of social order which established truth, justice, and righteousness.[69] The sun god Re ruled the universe, and the king, "Re's incarnate son," was responsible for the human maintenance of *mꜣ't* on the land.[70] The king dispensed the laws to his subjects as he saw fit.[71] The king was the highest judge and "*ex officio* in harmony with ma'at."[72] The individual, however, somehow had to find ways to claim his innocence without written codified laws. This was done by not incurring any complaint from his neighbours[73] or making the eighty-two transgressions listed in Spell 125 of the *Book of the Dead* his laws or guiding principles. For example, a stela of Baki from the fourteenth century BCE explicitly states:

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[65] Taylor, *Death*, 37.

[66] Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (trans. Lorton; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 77.

[67] *Book of the Dead* Chapter 125, translation in Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings, Vol. 2: The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 124–32; or see Thomas G. Allen ed, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago* (UCOIP; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 196–207.

[68] Lichtheim, *AEL2*, 128; in Allen ed, *BD*, 200, translation is in the third person, starting with "Behold, Osiris N. is coming to you. . . ," etc.

[69] Taylor, *Death*, 36; S. G. F. Brandon, *The Judgment of the Dead: An Historical and Comparative Study of the Idea of a Post-Mortem Judgment in the Major Religions* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1967), 11.

[70] Brandon, *Judgment*, 11.

[71] Teeter, *Religion*, 4; Ronald J. Williams, "Theodicy in the Ancient Near East," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. Crenshaw; IRT 4; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 47.

[72] Alan B. Lloyd, "Nationalist Propaganda in Ptolemaic Egypt," *Historia* 31 (1982): 43.

[73] E.g., see the complaints of *The Eloquent Peasant*, written in the Middle Kingdom, in Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings, Vol. 1: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 169–84; Jan Zandee, *Death as an Enemy: According to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions* (SHR 5; trans. Klasens; Leiden: Brill, 1960), 32; Brandon, *Judgment*, 8. The underlying presumption is that the fate of the deceased will be well if there were no complaint against him in this life, or a complaint is lodged against him before a court of justice, and therefore the deceased has to prove his innocence.

> I am a worthy who is fortunate because of maat, one who emulated the laws of the Hall of the Two Truths, for I intended to reach the realm of the dead without my name being attached to any meanness, without having done anything evil to any man, or anything that their gods censure.[74]

The deceased's innocence was confirmed by weighing his heart on a scale against a feather, the symbol of *mꜣʿt*. If the scale was balanced, the deceased was declared as *mꜣʿ-ꜣḫrω*[75] and allowed to proceed and live with gods in the Field of Reeds.[76] Thus "the righteous one" can join with Re or other gods in the heavenly realm. If the scale was unbalanced, namely, if the heart weighed heavier than the feather, the deceased's heart would be given to Ammit[77] who was waiting to devour it. But Ammit's gulping the heart apparently did not destroy the deceased, since his *kꜣ*, *bꜣ*, and *sꜣḥ* still remained, and the dead would be inflicted with punishment and confined in the netherworld forever.

The *Books of the Underworld*, composed during New Kingdom, give the most detailed descriptions of the realm of the dead.[78] The Egyptian netherworld is located in the West and is deep and dark beneath the earth. The netherworld is called "the land that loves silence" or "the beautiful West."[79] The realm of the dead in the West has gates—a gate which may lead to a passage heavenward, gate(s) to a passage below, and gates to various regions of the netherworld. So the West can be beautiful, as it is so called, but also can be a place of terror. Those who travel to the West do not return[80] and the dead in the netherworld are called "the hidden ones"[81] because they exist hidden from the living realm. It is a gloomy place where life activities cease and silence prevails, perhaps except a sound of agony and cries from torture.[82] Ancient Egyptians have understood that the netherworld is "situated on the under-side of the disk of the earth,"[83] and "the reverse of life" is what the dead experience.[84] The dead

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[74] Turin stella 156 cited and translated in Assmann, *Death*, 80.
[75] Namely, translated "just voice," "righteous" or "justified" in S. G. F. Brandon, "A Problem of the Osirian Judgement of the Dead," *Numen* 5 (1958): 113.
[76] See, e.g., a reproduction of "Weighing of the heart of Hunefer in the Judgment Hall of Osiris" (the Papyrus of Hunefer) in the British Musium (No. 9901) in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection, Vol. 1* (2vols.; London: Warner, 1911), frontispiece; cf. Brandon, "Problem," 112, notes that "in the Papyrus of Ani Osiris does not actually appear as presiding over the fateful weighing of the heart, but there can be no doubt that he is conceived as the divine judge of the dead."
[77] Or Ammut ("eater of the dead"). Brandon, "Life," 220.
[78] Mainly, *Book of Amduat* and *Book of Gates*. Taylor, *Death*, 33.
[79] Ibid., 12.
[80] *PT* Spell 2175, translation in Faulkner, *PT Trans.*, 305.
[81] Zandee, *Death*, 97.
[82] Ibid., 88–93; Brandon, *Judgment*, 46.
[83] Zandee, *Death*, 73. Ensuing discussion on the netherworld in this section largely relies on Zandee, pp. 73–97.

walk upside down against the ceiling,[85] are tortured by fire,[86] destroyed, or annihilated.[87] In other words, the dead are punished and get their just deserts according to their evil deeds during their life, which will be used against and inflicted on them in the underworld.[88] The post-mortem judgement is considered final, irrevocable and everlasting. Sinners do not escape punishment or confinement in the netherworld.

The *Books of the Underworld* also detail the sun god Re's nightly journey through twelve regions of the subterranean underworld. The dead reside in every region, and Re visits each one of them for one hour during his twelve-hour journey through the night.[89] Re's rejuvenation also takes place during the journey through his union with Osiris[90] and his rebirth by the sky goddess Nut at dawn.[91]

Because justice was supposedly assured in the next life—if not in this life—in the Egyptian cult, premature death or death by violence or even suicide[92] did not exclude anyone from a chance to obtain afterlife.[93] Death by drowning was even considered a fortunate fate, probably owing to an Egyptian idea of water as a life-renewal medium or a belief in the immediate transit to the realm of the dead through water.[94] On the other hand, Egyptians avoided death by burning or in a foreign land because of fear of losing the body, which precluded the proper funerary rites of mummification. They described death as being "at rest," "weary," or "weary of heart" and likened it to "sleep" or being "asleep," probably with a view to being awakened into the next life.[95] Preparations for a proper burial in the traditional manner, which are in effect preparations for the next life, were of paramount importance to ancient Egyptians

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[84] Ibid., 88.
[85] *CT* Spell I.188.d–189.b, translation: R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts, Vol 1: Spells 1–354* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1973), 36.
[86] *PT* Utterance 323.a–d, translation: Faulkner, *PT Trans.*, 69.
[87] Zandee, *Death*, 40.
[88] See, e.g., the *Instructions of Ptahhotep* teaches, "Do not scheme against people, god punishes accordingly: If a man says: 'I shall live by it,' he will lack bread for his mouth," in Lichtheim, *AEL1*, 64.
[89] Taylor, *Death*, 33.
[90] Ibid., 198.
[91] Teeter, *Religion*, 11–12.
[92] *The Dispute between a Man and His Ba* about suicide from the Twelfth Dynasty (Middle Kingdom) did not seem to be considered immoral. Taylor, *Death*, 41; see Lichtheim, *AEL1*, 163–69 for a translated Egyptian text.
[93] Taylor, *Death*, 39.
[94] Ibid., 41.
[95] Ibid., 39. A similar "sleep–awake" idea is also expressed in Israelite religion.

while on this side of the world.[96] Their belief in the equitable post-mortem judgement undoubtedly shaped their lifestyle and conduct as well as their society. It would not be surprising, then, if they were preoccupied with preparations for the next life or if they did not consider suicide morally wrong, especially when they lived in misery in this life despite their good conduct: they expected a better life in the next. What Egyptians feared most was extinction (the second death) in the netherworld,[97] because they considered extinction or non-existence worse than death.[98] They would rather continue existing even in undesirable conditions of the netherworld.

What is surprising in the seemingly highly ethical Egyptian society, then, is that their graves, coffins, and even mummies were constantly ransacked and robbed throughout their mortuary history. Warnings inscribed on the grave stone or gate against robbers and passers-by apparently had little effect as a deterrent. This suggests that the afterlife based on their funerary cults did not necessarily convince all Egyptians. Since there were few codified laws, Egyptians decided their conduct according to their own judgement. Moreover, tomb robbers probably were not always caught or punished for their crimes. Egyptian mortuary customs must also have had a lot to do with economic factors in both the individual's ability for funerary preparations on the one hand, and funerary business enterprises on the other hand. These factors may have affected ancient Egyptian society and led an appreciable number of people to holding a sceptical view of post-mortem judgement or afterlife as a continuation of this life.

Already in the Middle Kingdom period, one of the *Harper's Songs* from the tomb of a King Intef eloquently expresses such scepticism against the traditional belief:[99]

> No one there is who returns from there to tell their condition, to tell their needs, and thus to heal our hearts, ere we hasten to the place they have gone.
> Be hale, while your heart (seeks the) self-forgetfulness that performs the sꜣḫ-rites upon you.
> Follow your heart while you live: put myrrh on your head, dress in fine linen, anoint yourself with true wonders from the god's property.
> Increase your pleasures greatly, let (not) your heart be weary, follow your heart and your pleasure, conduct your affairs on earth, let not your heart be sad.
> That day of lamentation shall come upon you—and the Weary of Heart heeds not their wailing: their weeping cannot save a man from the Netherworld.

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[96] Ibid., 39.
[97] For this concern, see Spell 176 for not dying again in Faulkner, *BD*, 143.
[98] Lesko, "Death," *CANE* 3:1766.
[99] Brandon, *Judgment*, 26.

Refrain(?):
Spend a pleasant day!
Weary not of it!
None there is who can send his wealth with him.
None there is who goes who can return again.[100]

The song was popular in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties. Other harpers' songs appear after Intef's song either influenced by, or as a response to, it.[101] Two harpers' songs on the walls of the tomb of Neferhotep and the Song of Khai-Inheret from the time of Ramses III appear to be reactions to Intef's song, expressing either an outright rejection or a toning down of its scepticism, just as there was probably a similar reaction to Qohelet's monologic discourse later in Israel. Qohelet's questioning of afterlife and his advice to enjoy life while one can (9:7-9) strikes a chord with Intef's song, which is probably accidental, but still remarkable.

The tenets of Egyptian concepts of life, death, and afterlife endured, nonetheless, so long as the king exerted his military power, protected the land, and maintained the social order. Traditionally the Egyptian king was "a god incarnate, the earthly embodiment of the god Horus and, as such, the champion of the cosmic order (*mз't*)."[102] However, their traditional belief in the king's absolute power crumbled and a shift to direct dependence on the divine power emerged, when invasions and dominations by foreign powers began to change the political landscape of Egypt from the seventh century BCE onward. It is probably no coincidence that demotic writings began to appear around the same period.

Demotic writings exhibit reflection and response to cultural trauma caused by wars, invasions, and changing dynasties, while attempting to preserve traditional Egyptian ideology.[103] The so-called *Demotic Chronicle* in the third century BCE[104] is a collection of oracles with interpretations. Its main thrust is the ideological underpinning of the legitimate Egyptian kingship for *cultural* propaganda, as Lloyd remarks: "All the oracles refer to kings of Egypt ranging from Amyrtaeus (c. 404–

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[100] Translation by Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 346–47; see also Lichtheim, *AEL1*, 195–97.
[101] See Miriam Lichtheim, "The Songs of the Harpers," *JNES* 4 (1945): 178–212.
[102] Alan B. Lloyd, "The Late Period, 664–323 BC," in *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (eds. Trigger, et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 288.
[103] More elaborate treatment on this subject, see "Late Period Egypt: Historical and Intellectual Context" (Chapter 6) in Shannon Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 209–34.
[104] Probably early Ptolemaic period. Janet H. Johnson, "The Demotic Chronicle as a Statement of a Theory of Kingship," *JSSEA* 13 (1983): 62–63.

398) to the last native Egyptian Pharaoh Nectanebo II (c. 358–41)."[105] Meyer describes it as "an eschatological prophecy concerning the history of Egypt in the Persian and Greek eras"[106] written *post eventum*. But the emphasis is shifted from the king being *ex officio* in accord with *mɜʿt* in earlier texts to the point that only the king who lives according to the will of gods will endure—the fundamental theme in the *Demotic Chronicle*.[107] The *Chronicle* attributes the past failure of native kings to their disloyalty to *hp*, "law," the will or the law of god—"a late equivalent of *mɜʿt*."[108] The *Chronicle* demolishes "the aura of godhead" surrounding kingship and depicts the king as a mortal who can "violate the divine order, incur divine wrath and be punished."[109] A good king depends on the gods and is judged by his actions, not by his ethnicity.[110] Pragmatic and adaptive, ancient Egyptians have thus accepted and legitimized Persian and Macedonian rulers, who conquered Egypt, as their kings so long as those rulers fulfilled the Egyptian kingship role with all its obligations.[111]

Thus the Egyptians' dependence inevitably shifted more directly towards the power and authority of gods with the decline of the native king's religious authority, and his military and political power. Demotic wisdom texts, *The Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy*[112] and *The Instruction of Papyrus Insinger* (3rd–2nd century BCE),[113] not only indicate this shift, but also show their psychology under conditions of uncertainty in the changing world. Coming under direct divine authority, Egyptians find themselves not necessarily living in an orderly and just world, which was once kept under the king's authority according to the universal order of *mɜʿt*. Instead, they

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[105] Lloyd, "Nationalist," 41, 55; Lloyd, "Late," 296; Johnson, "Demotic," 72.
[106] „Eine eschatologische Prophetie über die Geschichte Ägyptens in persischer und griechischer Zeit" in Eduard Meyer, "Ägyptische Dokumente aus der Perserzeit," *SPAW* 16 (1915): 287; cf. J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Era," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 279.
[107] Lloyd, "Nationalist," 41.
[108] Ibid., 43; Griffiths, "Apocalyptic," 282. , Griffiths notes that "*hp* is often associated with god Thoth" and that "the idea of the 'Law' was elaborated in Egypt from the Twenty-sixth Dynasty onwards."
[109] Lloyd, "Late," 299.
[110] Burkes, *Death*, 214.
[111] Lloyd, "Late," 297.
[112] Although the MS date on palaeographical grounds is late Ptolemaic, the composition itself is probably in fifth or fouth century BCE, notes S. R. K. Glanville, *Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum, Vol. 2: The Instructions of 'Onchsheshonqy (British Museum Papyrus 10508)* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1955), xii, xiv; B. Gemser, "The Instructions of 'Onchsheshonqy and Biblical Wisdom Literature," in *Congress Volume: Oxford, 1959* (ed. Quarterly; VTSup 7; Leiden: Brill, 1960), 106.
[113] Jack T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 70; Johannes Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (BZAW 272; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 169.

often observe the reversal of order directly under the divine *mɜʿt*: particularly, “the undeserved and unpredictable reversal of human fortune.”[114] Both *Ankhsheshonqy* and *Insinger* recognize that events in life are beyond human control and nothing happens except what the god ordains. They warn of unpredictable outcomes for human plans and events. *Ankhsheshonqy* writes:

> Nothing occurs except what the god commands. (22,25)
> The plans of the god are one thing, the thoughts [of men] are another. (26,14)
> Man does not know the days of his misfortune. . . you do not know the length of your life” (12,3.5)[115]

Similarly, *Insinger* notes:

> Death and the life of tomorrow, we do not know its <shape>.” (17,6)
> One does not understand the heart of the god until what he has decreed has come. (31,1).[116]

There are also some notable similarities of thought between *Ankhsheshonqy* and Qohelet’s utterances in Ecclesiastes:[117]

Ankhsheshonqy (LEW)	Ecclesiastes (NASB)
Every hand is stretched out to the god but he accepts only the hand of his beloved. (23,14)	For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. (2:26)
If Pre is angry with a land, he makes great its small men and makes small its great men. If Pre is angry with a land, he sets the fools over the learned ones. (5,9.10)	folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land. (10:6-7) Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning. (10:16)
He who shakes the stone, upon his foot it falls (22,5)	He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them. (10:9)

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[114] Miriam Lichtheim, “Observations on Papyrus Insinger,” in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren* (eds. Hornung and Keel; OBO 28; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1979), 295.
[115] Cf. Eccl 7:14; 9:12. Translation and citation of the texts of *Ankhsheshonqy* from Miriam Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International Context: A Study of Demotic Instructions* (OBO 52; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 66–92.
[116] Translation and citation of the texts of *Insinger* from ibid., 197–234.
[117] Gemser, “Instructions,” 125–26.

There is one who plows and does not [reap]. There is one who reaps and does not eat. (26,17.18)	When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. (2:21) I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. (9:11)
Do a good deed and cast it in the flood; when it dries you will find it. (19,10)	Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days. (11:1)

And between *Insinger* and Qohelet:

Insinger (LEW)	Ecclesiastes (NASB)
There is one who lives on little so as to save, yet he becomes poor. There is one who does not know, yet the fate gives (him) wealth. It is not the wise man who saves who finds a reserve. Nor is it the one who spends who becomes poor. The god gives a wealth of provisions without an income. He also gives poverty in the purse without spending. The fate and the [fortune] that come, it is the god who sends them. (7,13–19)	When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. (2:21) For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind. (2:26) a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires, but God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction. (6:2) I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all. (9:11)
Money is the snare the god has placed on the earth for the impious man so that he should worry daily. (15,19-20)	For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity. (2:22-23) There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task. (4:8)

Most notably, *Insinger* describes many examples of the reversal of right order and concludes nearly all chapters with the refrain: "The fate and the fortune that come, it

is the god who sends them."[118] Such repetition only buttresses a precarious sense of security in Egyptian society and reveals anxieties and perplexities regarding inscrutable divine freedom, which arose during the Late Period, in the Hellenistic milieu.[119] Lichtheim writes:

> The autobiographical inscriptions of the Late Period reveal a mentality and a piety that are traditional and yet subtly different from the attitudes of the past. There is less optimism and more concern. It is no longer assumed that righteous living guarantees a successful life. Success and happiness are now thought to depend entirely on the grace of the gods. The individual can achieve nothing without their help; but the will of the gods is inscrutable. Yet life was not prized any less. Piety itself demanded that life should be enjoyed. Thus enjoyment of life is a basic theme of the autobiographies. And the exhortation to value life remains central to the moral code of the Instructions.[120]

Such sentiment in demotic literature has emerged and becomes heightened under cultural trauma within Egypt, as the native king's ineffable absolute power declined and eventually was lost through foreign invasions and defeats of the Egyptian dynasty.[121] Similar sentiment in Qohelet's monologue will be unmistakably seen later.

It is noteworthy that this shift has taken place around the same period when Israel was experiencing her own cultural trauma under domination by foreign powers. As in the demotic wisdom literature, a similar but much more pessimistic view of inscrutable divine control and free will over human life is expressed in Ecclesiastes.

1.1.2 Mesopotamia

As in Egypt, Mesopotamia has a long history with literary sources on concepts of death and netherworld for a period of about 2000 years from the Old Sumerian to

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[118] Lichtheim, "Observations," 297, 304. "The fate and the fortune that come, it is the god who sends/commands/determines them" is a refrain which ends nearly all chapters in *The Instruction of Papyrus Insinger* with "a line count, which totals the number of monostichs per chapter": 2,20; 5,11; 7,19; 8,20; 11,21; 13,7; 14,2; 15,6; 17,3; 19,5; 21,6; 22,6*; 23,19; 25,13, 27,21; 29,11; 30,16; 33,6* (*line counting missing).

[119] Matthew J. Goff, "Hellenistic Instruction in Palestine and Egypt: Ben Sira and Papyrus Insinger," *JSJ* 36 (2005): 172; cf. Lichtheim, *LEW*, 138, appears downplaying the significance of Insinger's repetition concerning fate and fortune, although she believes Hellenistic influence.

[120] Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings, Vol. 3: The Late Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 5.

[121] Johnson, "Demotic," 72; Janet H. Johnson, "The Role of the Egyptian Priesthood in Ptolemaic Egypt," in *Egyptological Studies in Honor of Richard A. Parker* (ed. Lesko; Hanover: University Press of New England, 1986), 71; Burkes, *Death*, 231; cf. Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (trans. Keep; London: Methuen, 1973), 57–80; Marc J. Smith, "Weisheit, Demotische," *LÄ* 6:1195; Richard Jasnow, *A Late Period Hieratic Wisdom Text (P. Brooklyn 47.218.135)* (SAOC 52; Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2003), 41–42; contra Lichtheim, *LEW*, 11–12, 65; Lichtheim, "Observations," 302–5, who ascribes demotic texts to foreign influence of the Hellenistic milieu.

Neo-Babylonian/Assyrian times.[122] The main literary sources on Mesopotamian cults and practices are found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Ishtar's Descent to the Netherworld*,[123] and *Nergal and Ereshikigal*. Among the three, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the most famous and the oldest, with its earliest version probably dating back to 3000 BCE. Its nearly complete text poignantly expresses ancient people's views of life, death, and the netherworld in Mesopotamia.[124]

People in Mesopotamia lived in a polytheistic society where numerous gods controlled or influenced human and natural worlds.[125] Besides the principal gods, there were hundreds of gods who resided in three realms: three hundred each in heaven and on earth;[126] and still more, the queen and her consort Ereshkigal and Nergal and seven judges, the Anunnaki, in the netherworld,[127] where dreadful monsters, demons, and the dead were also present.[128] According to the Babylonian creation epic *Enūma Eliš*, gods created humankind to serve the gods from clay and the blood of Qingu, who urged his mother goddess Tiāmat to rebel against Ea:

> "Qingu is the one who instigated warfare,
> Who made Tiāmat rebel and set battle in motion."
> They bound him, holding him before Ea,
> They inflicted the penalty on him and severed his blood-vessels.
> From his blood, he (Ea) created mankind,
> On whom he imposed the service of the gods, and set the gods free.
> After the wise Ea had created mankind,
> And had imposed the service of the gods upon them—.[129]

Only the divine Qingu possessed immortality. Gods could die and be resurrected but they withheld immortality from humankind because they created humans to serve

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[122] Charles Penglase, "Some Concepts of Afterlife in Mesopotamia and Greece," in *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East* (eds. Campbell and Green; OM 51; Oxford: Oxbow, 1995), 192.
[123] The Neo-Assyrian: the Akkadian version of the Old Babylonian Sumerian (OBS) myth, *lnana's Descent to the Netherworld*, and is much shorter than the OBS version. Ibid., 193; cf. Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Rev. ed.; WC; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154–62.
[124] Segal, *Life*, 83.
[125] Names of gods: Anu, Enlil, Marduk, Ea, and Shamash appear in the Prologue (P1–P3) in M. E. J. Richardson, *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* (BS/STS 73/2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 28–31; J. Gordon McConville, "The Judgment of God in the Old Testament," *ExAud* 2 (2004): 27; Hans H. Schmid, "Creation, Righteousness, and Salvation: 'Creation Theology' as the Broad Horizon of Biblical Theology," in *Creation in the Old Testament* (ed. Anderson; IRT 6; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 104.
[126] "The Epic of Creation," Table VI, 39–46 (Standard Babylonian Version) in Dalley, *Myths*, 262; also W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (MC 16; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 112–13.
[127] "lnana's Descent to the Nether World," line 163, translation by S. N. Kramer in James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd with suppl. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 55. In later times Anunnakku appears to be a collective name of the underworld gods. Penglase, "Afterlife," 192.
[128] Penglase, "Afterlife," 192.
[129] "*Enūma Eliš*," Tablet VI, lines 29–36 in Lambert, *Babylonian*, 110–13.

gods either in this world or in the underworld.[130] Humans were expendable commodities to be used and, therefore, their life or death was of little concern to the gods. Such was the fate of human life which people in Mesopotamia embraced from ancient times.

In his epic, for example, Gilgamesh speaks to his friend Enkidu:

> Who can go up to heaven, my friend?
> Only the gods dwell (?) with Shamash forever.
> Mankind can number his days.
> Whatever he may achieve, it is only wind.
> Do you fear death on this occasion?
> Where is the strength of your heroic nature?
> Let me go in front of you,
> And your voice call [*sic*] out: "Go close, don't be afraid!"
> If I should fall, I shall have won fame.
> People will say, "Gilgamesh grappled in combat
> With Ferocious Huwawa.
> He was (nobly ?) born."[131]

Gilgamesh knows that only gods are immortal and recognizes both the fleeting nature of human life and the futility of human achievement. He does not seem to fear death but wishes to accomplish something great and win his fame to be remembered. Apparently, he thought that was enough.

But the death of his friend Enkidu changes everything. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* vividly describes Gilgamesh's heart-wrenching grief over Enkidu's death, fear of his own death, and his search for immortality to bring Enkidu back as well as secure his own life.[132] Gilgamesh seeks afterlife beyond death but eventually has to come to grips with the reality of death as human destiny. What he hears from Siduri is what Gilgamesh needs to content himself in the end:

> Gilgamesh, where do you roam?
> You will not find the eternal life you seek.
> When the gods created mankind
> They appointed death for mankind,
> Kept eternal life in their own hands.
> So, Gilgamesh, let your stomach be full,
> Day and night enjoy yourself in every way,
> Every day arrange for pleasures.
> Day and night, dance and play,
> Wear fresh clothes.

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[130] E.g., see "The Epic of Gilgamesh" Table VII. iv.39–43: Enkidu saw (in his dream) even the kings no longer wearing their crowns but serving and waiting on tables in the netherworld. Dalley, *Myths*, 89; Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 193.

[131] "The Epic of Gilgamesh," Tablet III. iv (Old Babylonian Version; Yale Tablet) in Dalley, *Myths*, 144.

[132] Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, 1–101; Dalley, *Myths*, 39–153.

Keep your head washed, bathe in water,
Appreciate the child who holds your hand,
Let your wife enjoy herself in your lap.
This is the work [ ].[133]

The Gilgamesh myth expresses a much more negative view of life and death without afterlife than in Egypt. Similarities are found in Qohelet's view of life and death and his advice which echoes what Gilgamesh and Siduri expressed above: that the days of human life are numbered and human achievement is but wind; that humans are destined to death and therefore all that humans can, or should, do is eat and enjoy life. Cooper writes:

> Occupying the surface of the earth, humankind filled the space between the divine realms of heaven and the netherworld, and served both. But a human's actual sphere was properly the netherworld; the same word in both Sumerian (ki) and Akkadian (ersetu) signifies both the earth's surface and the netherworld beneath it. Like the gods and demons of the netherworld, a human is destined to spend an eternity there; unlike them a human has a brief opportunity to enjoy earthly pleasures.[134]

The netherworld in ancient Mesopotamia is the realm of the queen Ereshkigal and her consort Nergal.[135] It has several names or descriptive designations. The most common name is "earth" or "great earth." Other names include "desert," "steppe," "the great city,"[136] "a city with many walls,"[137] "the great below,"[138] and probably the most important, the "land of no return."[139] It is a city filled with the dead below the earth. It is "a dark, gloomy, dusty unattractive place."[140] Both Ishtar and Enkidu describe what they saw in the netherworld:

To Kurnugi, land of [no return],
Ishtar daughter of Sin was [determined] to go;
The daughter of Sin was [determined] to go
To the dark house, the dwelling of Erkalla's god,[141]
To the house which those who enter cannot leave,
On the road where travelling is one-way only,
To the house where those who enter are deprived of light,

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[133] Tablet X. iii (OBV), in Dalley, *Myths*, 150. A similar sentiment is expressed in Eccl 9:7–10 (*vide infra*).
[134] Jerrold S. Cooper, "The Fate of Mankind: Death and Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions* (ed. Obayashi; Westport: Greenwood, 1992), 30.
[135] Penglase, "Afterlife," 192.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 219; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1986), 100; cf. "Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld" in Dalley, *Myths*, 159.
[138] Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Life, Death, and Afterlife in the Ancient Near East," in *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (ed. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 33.
[139] Namely, "Kurnugi—'land of no return,' a Sumerian term for the Underworld." Dalley, *Myths*, 324.
[140] Penglase, "Afterlife," 193.
[141] Ereshkigal, the queen of the netherworld and the goddess of death.

> Where dust is their food, clay their bread.
> They see no light, they dwell in darkness,
> They are clothed like birds, with feathers,
> Over the door and the bolt, dust has settled.[142]

Enkidu also calls the netherworld "the House of Darkness" and "the House of Dust."[143] Even gods cannot leave the netherworld unless they first take a hostage, so the netherworld can be likened to "a prison city."[144] Ghosts, however, are allowed to return to the realm of the living for short, temporal visits[145] to haunt the living who do not remember the dead with food and offerings,[146] or to be called up by necromancers.[147] Ancient people in Mesopotamia appear to have conceived the netherworld as functionally consisting of three-tiered levels: (1) the lowest: the court of the Annunaki; (2) the middle: the domain of *Apsû*, the god of fresh water; and (3) the upper level under the surface of the earth: the residence of *eṭemmi* "the spirits of the dead."[148] There were many entrances or gates to the netherworld. One of its gates is located in the far west and the sun god Shamash travels through the netherworld each night just as the sun god Re in Egypt does.[149]

In Mesopotamia, "to dwell there in 'the land of no-return' was the common lot of all. Rich and poor, king and slave, all were in a like state of wretchedness. This *post-mortem* equality seems to be symbolized in the myth of the *Descent of Ishtar into the Underworld*," notes Brandon.[150] An existence in the netherworld was nothing to look forward to, because it was under worse and more fearful conditions, even if it was perceived a continuation of this life.

A decent burial, followed by funerary offerings and memorial rites, was also important to the people in Mesopotamia, as in Egypt, but for different reasons. When a person died, the deceased remained as bones and "ghost" (*eṭemmu*) after the body decayed.[151] It was the *eṭemmu*, the insubstantial ghost of the spirit of the dead, which continued in existence and even returned to the earth to haunt the living if the

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[142] "Descent of Ishtar to the Underworld," lines 1–11, of which 4ff. are parallel to "The Epic of Gilgamesh," Tablet VII. iv.34–41. See Dalley, *Myths*, 155 and 89.

[143] "The Epic of Gilgamesh," Tablet VII. iii, lines 33, 40, 45 in Pritchard, *ANET*, 87.

[144] Alluded in *Inanna's Decent to the Netherworld*. Segal, *Life*, 99.

[145] Jo Ann Scurlock, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought," *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* 3:1889.

[146] Penglase, "Afterlife," 193; Cooper, "Fate," 27.

[147] Yamauchi, "Life," 34.

[148] Ibid., 33–34.

[149] Penglase, "Afterlife," 193.

[150] Brandon, *Judgment*, 51.

[151] Cooper, "Fate," 27, 32 (n. 33) notes that "The Akkadian word *eṭemmu* is translated 'ghost,' and not 'spirit' or 'soul,' intentionally. . . . The word is borrowed from the Sumerian *gidim*."

deceased were not properly buried, fed, or remembered.[152] "Burial and the correct rites were required for the *eṭemmu* to be allowed to enter the netherworld,"[153] and therefore to be left unburied was considered the worst fate possible.[154] For this reason the burial was an important part of the funerary rites, but not for the care or preservation of the body such as mummification in Egypt. It was the responsibility of the heir to provide a so-called *kispu* ritual, the Mesopotamian memorial rites for the dead.[155] It is "through the memorial rites the deceased remained integrated in the living family, and the position of a new head of the family was reinforced by his performance of the rites."[156] Remembrance by their descendants or by fame was the way to secure their existence after death. Memorial rites were an important part of the funerary cult for individuals as well as royal dynasties in Mesopotamia.[157] Here the bones of the deceased played an important role because the memorial rites could not be performed if the bones were disturbed in the burial site. Both deprivation and disruption of burial were great offence to the *eṭemmu*.[158] People lived in fear of the *eṭemmu* returning to haunt or retaliate, unless they continued remembering the deceased by their funerary offerings.

There was no post-mortem judgement of the dead in Mesopotamian cults as in Egypt. The ancient Mesopotamian texts mention judges in the netherworld,[159] but their function seems to have very little, if anything, to do with justice for human

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[152] Severino Croatto, "The Hope of Immortality in the Main Cosmologies of the East," in *Immortality and Resurrection* (eds. Benoit and Murphy; Concilium 60; New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 22; Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, 155.
[153] Penglase, "Afterlife," 193.
[154] Yamauchi, "Life," 34–35; see, e.g., an exchange between Gilgamesh and Enkidu describes the unburied dead in "The Epic of Gilgamesh," Tablet XII. vi (SBV) in Dalley, *Myths*, 124–25 :

> I saw him, whose corpse you saw abandoned in the open country:
> His ghost does not sleep in the Earth.
> I saw him whom you saw, whose ghost has nobody to supply it:
> He feeds on dregs from dishes, and bits of bread that lie abandoned in the streets.

[155] Wayne T. Pitard, "The Ugaritic Funerary Text RS 34.126," *BASOR* 232 (1978): 67.
[156] Cooper, "Fate," 29.
[157] Ibid., 29–30; Miranda Bayliss, "Cult of Dead Kin in Assyria and Babylonia," *Iraq* 35 (1973): 115–25.
[158] Cooper, "Fate," 27–28, cites that Ashurbanipal of Assyria demolished Elamite royal tombs for their eternal curse and Merodachbaladan fled with his ancestor's bones when Sennacherib defeated him to avoid such a curse, both in the seventh century BCE. See Elena Cassin, "Le mort: valeur et représentation en Mésopotamie ancienne," in *La Mort, les morts dans les sociétés anciennes* (eds. Gnoli and Vernant; Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1982), 362, 365.
[159] There were the court of the Annunaki, the little known court presided over by Gilgamesh, and the court of Shamash, "whose daily circuit gave him jurisdiction in both the upper and lower world," in the ancient Mesopotamian netherworld. Scurlock, "Death," *CANE* 3:1888.

conduct while people were on the earth. These lesser underworld gods appear to have functioned as "authorities" assigned to the dead according to their status, or even as "police" of the netherworld, rather than as "judges" for judicial decisions.[160] There was no hope or better world for the ancient people in Mesopotamia once they died. They were destined to the netherworld where they had to serve the underworld gods, regardless of their status or under which dynasty they lived.

The pessimistic view of death and afterlife remained in Mesopotamia throughout their history and probably was unchanged even during the Persian period.[161] Stolper remarks: "Little can be said of changes in Babylonian religion under Achaemenid influence."[162]

1.1.3 Levant: Israel's Neighbours

As in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the religions of ancient Israel's neighbours in the Levant had many of their characteristics rooted in natural phenomena. Their deities were associated with the sun, the earth, storm, wind, water, thunder and lightning. Theirs were polytheistic religions with a hierarchical structure among their deities.[163] The Israelites' closest neighbours, Syro-Palestinians, were worshippers of "Baal," although Baal was not the supreme deity among many gods in a divine hierarchy of "Baal religion." Localized forms of deity with the title Baal spread and represented the single defined storm-god figure over the whole region of Syria and Palestine far beyond its original home. "Baal religion" may date back as early as the eighteenth century BCE in northern Mesopotamia or northern Syria.[164]

Like Mesopotamians, Syro-Palestinians also seem to have held a view that only gods can live perpetually but humans are destined to die. Young Aqhat's response to Anat expresses realistic scepticism in the Aqhat epic, when she entices him to give her his bow in exchange for immortality:

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[160] Brandon, *Judgment*, 52; Penglase, "Afterlife," 193.

[161] Tammi J. Schneider, "Assyrian and Babylonian Religions," in *The Cambridge History of Religions in the Ancient World, Vol. 1: From the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic Age* (eds. Salzman and Sweeney; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 54–55.

[162] Matthew W. Stolper, "Mesopotamia, 482–330 B.C.," in *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 6: The Fourth Century B.C.* (eds. Lewis, et al.; CAH 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 258.

[163] Lowell K. Handy, "Dissenting Deities or Obedient Angels: Divine Hierarchies in Ugarit and the Bible," *BR* 35 (1990): 18–35.

[164]M. J. Mulder and Johannes C. de Moor, "בַּעַל," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*(ed. Botterweck and Ringgren; vol. 2 of; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 183.

> Do not lie, O Virgin, because to a hero your lying is rubbish!
> What does a man get as (his) fate?
> What does a man get as (his) final lot?
> Glaze will be set near my head, potash on the top of my skull!
> The Death of every man I too shall die, even I shall certainly die![165]

This is reminiscent of what Gilgamesh in Mesopotamia found. Similarly, death as an unavoidable human fate is a theme of Qohelet in Ecclesiastes. Nevertheless, Ugaritic people also appear to have believed that life is not completely extinguished after death but that a vital element survives and separates from the body after death. What survived was called *rpu* "the spirit of the dead,"[166] but there was no revivification or beatific afterlife of the dead.[167] At Ugarit there was apparently no post-mortem or eschatological divine judgement of the dead.[168]

The god of the underworld Mot was a personification of death, who had a ravenous appetite for swallowing up all the living, and even consumed gods without discrimination at their predetermined term;[169] but how Mot ruled his kingdom is absent from the Ugaritic texts. Being swallowed up by Mot apparently means going down to the netherworld.[170] What happens after descending to the netherworld is not at all clear because Ugaritic texts do not describe any activity by Mot or the spirits of the dead, as do Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts. The texts do not elaborate on the netherworld, either, but call it "the Earth" (*KTU* 1.5.V.6), "the Pit," the "town/city" of Mot, or the "House of Freedom" (*KTU* 1.5.II.14; 1.5.V.14). The netherworld is "located deep underground, like a vast cave, and is covered with dust."[171]

The only universally recognized extant funerary ritual text, *KTU* 1.161, seems to indicate that the people of Ugarit may have held a view of post-mortem existence through ancestral worship as a continuation of family, although it is the only text to

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[165] *KTU* 1.17.VI.34–38, English translation by G. Faith Richardson from Xella's Italian text in Paolo Xella, "Death and the Afterlife in Canaanite and Hebrew Thought," *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* 3:2063 [Note: Xella's inaccurte line numbering 34–48 is corrected].

[166] Rephaim (*rp'im* or *rp'um*) is the plural form of the term. Some scholars interpret that *rp'im* in Ugarit may refer only to the royal ancestors (*KTU* 1.161), but the only one evidence is not a strong support for such reality. See John Day, "Ugarit and the Bible: Do They Presuppose the Same Canaanite Mythology and Religion?," in *Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible, Manchester, September 1992* (eds. Brooke, et al.; UBL 11; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), 48.

[167] Karel van der Toorn, "Funerary Rituals and Beatific Afterlife in Ugaritic Texts and in the Bible," *BO* 48 (1991): 63–65; contra Spronk, *Beatific*, 142–213.

[168] Xella, "Death," *CANE* 3:2063.

[169] *KTU* 1.5.I.14–22. Umberto Cassuto, "Baal and Mot in the Ugaritic Texts," *IEJ* 12 (1962): 80–85.

[170] Ibid., 82.

[171] Michael C. Astour, "The Nether World and Its Denizens at Ugarit," in *Death in Mesopotamia* (ed. Alster; MCSA 8; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 228. Cf. *KTU* 1.161.20–26.

support such a possibility.[172] The text describes the royal funerary ritual for a dead king Niqmaddu III (late-13th century BCE) in ancient Ugarit. The sun goddess Shapsh plays the central role in the mythical ritual. The text describes a scene, in which Shapsh is about to bring down Niqmaddu to the underworld where he meets the spirits of dead ancestors as they are invoked, suggesting an ancestor worship of the royal family.[173] Due to the difficulties in transcribing and reading the original text on the tablet, its translations and interpretations by scholars vary. Lewis summarizes the content of *KTU* 1.161 as follows:

> The so-called Ugaritic Funerary Text (*KTU* 1.161 = RS 34.126) is, without doubt, the most important text for understanding the cult of the dead at Ugarit. The ritual, which seems to be Niqmaddu's funerary liturgy, was undertaken by Ammurapi, the reigning king, in order to provide essential services to the deceased (invoking their names, presenting offerings) and to secure the well-being for his own reign and kingdom. The long dead (*rp'm*) and the recently dead (*mlkm*) were invoked to take an active part in the ritual which seems to have lasted for seven days. It is clear from this text that the dead were not utterly cut off from the living and could be beseeched to grant favors for the present life.[174]

The *rp'm* are usually interpreted as long-dead (royal) ancestors[175] and *mlkm* are the recently dead rulers.[176] The text is apparently a funerary liturgy to mourn and honour the deceased king and to secure favours for the newly enthroned king, summoning

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[172] Also RS 34.126. The text has imposed a number of interpretative challenges due to the epigraphical difficulties, coupled with Claude Schaeffer's erroneous interpretations of his famous archaeological discovery at Ras Shamra, which have affected all the Ugaritic textual interpretation through 1980s. For issues and verification of Ras Shamra findings, see Wayne T. Pitard, "The 'Libation Installations' of the Tombs at Ugarit," *BA* 57 (1994): 20–37; Wayne T. Pitard, "Voices from the Dust: The Tablets from Ugarit and the Bible," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* (eds. Chavalas and Younger; JSOTSup 341; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 264–70; for the text with notes and its relevant photos, see Wayne T. Pitard, "RS 34.126: Notes on the Text," *Maarav* 4 (1987): 75–86, 111–55. For translation and interpreatation of *KTU* 1.161, see, e.g., David T. Tsumura, "The Interpretation of the Ugaritic Funerary Text KTU 1.161," in *Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East: Papers of the First Colloquium on the Ancient Near East–the City and Its Life Held at the Middle Eastern Culture Center in Japan (Mitaka, Tokyo), March 20–22, 1992* (ed. Matsushima; Heidelberg: Winter, 1993), 40–55; Baruch A. Levine and Jean-Michel de Tarragon, "Dead Kings and Rephaim: The Patrons of the Ugaritic Dynasty," *JAOS* 104 (1984): 649–59; Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 5–46. Lewis's comments on archaeological supports in Conclusion of the Ugaritic Texts (pp. 97–98) should be disregarded.

[173] Tsumura, "KTU 1.161," 40–55; cf. Simon B. Parker ed, *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 164 and 175 (nn. 203 and 204); Pitard, "Voices," 265.

[174] Lewis, *Cults*, 171.

[175] A dead ancestor is also called an *ilu* (the Ugaritic king list in *KTU* 1.113). A king may have simply "become an *ilu*" upon death, which "need not mean anything more than that the dead joined the illustrious company of the *rp'm*. . . . The dead, though called *ilu's,* were not 'deified' in the sense that they became like the high gods of the pantheon" (note that *rp'm*, *ilnym*, *ilm*, and *mtm* are parallel terms). Ibid., 96, 171.

[176] Ibid., 95.

both the long-dead ancestors and the succeeding living king. The funerary ritual thus seemed to ensure "the dynastic continuity between the deceased and living kings."[177]

Another passage known as "The Duties of an Ideal Son" in the Aqhat epic (*KTU* 1.17.I.26–34)[178] has been interpreted by many to be an instruction to a son about his duty to provide for the spirit of his dead father. But the text with its surrounding context also suggests a son's duty to his father while the latter is still alive rather than after his death.[179] Perhaps it may have meant both: it is the son's duty to take care of his father's well-being both while the father is alive and after his death. There is not enough evidence to know if ancestor worship was common among Ugaritic people or restricted only to the privileged royal family.

Unambiguous literary or archaeological evidence for cultic rituals and beliefs concerning death and afterlife at Ugarit are scarce according to more recent studies. Pitard cautions that the early misidentification of the harbour town as a cemetery at Ras Shamra has coloured and compromised the basic and subsequent interpretations of both the textual and archaeological evidence, which apparently need to be re-evaluated.[180]

1.1.4 Greece

Greek religious culture is rich and diverse in literature, arts, and architecture. But it lasted nearly 1000 years with arguably little change, and with great continuity amidst other changes, from the archaic period through the Greco-Roman era.[181] It is far beyond the scope of this thesis to consult the many resources available, and the present purpose is briefly to describe a general overarching Greek religious attitude towards death, afterlife, and divine judgement, which manifested itself in their cultic

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[177] Mark S. Smith, "The Death of 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Biblical World: An Update, with Special Reference to Baal in the Baal Cycle," *SJOT* 12 (1998): 307. Cf. Lewis, *Cults*, 96, notes: "The ties between OB Amorite Mari and the Ugaritic ritual of ancestor cults–which probably stem from older Amorite practices [cf. the Ugaritic king list which goes back to the Amorites]–can be underscored."

[178] Also see the parallel passages: *KTU* 1.17.I.43–48; 1.17.II.1–8, 112–123.

[179] Pitard, "Voices," 265; Lewis, *Cults*, 53–71; contra Toorn, "Funerary," 44, for example.

[180] Pitard, "Libation," 20–37, convincingly refutes most, if not all, of C. F.-A. Schaeffer's discovery of the "burial site" at Ras Shamra, published between 1929 and 1951; see also Wayne T. Pitard, "Tombs and Offerings: Archaeological Data and Comparative Methodology in the Study of Death in Israel," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (ed. Gittlen; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 146–50; cf., e.g., Nicolas Wyatt, "Religion in Ancient Ugarit," in *A Handbook of Ancient Religions* (ed. Hinnells; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105–60, for a recent careful treatment of evidence and description of Ugarit cults.

[181] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* (trans. Raffan; Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 246, 305.

rituals and festivals. We will probe if and what role Greek philosophy played in the religious formation of ancient Greece, and more importantly if Greek philosophy exerted any influence on the wider ancient world, particularly Israel.

The Greeks are people of Indo-European descent who migrated into the non-Indo-European coastal regions of the Aegean basin. Amalgamation of the indigenous cultic practices and the religions of surrounding advanced civilizations shaped Greek religion.[182] In Greece, city-states governed each territory with no dominant central government, and the Greeks built temples and organized their cult rituals and festivals within a city-state government boundary. Greek religion by definition is public religion, being bound to πόλις: it is what the city defines and decrees for its citizens to participate in.[183] Politics and social activities such as festivals and athletic events were meshed together with cultic rituals in Greek public life. Participation in public (religious) events guaranteed the integration of an individual into the community, and it was regarded as a civic duty of a citizen's life.[184] Piety (εὐσέβεια) meant participation, a matter of observing public rituals and offering sacrifices, and of showing respect towards the gods.[185] It never meant "devotion to only one god," and had little to do with individual belief or ideology.[186] The refusal to take part meant impiety (ἀσέβεια).

In ancient Greek society there was no single "established" religious institution, sacred texts, or professional priests.[187] "The important quality of piety was to keep the ancestral customs"; this the Greeks adapted according to the changing social conditions.[188] Flexibility and innovation characterized Greek communal life and religion, while living with neighbours of different cultures thanks to wars, commerce, and politics.[189] Greeks were polytheists in a true sense of the word:[190] individual

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[182] Robert Parker, "Greek Religion," in *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (eds. Boardman, et al.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 256.
[183] Burkert, *Greek*, 276.
[184] Ibid., 246.
[185] Parker, "Greek," 261.
[186] Jan M. Bremer, *Greek Religion* (GR 24; Oxford: The Classical Association by Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.
[187] P. E. Easterling, "Greek Poetry and Greek Religion," in *Greek Religion and Society* (eds. Easterling and Muir; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 35.
[188] Bremer, *Greek*, 5.
[189] Susan G. Cole, "Greek Religion," in *A Handbook of Ancient Religions* (ed. Hinnells; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 274.
[190] Matthew Dillon and Lynda Garland, *The Ancient Greeks: History and Culture from Archaic Times to the Death of Alexander* (London: Routledge, 2013), 73.

communities selected and paid homage to particular gods, but "not to the exclusion of others."[191] Gould states:

> Greek religion is not theologically fixed and stable, and it has no tradition of exclusion or finality: it is an open, not a closed system. There are no true gods and false, merely powers known and acknowledged since time immemorial, and new powers, newly experienced as active among men and newly acknowledged in worship.[192]

Because the Greek had no "authorized" sacred text, it was poets and tragedians, and their literary works, particularly Homer and Hesiod among them, which shaped overall Greek religion.[193] Homer's *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Hymn to Demeter* and Hesiod's *Theogony*, all probably written during the eighth–seventh centuries BCE, are the most relevant literature.[194] They not only reveal early historical Greek customs and beliefs, but also reflect cults in the preceding Greek Dark Age from 1100 to 900 BCE. After the fall of the Bronze-Age Mycenaean civilisation, they even included some Mycenaean cults.[195] Herodotus, a Greek historian in the fifth century BCE, writes:

> It was Homer and Hesiod who created a theogony for the Greeks, gave the gods their epithets, divided out offices and functions among them, and described their appearance (2.53).[196]

In the portrayals by Homer and Hesiod, Greek gods and their activities appear quite anthropomorphic and mischievous; nonetheless, there is a clear divide between the divine and human realms in their descriptions. Although Greek gods can look and behave like humans, gods (and a limited number of demi-gods) are "deathless" or "undying." In contrast, humans are destined to die, and their dilemma is neither comprehensible nor of concern to the gods.[197] The ancient Greek hero cult manifests human desires to live long, be strong like gods, and keep their memory in perpetuity.

Ancient Greeks believed that the gods were interested in the lives and affairs of the human world, and they sought divine favours by offering gifts and sacrifices according to the vicissitudes of life.[198] But once they died, there was nothing more to

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[191] Parker, "Greek," 254.
[192] John Gould, "On Making Sense of Greek Religion," in *Greek Religion and Society* (eds. Easterling and Muir; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8.
[193] Bremer, *Greek*, 1.
[194] By "Homer" or "Homer's" is meant the work(s) attributed to Homer.
[195] Penglase, "Afterlife," 194.
[196] As cited in Parker, "Greek," 260; cf. Herodotus, *Herodotus with an English Translation, Vol. 1: Books I and II* (LCL 117; trans. Godley; London: Heinemann, 1920), 340–41 for Greek text and translation.
[197] Peter Toohey, et al., "Death," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome* 2:371.
[198] Dillon and Garland, *Ancient*, 80.

expect from gods, since death terminated the relationship with the Olympian gods.[199] Greek views on their post-mortem destiny widely varied from extinction to a beatific afterlife of the ψυχή—the two extremes and somewhere in-between.[200] Greek burial and mourning rituals hardly changed throughout their history but beliefs about what happened to an individual at death and afterwards were never settled and continually debated.[201]

In early Greek ideas, a human being was composed of three entities: body (σῶμα), θυμός, and ψυχή. The θυμός is the "most important word for the seat of emotions, such as friendship, anger, joy and grief, as well as emotion itself."[202] The ψυχή is not recognizable when one is alive, but is released and separated from the body when one dies. It is "a shadowy replica of the living person"[203] and is often called εἴδωλον "a phantom image."[204] The ψυχή is a kind of "shade," which resembles the living image of the deceased but cannot be grasped if one tries to touch it.[205] It is without vital force and even lacks consciousness unless it first drinks the blood of a sacrificed animal.[206] It is the ψυχή which journeys to Hades, the Land of the Dead,[207] after the deceased receives a proper burial. In rare instances, such as of heroes, the ψυχή may reach the Islands of the Blessed.[208] A proper burial is an important funerary rite for the ψυχή to reach Hades, otherwise it is not allowed to cross to Hades and wanders

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[199] Toohey, et al., "Death," *OEAGR* 2:371.

[200] D. Felton, "The Dead," in *A Companion to Greek Religion* (ed. Ogden; BCAW; Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 86; Dag Øistein Endsjø, *Greek Resurrection Beliefs and the Success of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 2009), 120; Jan M. Bremer, "Death and Immortality in Some Greek Poems," in *Hidden Futures* (eds. Bremer, et al.; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), 122. For Greek view of afterlife see, e.g., Segal, *Life*, 204–47; Bartel Poortman, "Death and Immortality in Greek Philosophy: From the Presocratics to the Hellenistic Era," in *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World* (eds. Bremer, et al.; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), 197–220.

[201] N. J. Richardson, "Early Greek Views about Life after Death," in *Greek Religion and Society* (eds. Easterling and Muir; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 50.

[202] Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.

[203] See *Odyssey* 11.204–222. Brandon, *Judgment*, 81.

[204] See *Iliad* 23.72; *Odyssey* 11.83. Burkert, *Greek*, 195.

[205] *Iliad* 23.100–104. Helen F. North, "Death and Afterlife in Greek Tragedy and Plato," in *Death and Afterlife* (Westport: Greenwood, 1992), 49.

[206] *Iliad* 23.104. Burkert, *Greek*, 196.

[207] Felton, "Dead," 90. Note the term "Hades" in ancient Greece serves dual function: (1) the name of the chthonic god; and (2) the name of the underworld.

[208] Cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 167–173. for the Greek text and English translation, see Hesiod, *Theogony; Works and Days; Testimonia* (LCL 57; ed. Most; trans. Most; 2 vols.; vol. 1; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 100–101.

over the earth.[209] The ψυχή must be released from the corpse, because death itself is considered pollution.[210] The Greeks have concurrently practised both cremation and inhumation of the corpse.[211] Both methods were used throughout Greek history, although cremation might have been preferred at times because it was thought to release the ψυχή from the body more rapidly.[212] What really matters was, however, that the dead received proper burial rites with either method.

The ψυχή thus released can easily reach the kingdom of Hades by crossing the river Styx,[213] which is one of the five rivers flowing around Hades and is the main boundary of Hades.[214] The kingdom of Hades is neither Hell, nor a place of punishment (or reward), but simply a destination of all mortals:[215] it is a place where every ψυχή of the dead is expected to go and stay. Greek Hades is also

> a gloomy realm at the outermost reaches of the world surrounded by the River Styx, peopled by insubstantial ghosts or psychai that [are] bereft of the power of communication with the upper world.[216]

Once anyone enters the House of Hades,[217] no one can leave, even a god. Thus Persephone, whom Hades kidnaps and makes his wife, must stay in Hades for at least part of a year even after she is rescued by her mother Demeter with Zeus' intervention. Hades' main job as the ruler of Greek netherworld is to ensure that the living and the dead stay in their appropriate places: the living do not enter and the dead do not leave Hades.[218] A few heroes—Heracles, Theseus, Orpheus and Odysseus—still manage to return to earth after their descent to Hades,[219] even though it is "guarded by monstrous creatures."[220] In the earliest account, Homer describes

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[209] See *Iliad* 23.71–74; *Odyssey* 11.72. George E. Mylonas, "Homeric and Mycenaean Burial Customs," *AJA* 52 (1948): 61–62; Penglase, "Afterlife," 194.
[210] Cole, "Greek," 310.
[211] Segal, *Life*, 209–10; Richardson, "Early Greek," 50.
[212] See *Iliad* 23.71–76; *Odyssey* 11.51–54, 216–222. Richardson, "Early Greek," 50–51.
[213] ("Hateful"). In earlier times without help (in Homer), but later by Charon, a ferryman, for whose payment, the deceased's family put a coin in the mouth of the dead "from the fifth century BCE onward." Toohey, et al., "Death," *OEAGR* 2:371; Jan N. Bremmer, "The Soul, Death and the Afterlife in Early and Classical Greece," in *Hidden Futures: Death and Immortality in Ancient Egypt, Anatolia, the Classical, Biblical and Arabic-Islamic World* (eds. Bremer, et al.; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), 103.
[214] Felton, "Dead," 92.
[215] Segal, *Life*, 211.
[216] Robert Garland, "Underworld and Afterlife," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome* 7:137.
[217] Another name of the realm of the dead. North, "Death," 4.
[218] Felton, "Dead," 91.
[219] Known as *katabasis*— "descent" of a hero who dares to face death and achieves a heroic reputation to be memorialized as their way of attaining immortality. Ibid., 94.
[220] Ibid., 90.

Hades as located not underground but at the edge of the earth, across the ocean (*Odyssey* 11.13–22), but writers regularly describe Hades as underground by the sixth century BCE.[221]

Ancient Greeks believed there were divine law and justice. Felton notes: "Greek literature as early as Homer included the concept of punishment and honor after death, depending on whether one had offended gods or led a pious life."[222] The important point to note here is that reward or punishment was not for personal belief or morality, since the pious life was defined by participation in public rituals. As Elysium was moved and became a part of Hades, the ψυχαί of the dead faced judgement once they reached Hades. Over time there were three judges in the underworld: Minos, the earliest judge (*Odyssey* 1.568–571); Rhadamanthys, who ruled Elysium (*Odyssey* 4.561–565) and eventually became another judge; and Aeacus, whom Plato added in the fourth century (*Apology* 41a; *Gorgias* 523c–524a).[223] All three were well-known law-givers during their lifetime. After their death, they became judges of the underworld to punish or reward the descended ψυχαί and assign them to appropriate places within Hades (*Gorgias* 524).[224] The wicked ψυχή was sent and punished in Tartarus, a dungeon of torment and suffering,[225] located in the deepest part of Hades.[226] The pious ψυχή was rewarded to move into Elysium for an enjoyable afterlife. In the Homeric *Odyssey* the writer describes the place as:

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[221] Ibid., 92. Hades (and later Elysium) varied over time and location. Initially they were located at the edge of the earth, but later underground. Elysium (Islands of the Blessed) was initially a separate island and reserved for demigods—a favoured few heroes, warriors, and god's relatives, but later became a part of Hades. As noted already, many Greek concepts are fluid, varied, and sometimes even contradictory in many details of divinity, ψυχή, or afterlife even within the same author's writings (e.g., Homer) as well as among the authors (e.g., Homer vs. Hesiod). "Such discrepancies caused no anxiety, and there was no need to question one's conscience before doubting or disputing a traditional myth," notes Parker, "Greek," 260. The only religious crimes were acts or attitude of not recognizing or respecting the gods that city-state recognizes and not observing the community rituals.

[222] Felton, "Dead," 92.

[223] Ibid., 92–93; cf. *Apology* 41a in Plato, *Plato with an English Translation I: Euthyphro; Apology; Crito; Phaedo; Phaedrus* (LCL 36; trans. Fowler; London: Heinemann, 1926), 142–43. *Gorgias* 523c–524a in B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato* (4th rev. ed.; trans. Jowett; 4 vols.; vol. 2; Oxford: Clarendon, 1953).

[224] Felton, "Dead," 93; Stanley E. Porter, "Resurrection, the Greeks and the New Testament," in *Resurrection* (eds. Porter, et al.; JSNTSup 186; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 73.

[225] Hesiod, *Theogony* 720–745.

[226] *Iliad* 8.13–16.

> Elysian plain . . . where life is easiest for men. No snow is there, nor heavy storm, nor ever rain, but ever does Ocean send up blasts of the shrill-blowing West Wind that they may give cooling to men.[227]

The desire to have a better afterlife in Hades and a possibility for preparing for it is also realized through the Eleusinian mysteries depicted in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (480–482).[228] The rituals of the mystery cult, undisclosed due to its strict secrecy, become available to all who speak Greek without discrimination. Male and female, free and even slave can be initiated in the cult to reach Elysium after death. The mystery cult may date back to the Mycenaean period.[229]

Two strands of religious movement emerged around the same period during the sixth century BCE in another sphere concerning the destiny of a human soul after death: Orphism and Pythagoreanism. The two are parallel in their beliefs, although which movement has appeared first or influenced the other remains unclear. They both believe in metempsychosis, namely, transmigration and incarnation of the ψυχή in a cyclic pattern.[230] Orphic religion was cultivated by Orpheus' legendary descent to Hades. It held a view that the ψυχή was basically divine in origin and should be freed from contamination by the body through strict rules and purification rituals. After undergoing a series of incarnations and purgations in the underworld, the ψυχή could return to its original divine state.[231] The Pythagorean doctrine created a new concept of ψυχή: the essential part of human ἔμψυχον (the ψυχή within) was immortal, was imprisoned in the body, and therefore was separable from the body.[232] In addition, the ψυχή could "enter another body after death and retain its original identity."[233]

The concept that the human ψυχή is immortal and can go through a series of incarnations in a circular succession presupposes dualism: body and ψυχή are two independent and different entities.[234] This eventually leads to Plato's concept of an

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[227] *Odyssey* 4.563–567, the text and translation in Homer, *The Odyssey* (LCL 105; trans. Murray; 2 vols.; vol. 1; London: Heinemann, 1919), 148–49. Here Homer means heroes by "men." Why the pleasant climate has anything to do with the bodiless ψυχή is a strange notion.
[228] The numbers designate verse line number. Helene P. Foley ed, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26–27; Garland, "Underworld," *OEAGR* 7:137.
[229] Anthony T. Edwards, "Achilles in the Underworld: *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aethiopis*," *GRBS* 26 (1985): 218.
[230] Poortman, "Death," 206.
[231] Richardson, "Early Greek," 61.
[232] Poortman, "Death," 198; Burkert, *Greek*, 300.
[233] Garland, "Underworld," *OEAGR* 7:139; Cf. DK 21 B7 in Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, Griechisch und Deutsch* (6th rev. ed.; 3 vols.; vol. 1; Berlin: Weidmann, 1951), 150–51.
[234] Poortman, "Death," 206.

immortal soul, very different from the insubstantial ψυχή of the traditional Greek view which had changed very little from the archaic period; thus, Plato's ideas appear to have had little popular support.[235] In Plato's *Phaedo* Socrates says:

> The soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intelligible, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable; and the body is in the very likeness of the human, and mortal, and unintelligible, and multi-form, and dissoluble, and changeable. . . . The soul which is pure at parting draws after her no bodily taint, having never voluntarily had connection with the body, which she is ever avoiding.[236]

What Socrates and Plato distinguish[237] in their definition of ψυχή (soul) is that it is divine and immortal, the very essence of human being—"a person" or one's true "self"—which survives death and separates from the body, not merely a shadowy existence. Rohde explicates:

> If the soul is immortal, it must be in its essential nature like God; it must itself be a creature of the realm of Gods. When a Greek says "immortal" he says "God"; they are interchangeable ideas. But the real first principle of the religion of the Greek people is this—that in the divine ordering of the world, humanity and divinity are absolutely divided in place and nature, and so they must ever remain.[238]

Namely, by saying that the soul is immortal, Plato has basically elevated the status of ψυχή into the realm of God,[239] which is significantly different from traditional Greek beliefs. Moreover, distinguishing intellectuals from the average populace, Socrates and Plato have often emphasized and claimed that it is the *philosophers* who are not afraid of death because their soul not only survives but will be released from the bodily prison.[240] It is understandable if the Greek general public did not accept their claim.

Greek literature shows that pre-Socratic philosophers questioned the validity of Greek poets' depiction of gods long before Plato. Xenophanes and Ionian philosophers in the sixth century BCE criticized the anthropomorphic depiction of

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[235] Parker, "Greek," 269.

[236] *Phaedo* 80 in R. W. Livingstone, *Portrait of Socrates: Being the Apology, Crito and Phaedo of Plato in an English Translation with Introductions and Notes* (trans. Jowett; Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), 127–28.

[237] For the purpose of this thesis it is of little significance whether the ideas expressed in Plato's *Apology*, *Crito*, or *Phaedo* are actually Plato's or Socrates'.

[238] Erwin Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (ILPPSM; trans. Hillis; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1925), 253.

[239] See *Apology* 40–41; *Phaedo* 70–81, 114–115; *Phaedrus* 245–249 for Plato's concept of the immortality of the soul. Cf. Emily Vermeule, "The Afterlife: Greece," *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome* 2:992.

[240] See, e.g., *Phaedo* 64–70 in Livingstone, *Portrait*, 96–108; Fritz Graf, "Theology, Theodicy, Philosophy: Greece and Rome," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (ed. Johnston; Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 543.

gods and proposed a new idea of god(s).[241] Thus a possible decisive turn for re-defining Greek concepts of god, death, and afterlife by the challenges of philosophers and poets existed from the beginning. But in reality, criticism by the intellectuals had little influence upon ancient Greek religion and their practice.[242] Xenophanes and other philosophers were not punished for their criticism of the religious system, but neither did their criticism change that system. By and large people ignored "ideas" contradicting their traditional cults and established community rituals.[243] Impiety was judged by actions, not by ideas, and, in point of fact, those philosophers participated in the city rituals, while ridiculing the old ideas and proposing the new at the same time. A poet, critic, and scholar Callimachus wrote in the third century BCE:

> there is a theology of the poets which need not be believed, and at the same time a theology of the polis which is very much a civic duty. (*Aet*. 1.6.9)[244]

Burkert remarks: "Xenophanes' criticism of Homeric religion could not be outdone, and it was never refuted. . . . And yet . . . Xenophanes found listeners but no adherents or disciples."[245]

It is therefore doubtful if the philosophical ideas were widely circulated or accepted among Greeks in terms of availability and transmission of such treatises. Endsjø points out that "Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Orphics all remained essentially marginal figures connected to the limited circles of educated men who pledged their allegiance to philosophy and religious innovation."[246] He substantiates this by noting:

> As firsthand witnesses of the intellectual milieu of the early Christian era, some philosophically inclined men deplored the fact that their own beloved Plato was not widely read. While referring to how both Homer and the tragedians were perused extensively all over the Hellenistic realm, and "hundreds of thousands . . . continue to use" the laws of Alexander the Great, Plutarch admitted in the first century A.D. that only "few of us read Plato's Laws." About the same time, Strabo simply stated as a

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[241] Burkert, *Greek*, 308–9; Dillon and Garland, *Ancient*, 73; Bremer, *Greek*, 11. See, e.g., Xenophanes of Colophon, *Fragments: A Text and Translation with a Commentary* (PSV 32; trans. Lesher; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 82–84, 89–94; DK 21 B15 in Diels and Kranz, *Xenophanes*, 132–33; cf. Herodotus 1.32.1 mentions that gods are jealous and trouble-makers. Herodotus, *Books I&II*, 36–37.

[242] Burkert, *Greek*, 305.

[243] Cole, "Greek," 276–78.

[244] Burkert, *Greek*, 246; Hermann Diels, *Doxographi Graeci: collegit, recensuit, prolegomenis indicibusque instruxit* (Berlin: Reimer, 1879), 295.

[245] Burkert, *Greek*, 309.

[246] Endsjø, *Greek*, 109.

> fact that "philosophy is for the few, whereas poetry is more useful to the people at large."[247]

It was on the outskirts of the Greek world where the ideological movements by philosophers attracted their adherents, but they remained marginal phenomena without any influence upon the cultic life and practice of ancient Greek society.[248] It is noteworthy that Socrates was charged with two accounts of impiety against him (1) "not recognizing the gods that the city recognizes" and (2) introducing new gods and corrupting the youth.[249] Socrates was tried for political reasons, but his foes cunningly brought official charges relating to the city's religious practice against Socrates, which condemned him to death.[250] Socrates and Plato actually participated in the city's cultic rituals, while criticizing traditional mythology and cult.[251] Such were the stronghold and grip of traditional Greek religion on Greek society. Plato's concept of the immortality of the soul was rejected by the Epicureans and Stoics not long after Plato. The epitaphs on the graves in the Greco-Roman period (2nd century BCE) are often characterized by an emphasis on the finality of death: οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος "No one is immortal."[252] For whatever reason, most ancient Greeks were not initiated into mystery cults, either.[253] Epicurean pragmatism rather than Plato's intellectual idea of the immortality of the soul apparently had a more lasting effect on Greeks in Hellenistic society.[254]

1.2 Death, Afterlife, and Divine Judgement in Israel

By the time the nation of Israel was born, people in the surrounding nations of the ancient Near East already had a long history of their own concepts and beliefs regarding god, death, and the afterlife. A plethora of literature, remains of temples,

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[247] Ibid., 13. Endsjø's citations in his statement refer to Plutarch's *Mor.* 328de and Strabo's *Geogr.* 1.2.8, respectively.
[248] Parker, "Greek," 269; Endsjø, *Greek*, 17.
[249] Parker, "Greek," 260. Cf. *Apology* in Xenophon, *The Works of Xenophon, Vol. 3, Pt. 1: The Memorabilia and Apology; the Economist; the Symposium; and Hiero* (trans. Dakyns; 3 (in 4) vols.; London: Macmillan, 1897), 187. *Apology* 24–27 in Thomas G. West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates: An Interpretation, with a New Translation* (trans. West; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 28–34.
[250] Cole, "Greek," 277.
[251] Xenophon, *Apology*, 188. Graf, "Theology," 543.
[252] William Horbury, "Jewish Inscriptions and Jewish Literature in Egypt, with Special Reference to Ecclesiasticus," in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy* (eds. Henten and Horst; AGJU 21; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 32–43; Émile Puech, "Inscriptions funéraires palestiniennes: tombeau de Jason et ossuaires," *RB* 90 (1983): 492–94; Endsjø, *Greek*, 109; Rohde, *Psyche*, 539–44, 577 (n. 166).
[253] Sarah I. Johnston, "Death, the Afterlife, and Other Last Things: Greece," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (ed. Johnston; Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 487.
[254] G. E. R. LLoyd, "Greek Philosophy," *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome* 3:1614.

burial sites, monuments, inscriptions, and archaeological artefacts attest how deeply rituals and the cult of the dead and afterlife shaped and permeated lives and societies of the ancient world, as seen in the previous section. Finding similar information in Israel other than from the Old Testament (OT) is complicated. Although archaeological findings and the publications on them offer an important resource,[255] identification or verification of Israelite archaeological data remains difficult, susceptible to error, and often inconclusive.[256] The major challenge lies in sorting out coexisting remains of the pre-existent inhabitants and other ethnic groups who were stationed in or passed through Palestine and the whole Canaanite region thanks to commerce, occupation, wars, political conflicts, and changing rulers. Different ethnic groups in Palestine held and practised a long tradition of their own mortuary cults throughout, before and after Israelite presence in Canaan. Moreover, there is a paucity of verifiable data concerning mortuary rituals or practices for the Israelite dead.

Whatever the interpretative difficulties, the OT still remains the prime resource for exploration of Hebrew concepts of death, afterlife, and divine judgement. The following discussion will seek to present a synthetic overview of characteristic understandings and practices within the OT.

1.2.1 Biblical Concepts of Life, Death, and Divine Judgement

According to Genesis, Yahweh, the God of Israel, has created the universe and all the living things in the world, and no living creatures can live without a life-breath from Yahweh. The text specifically recounts that the first human becomes a living being after Yahweh has formed his body from dust and breathed His breath into his nostrils (2:7); humankind as created in God's image, whatever it may mean, is distinguished from animals.

God places humankind in the Garden of Eden with a specific purpose: Adam is to cultivate (עבד) and keep (שמר) the Garden, while he can freely eat from any tree (מכל

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[255] E.g., Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992); Rachel S. Hallote, *Death, Burial, and Afterlife in the Biblical World: How the Israelites and Their Neighbors Treated the Dead* (Chicago: Dee, 2001); Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims* (LHBOTS 473; New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

[256] Hallote, *Death*, 17, 45, 96–97; L. Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part One," *BA* 44 (1981): 171–77; L. Y. Rahmani, "Ancient Jerusalem's Funerary Customs and Tombs: Part Two," *BA* 44 (1981): 229–35; Peter J. Ucko, "Ethnography and Archaeological Interpretation of Funerary Remains," *WA* 1 (1969): 262–80; cf. Pitard, "Libation," 20–37; Pitard, "Tombs," 145–67; Pitard, "Voices," 251–75.

עץ) except one in the Garden. God commands Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because in the day (ביום) he eats from it he shall surely die (Gen 2:15–17). Since the interpretation of this famous story is greatly contested, a few brief comments on a possible reading will be offered below.

The Genesis text does not indicate up to this point that the first human is destined to death or if his life span is fixed, but it does specify that he will lose his life if he disobeys God.[257] When Adam and Eve disobey God's command, they are expelled from the Garden of Eden where the tree of life is located; they are denied access to the tree of life (any longer),[258] with whose fruit they could have lived forever (Gen 3:22–24). What seems odd in Yahweh's pronouncement of a guilty verdict on Adam and Eve in Gen 3:16–19 is that they do not die immediately, when He caught their disobedience. Yahweh declares that Adam will toil for food all his life on the now-cursed ground because of his disobedience, until he dies, while Eve will bear children in pain and be subjected to her husband. Thus Yahweh allows them to live but makes clear that they *will* die and return to dust, from which they are created (v. 19b). Death was a possibility (Gen 2:17), but it became a reality when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, even if they did not die immediately. Hamilton notes: "The verse is underscoring the certainty of death, not its chronology" on the meaning and implication of ביום in Gen 2:17.[259]

Gen 3:17–19 antithetically parallels 2:15–17. Everything changes in Adam's life after his disobedience: *from* cultivating and keeping the Garden of Eden *to* labouring with pain and sweat on the cursed ground; *from* eating fruit from any tree (save one) in the Garden *to* eating plants of the field which needs to be separated from thorns and thistles; and *from* the day when one eats the forbidden fruit and will die *to* all the days of life eating with pain and sweat until one dies.[260] Yahweh says, "Because . . . you have eaten from the tree which I commanded you, saying 'You shall not eat from it'"

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[257] Although scholars debate whether or not Adam and Eve were initially created immortal, they concede that the first parents of humanity forfeited immortality when they disobeyed God and were expelled from the Garden of Eden. Thomas Barrosse, "Death and Sin in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans," *CBQ* 15 (1953): 450; Konrad Schmid, "Loss of Immortality? Hermeneutical Aspects of Genesis 2–3 and Its Early Reception," in *Beyond Eden: The Biblical Story of Paradise (Genesis 2–3) and Its Reception History* (eds. Schmid and Riedweg; FAT 2/34; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 58–78.

[258] Note God did not exclude the tree of life among all trees (מכל עץ־הגן) in Gen 2:16–17.

[259] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 172. Similar use of ביום: see, e.g., 1 Kgs 2:37, 42, Exod 10:28.

[260] See Appendix 2 for the parallel chart.

in 3:17, and He explicates what happens to Adam's life in 3:17–19, which includes death. Gen 3:17–19 thus appears as an elaboration of what the content of Yahweh's verdict in 2:17 entails. Logically, the text in 3:17–19 assumes details of Yahweh's punishment in 2:17. This reading of the text indicates that death is the result of Adam's disobedience.[261] Yahweh then clothes the first couple, expels them from the Garden, and stations the cherubim and the flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:21–24). The verdict is complete as far as Yahweh is concerned. The biblical writer seems to imply that God did not destine humankind to death, unlike the gods of ancient Near Eastern world, but humans chose and brought death to themselves.[262]

Death as punishment by God stems from the claim that Yahweh is the king and the legislator who has established the nation of Israel and her law, according to Deuteronomy. Israelite kings did judge, but basically according to the laws given and promulgated by Yahweh.[263] This is an essential difference from other ancient Near Eastern nations, whose kings usually legislated justice, often with a claim that God has entrusted it to them: e.g., it is Hammurabi, the king of Babylon, who wrote his code and expressly described himself as the lawgiver in Mesopotamia, although he claimed to have acted by divine commission. Nevertheless, many ancient nations, most famously Egypt among them, had no law codes.

The developed Israelite concept of משפט is built on the premise that (1) Yahweh is the Creator and the Judge of all the earth; (2) Israel is Yahweh's chosen nation; and (3) Yahweh has established His covenant with Israel.[264] According to the Genesis account, the Israelites did not form their nation, but Yahweh called Abraham out of the land of Chaldeans and established the nation of Israel based on the covenant that

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[261] For more elaborate treatment of the controversial issue of "the Fall" in Genesis 2–3, see R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (OTT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70–87, who also responds to Barr's view; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 82–83; contra James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM, 1992), esp. 1–56; Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 202–4, thinks the punishment is the expulsion from the Garden, not the death. But the expulsion results in death, while in the Garden they could live forever by eating the fruit of the tree of life (Gen 3:22).

[262] Cf. Jacques B. Doukhan, "'When Death Was Not Yet': The Testimony of Biblical Creation," in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (ed. Klingbeil; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 337–40.

[263] Hans J. Boecker, *Recht und Gesetz im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), 33; ET Hans J. Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East* (trans. Moisesr; London: Augsburg, 1980), 41, points out "the OT nowhere refers to legislation on the part of the king": neither the king nor the state promulgated OT laws in the OT's presentation.

[264] Anders Runesson, "Judgment," *NIDB* 3:461.

He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Because of the covenant, Israelites are to serve only Yahweh, who enacted the Law (Torah) to govern Israel as their Ruler. Runesson writes:

> The single most important concept for understanding judgment in the Bible is covenant. . . . While God is presented as the judge of the whole world (Ps 98), the relationship between Israel and God is defined by the idea of a covenant that sets conditions for the relationship (Exod 19:5). The Law (TORAH) was given within this conceptual context, delineating what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and attitudes on the part of Israel; the Law, including a commitment to worship the God of Israel only, represents the primary criterion of judgment, and it was used as a basis for the judicial system as well as a foundation for ideas about divine judgment generally (Exod 19–20, 24; Ps 119; compare Deut 30; Dan 9:11–14).[265]

According to the OT, the existence of Israel is defined and can be understood only against the background of relationality between Yahweh and His people Israel. The book of Deuteronomy spells out that Israelite covenantal relationship with Yahweh entails a choice between life and death. To Israelites, "life and death stand face to face like good and evil . . . like a blessing and a curse," and between the two is laid a choice to be made (Deut 30:15, 19): obedience or disobedience to the divine commandments.[266] Obedience to Yahweh means maintaining a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob intact, and to *live the length of one's life* (Deut 30:20). Moses exhorts Israelites to "choose life," the life which God has allotted, that is. Living to a ripe old age means a blessing of God (cf. Prov 3:2), whereas premature, sudden death which cuts short divine blessing, is understood as a punishment from God.[267] It means that one has somehow offended God, wilfully or unwittingly, and ending life by such a death can be anything but desirable.

Therefore, Israelites seem to have taken issue with death only when it was sudden and unexpected, because it was not death itself but the manner or kind of death that one died that mattered to them. On the one hand, the biblical writers knew and accepted death as an unavoidable reality, but they generally did not hold a pessimistic or negative view of life because of the inevitability of death. They regarded living to a ripe old age and dying in peace to be gathered to their ancestors as the fulfilment of their life as God's people, so long as they had legitimate heir(s) to continue their

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[265] Ibid.
[266] Eberhard Jüngel, *Death, the Riddle and the Mystery* (trans. Nicol; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 77.
[267] Michael A. Knibb, "Life and Death in the Old Testament," in *World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (ed. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 403.

generativity.[268] People apparently considered dying in such a way as natural and satisfactory.[269] "When a ripe old age is reached, then it is time to die. It then becomes clear that dying is the way of all the earth" (Josh 23:14; 1 Kgs 2:2; Num 16:29)—the culmination of a good life: man *can* live and die in this way, and it is understood to be intended and natural.[270]

On the other hand, Israelites in the OT abhor premature death. For example, Jacob may have envisaged that Joseph, the older son of his beloved wife Rachel, was to succeed him as his heir to receive God's promise, but he unexpectedly faces Joseph's presumed sudden death by a wild animal. He tears his clothes, mourns for days, and refuses to be comforted. Such death is a "total breach with the world of the living," notes Martin-Achard.[271] It cuts off a life yet to flourish or to be fulfilled because it also cuts one off from God's blessing. The most tragic of all is the death of a first-born or only son (Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech 12:10), or of a man without an heir (cf. Eccl 4:8), in whom one holds a hope of family generativity. Without a descendent, he is essentially cut off from God's promise and blessing for ever. Israelites interpret these "unnatural" deaths as punitive, a form of punishment or curse, for which an evil force is at work as the underlying cause. It is a deliberate death that God inflicts on sinful human race, a result of divine judgement.[272]

That death leads to a complete isolation from the sphere of Yahweh's influence (Ps 88:6 [ET 5]) also signifies His abhorrence of death and its defilement.[273] Yahweh shuns death not only because it is a manifestation of human sin—His punishment—but also because His holiness demands it. He treats remains of the dead as defilement and uncleanness (Lev. 21:1; Num 19:13, 16; Deut 21:23). The OT prescribes meticulous purification procedures from the defilement acquired by touching a

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[268] See, e.g., Abraham's concern without an heir appears early in Genesis 15. Wendell W. Frerichs, "Death and Resurrection in the Old Testament," *WW* 11 (1991): 18; Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 73–81.

[269] Hans W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (trans. Kohl; London: SCM, 1974), 112.

[270] Jüngel, *Death*, 67.

[271] Robert Martin-Achard, *From Death to Life: A Study of the Development of the Doctrine of the Resurrection in the Old Testament* (trans. Smith; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), 46; E. W. Marter, "The Hebrew Concept of 'Soul' in Pre-Exilic Writings," *AUSS* 2 (1964): 98, 107.

[272] See, e.g., Gen 6:5–7; 7:4, 22f.; 19:13, 24f.; 20:3, 7; 38:7, 10; Exod 12:29; 22:21–23 [ET 22–24]; 32:27f.; Num 11:l, 33; 16:26, 30–33; 21:6; 25:8f., 18; Deut. 32:22–25; Josh 5:4–6; 7:25; Judg 9:54–56; 1 Sam 2:25, 33f.; 12:25; 26:10; 2 Sam 12:14, 18; 21:1, 8f; 24:10, 15. Wolfram Herrmann, "Human Mortality as a Problem in Ancient Israel," in *Religious Encounters with Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions* (eds. Reynolds and Waugh; University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 162.

[273] Jüngel, *Death*, 72; Wolff, *Anthropology*, 106–7.

corpse, a bone or a grave, entering a tent where a person died (Num 19:11–22), or even touching the carcass of dead animal (Lev 5:2–3).

For the same reason, Yahweh outlaws necromancy and divination (Lev 19:31; Deut 18:9–12) and adamantly prohibits Israelites from practising any cult of the dead, like the practices in their neighbouring nations (Lev 19:28; 21:5; Deut 14:1; 26:14). Consequently, descriptions of death in the OT, when they occur, are brief and matter-of-fact like a simple report: "and so-and-so died," in passing. Then the text moves on to the next subject matter in the narrative, although deaths are recorded in numerous places literally by 1,000 occurrences of the root word מות "die/death." No *detailed* description of burial, mourning and lamentation for the dead is found in the biblical texts even when Israelite kings or leaders die. Where they are recorded,[274] they do not have "a religious content" of a cult such as worshipping or deifying the dead.[275] One is hard-pressed to find anything other than brief descriptions of death, but cannot help recognizing strict prohibitions of the cult of the dead, which repeatedly appear in the OT.

Yahweh's constant reminder and warning against any form of idol worship, including a funerary cult of the dead, can be interpreted as: either (1) Israelites practised a similar cult like their neighbours[276] or (2) practices of the cult of the dead by other ethnic groups in Palestine were so prevalent that Israelites had to be constantly reminded of the prohibition. In either case, the prohibition appears as "the Biblical polemic against its environment."[277] Whichever the case, the OT seems to imply that Yahweh has no business with the dead and completely shuts out death and the netherworld. Yahweh demythologizes and denies any notion of magical or divine power, or influence, of the dead on the living, in contrast to denizens of the ancient Near Eastern netherworld. Yahweh is not the God of the dead like the gods of ancient Near Eastern nations, who can die and rule the underworld:[278] Nobody becomes

[274] In comparison to 1,000 of מות, the cognate of קבר (bury, burial) occurs 200 times (only one-fifth of מות), even though death without burial apparently is a disgrace in Scripture (e.g., 2 Kgs 9:10; Ps 79:3; Jer 14:16). Funerary languages are even far less: the cognates of ספד ("mourn, lament"; 30 times), of קינה ("dirge, lamentation"; 18 times), and of קין ("chant a dirge"; 8 times) sometimes appear twice for the same dead, or are not always associated with the dead, especially verses in Prophets.

[275] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. McHugh; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 61.

[276] For recent studies on this possibility, see Bloch-Smith, *Judahite*; Stavrakopoulou, *Land*.

[277] Spronk, *Beatific*, 30; Segal, *Life*, 121. Cf. Num 25:3–5; Deut 16:21; Judg 2:13–14; 6:25–26; 1 Kgs 11:5–7; 15: 11–13.

[278] Cf. Helmer Ringgren, "חָיָה," *TDOT* 4:338–39.

divine and is worshipped by virtue of death in the OT. Biblical writers make a definitive distinction between the realm of the dead and the divine: Yahweh and death are mutually exclusive and do not relate to each other. Martin-Achard aptly describes death in the OT as:

> an absolute separation from the Living God, an apparently total breach with the world of the living, and moreover a terrible and constant threat to human existence; it intrudes upon man everywhere; life finds itself continually disturbed, reduced to inexistence, and emptied of all meaning by death; the creature then becomes the prey of Sheol, and falls into a sort of nothingness, over which Yahweh is certainly sovereign, but in which He seems, in the last resort, to be disinterested.[279]

Sheol (שאול, f. noun)—a unique Hebrew name for the netherworld[280]—overall occurs rarely in the OT, as compared to the occurrences of deaths. The term שאול almost always appears with negative connotation in all sixty-six uses,[281] and they occur more often in Psalms and Wisdom literature than in the other books.[282] Sheol almost always implies or is associated with unnatural, premature death.[283] This means that Sheol is more to do with punitive death, namely, with God's curse: a place where they could expect neither God's presence nor His blessings. This is probably one of the reasons why the biblical texts do not often mention Sheol, which becomes more obvious as one closely looks at a few passages in the narrative texts.

In canonical sequence the term "Sheol" first appears in Genesis 37, a story of jealous brothers selling Joseph to Ishmaelites, in the narrative of Jacob's genealogy: Instead of telling the truth, they mislead Jacob to believe that his favourite son Joseph was killed by a wild animal. Jacob is inconsolable and refuses to be comforted, saying, "Indeed I will go down in mourning to my son, to Sheol," assuming that

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[279] Martin-Achard, *Death*, 46.

[280] Ludwig Köhler, "Alttestamentliche Wortforschung: Sche'ōl," *TZ* 2 (1946): 71–74; Ludwig Köhler, "Problems in the Study of the Language of the Old Testament," *JSS* 1 (1956): 9, 19–20; Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 71, 79. Johnston points out that the term never appears with a definite article; i.e., it is a proper noun.

[281] Ruth Rosenberg, "The Concept of Biblical Sheol within the Context of Ancient Near Eastern Beliefs" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1981), 2.

[282] Sixteen (16) times in Psalms, 18 times in Wisdom literature, 10 times in Isaiah, and the rest (22) infrequently appear from Genesis through Habakkuk. Outside the OT the word appears only once in Aramaic with exact Hebrew letters. A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), 180–181 (No. 71:15), translates it as "the grave" but it is most likely a loan word from Hebrew "Sheol." For detailed analysis and description of Sheol as a place, see also Johnston, *Shades*, 70–79; Rosenberg, "Sheol," 161–72.

[283] Johnston, *Shades*, 80–81, notes that half of all the occurrences of Sheol point to the destination of the ungodly, although "scholars often portray Sheol as the destiny of all, without qualification"; Levenson, *Resurrection*, 35–81, for detailed studies on Sheol as destination of the ungodly; Rosenberg, "Sheol," 2, 174–75, interestingly points out that "the semantic equivalents of Sheo1, שחת and בור [are] also associated with premature death, . . . This, then, is not the common fate of all mankind."

Joseph's unexpected violent death sent him to Sheol (Gen 37:35). A similar expression by Jacob appears three more times, when Jacob faces a possibility of losing Benjamin, yet another son by his favourite wife Rachel: He tells his sons that they will bring his grey hair down to Sheol in sorrow (Gen 42:38; 44:29, 31). However, when Jacob is about to die after seeing Joseph alive and his family securely reunited and preserved, there is no mention of Sheol (49:28–33). Jacob expresses that he will go down to Sheol in bitter sorrow when premature, violent death must have sent or will send his sons there, but he says that he is about to be gathered to his people and wishes to be buried in his family grave, when he anticipates his peaceful death. In Gen 46:30 Jacob simply says, "Let me die" rather than "Let me go to Sheol."

The second place where the term Sheol occurs is the most dramatic example in Scripture: Korah and his company go down alive to Sheol when they have rebelled against Moses who says,

> "If these [men] die like death of every man, or if the fate (פקדה)[284] of every man visit upon them, [then] Yahweh has not sent me. But if Yahweh creates a new thing (בריאה)[285] and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have spurned Yahweh." Then it happened as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground that was underneath them was ripped open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and with their households and with all the men who belonged to Korah, and with their possessions. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. (Num 16:29–33)[286]

This is the one and only incident in the entire Scripture which records someone actually going down to Sheol, dead or alive. The scene is dramatic as the earth splits open and swallows up Korah and his company in front of the Israelite assembly which was separated from them (Num 16:26–27). The significance of the episode is evident by the appearance of references to it three more times elsewhere.[287] Those texts (except Deut 11:6) repeatedly state that their descent to Sheol is God's punishment upon their rebellion. The event implies that those who openly rebel against Yahweh or

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[284] A feminine noun form of פקד "oversee, visit, punish" and thus meaning "oversight" or (the day of) "visitation, punishment" (for the latter use, see, e.g., Isa 10:3; Jer 8:12 and passim; Hos 9:7). Here follows ESV/NASB translation: fate= the visitation to everyone.

[285] Literally, "a creation, thing created, as preternatural, unparalleled." Francis Brown, et al., *BDB*:135.

[286] Interestingly, David C. Mitchell, "'God Will Redeem My Soul from Sheol': The Psalms of the Sons of Korah," *JSOT* 30 (2006): 376, points out the frequent appearance of the term "Sheol" in Psalms 42–49, 84–89 ascribed to the sons of Korah, who escaped the plight, saying, "a few statistics confirm the Korah Psalms' obsession with the underworld." His analysis shows that "it contains more than a third of Psalms references to Sheol," although the collection itself is less than 10% of the Psalter.

[287] Num 26:9–10; Deut 11:6; Ps 106:16–18.

His spokesperson will be directly sent alive to Sheol.[288] Furthermore, Moses apparently makes a distinction that natural death is not necessarily God's punishment: he discriminates the manner of death between the righteous and the wicked, describing the latter's perishing as a "new" thing that Yahweh brings about by His anger against their rebellion. The text also implies that Sheol is located deep beneath the earth.

In the third text Yahweh declares that a fire kindled in His anger will burn even to the lowest part of Sheol against idolaters, who incite His jealousy (Deut 32:22). This text conveys that Sheol is the place where Yahweh's curse can be intensified.

The above three examples clearly associate Sheol with untimely, unnatural, unexpected, or sinful death, all ascribing negative connotations to Sheol. Other texts in Scripture describe Sheol as a place of descent only,[289] of no return (Job 7:9),[290] of silence (Ps 94:17), of no power (Isa 14:10), of darkness (Job 17:13), of no activity, reckoning, knowledge or wisdom (Eccl 9:10),[291] of no habitation (Ps 49:15 [ET 14]), and of terrors (Ps 116:3). Psalmists often depict Sheol as a "place of complete isolation from God," where there is no mention of Yahweh, no work of His wonder, and no giving of thanks or praise to Him.[292] Silence in Sheol suggests a denial of communication or relationship, especially with God.[293] Johnston notes, "It always means the realm of the dead located deep in the earth, unlike other terms which can mean both 'pit' and 'underworld.'"[294]

Occurrences of Sheol in poetic expressions and prophetic utterances often reveal metaphorical uses of the term, expressing fear from an imminent danger, death, or anguish in a horrific situation. Hebrew poets express a life-threatening condition by an "undesirable" cause such as severe suffering, illness, oppression, or pursuit by an enemy as being under the clutch of Sheol. Such a circumstance or situation can be

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[288] "Swallowed by or go down alive to Sheol" seems intended to convey a sheer terror of Sheol (Prov 1:12; Ps 55:15).
[289] Note the description "go down/descend to Sheol" in Gen 37:35; Num 16:30, 33; 1Kgs 2:6; Job 7:9; 17:16; 21:13; Ps 55:16 [ET 15]; Isa 57:9; Ezek 31:15–17, 27. Also "deep as/depth(s) of Sheol" in Ps 86:13; Prov 9:18; Isa 7:11; Jona 2:3 [ET 2] or "Sheol from beneath" (Isa 14:9).
[290] John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976), 59.
[291] *Vide infra*.
[292] Ps 6:6 [ET 5]; 88:10; 115:17; Isa 38:18. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought; the James Sprunt Lectures Delivered at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia,1955.* (London: SCM, 1961), 159; Martin-Achard, *Death*, 42, notes that death itself effects an "absolute separation from the Living God."
[293] Tony Wright, "Death, the Dead and the Underworld in Biblical Theology. Part 1," *Chm* 122 (2008): 17.
[294] Johnston, *Shades*, 71, 83–85, referring to terms בור, באר, and שחת, all usually mean "pit."

deadly and is described as if one is already in Sheol. Psalmists often equate their adversity with falling into or being thrown into Sheol, but clearly they desire not to be left in Sheol, but to be delivered from there.[295] They also describe Sheol as the destination of sinners[296] or the place where they wish the wicked perish.[297] In contrast, no passage indicates that the righteous have gone down and remained in Sheol; rather pious psalmists affirm their faith, through which Yahweh has delivered or will deliver their soul from Sheol.[298] They do not expect their God to abandon them forever in Sheol. Cook explains:

> The biblical texts neither equate the afterlife with Sheol nor consign souls to Sheol in a haphazard manner. Rather, they tend to reserve the language of Sheol for describing the fate of lives gone horribly awry. Sinister people have Sheol as their fate, not the godly, though when in dire peril the latter may feel Sheol-bound.[299]

"Hence Sheol is a fitting place for the wicked who forget God (Ps 9:17; 31:17; 55:15), but one which the righteous dread (Ps16:10; 30:3; 49:15; 86:13)," notes Johnston.[300] He further elaborates that the use of the term conveys "personal emotional involvement, in apprehension of one's own destiny or anticipation of one's enemies' fate" and defines Sheol as "a term of personal engagement" in a negative sense.[301] Martin-Achard describes Sheol as an abode of the dead, which "does not denote a mere place; rather it stands for a state, a condition in which life ceases to be liveable for man."[302] The Israelites' metaphorical use of שאול connotes more than the inactive dead state, but rather an active force of the invisible world, into which they abhor falling or being thrown.[303] Metaphorical expressions that Sheol has a "mouth" (Ps 141:7), "throat" (Isa 5:14), "cords" (2 Sam 22:6), or "hand" (Ps 49:16 [ET 15]; 89:49 [ET 48]), and that she uses them, amply convey Israelites' fear of Sheol, depicting it as a dreadful place with its active force.

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[295] Wright, "Death Pt.1," 23.
[296] Num 16:30–33; Job 24:29; Ps 9:18 [ET 17]; 49:15 [ET 14]; Isa 14:5–15; Ezek 32:21. Job describes that Sheol snatches away sinners (Job 24:19).
[297] 1 Kgs 2:6, Ps 31:18 [ET 17]; 55:16 [ET 15].
[298] Ps 16:10; 30:4 [ET 3]; 49:16 [ET 15]; 86:13; Jonah 2:3–7 [ET 2–6].
[299] Stephen L. Cook, "Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel," *RC* 1 (2007): 669–70; see also Johnston, *Shades*, 83.
[300] Johnston, *Shades*, 75.
[301] Ibid., 72.
[302] Martin-Achard, *Death*, 43.
[303] Ibid., 45. Cf. J. Ellul, "Le livre de Jonas," Foi et Vie, 1952, 127, quoted by M.-A. in the same page, n. 50; ET Jacques Ellul, *The Judgement of Jonah* (trans. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 44.

Israelites speak of Sheol when facing a dire calamity of death, and it seems that they deliberately avoid associating the term with natural death in a ripe old age. Biblical writers do not mention Sheol when they report the deaths of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33), Aaron and Moses (Num 20:24–29; 27:13; Deut 32:50), Joshua and his generation (Judg 2:8–10), or Josiah (2 Kg 22:20).[304] The texts simply state that these men are all gathered to their fathers. Sheol is never associated or "portrayed as a peaceful ancestral gathering place" in all its occurrences.[305] The texts simply narrate that those men *slept* with their fathers and were buried (with them) in the family grave[306]—"a burial chamber dug out of soft rock, or . . . a natural cave."[307] Israelites consider not only a proper burial important, as did people in the wider ancient Near East, but also an improper burial is a punishment from God.[308] Yahweh makes clear that the wicked do not deserve a proper burial in other biblical passages: an implication that Yahweh Himself considers the burial proper for the righteous and rites of mourning for the dead to be a legitimate part of a funeral[309] whilst prohibiting certain pagan practices.[310] Remarkably, Deut 34:6 states that Yahweh buried Moses in the valley when he died in the land of Moab.

Biblical writers stop short of saying anything about conditions beyond the grave when the righteous die, but there is one case where a writer depicts the righteous dead appearing in 1 Sam 28:7–19 (the En-dor episode). When a woman medium of En-dor conjures up the dead Samuel at King Saul's request, she sees Samuel coming up from

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[304] On this point see e.g., Levenson, *Resurrection*, 67–81.
[305] Rosenberg, "Sheol," 193.
[306] See, e.g., 1Kgs 2:10; 11:43; 14:31; 15:24; 22:50; 2 Kgs 8:24; 15:7, 38.
[307] Gen 23:20; 49:29–30; 50:13. Vaux, *Ancient*, 57.
[308] E.g., being cast out of tomb, a trampled corpse (Isa 14:19), being excluded from the family tomb (1 Kgs 13:22; Isa 14:20), being buried with an animal (Jer 22:19), and being thrown into the burial place of the common people (Jer 26:23) or no burial at all (2 Kgs 9:10, 33–37) are all God's punishment, which Yahweh pronounces to those who have rebelled against Him.
[309] In Jer 22:17–19 Yahweh declares that Jehoiakim's death will not be lamented, nor will he receive proper burial because of his evil deeds, implying that mourning for the dead along with burial is a legitimate ritual or may even be considered a duty. Mourning is typically expressed with weeping (Gen 23:2), tearing one's garments, putting on sackcloth (Gen 37:34), wallowing in ashes (Jer 6:26), fasting (1 Sam 31:13), and chanting dirges (2 Sam 1:17). Cf. Vaux, *Ancient*, 56–61, for enumeration of ancient Israelite funerary rites in the OT/Apocrypha. Note, however, de Vaux covers mournings for all occasions, not limiting to funeral.
[310] E.g., self-mutilation (Lev. 19:27–28; 21:5; Deut 14:1) and divination (Lev 19:26; Deut 18:10; cf. 1 Sam 28:3, 9 *vide infra*). Brian B. Schmidt, "Memory as Immortality: Countering the Dreaded 'Death after Death' in Ancient Israelite Society," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity Part 4, Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (eds. Avery-Peck and Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 98–99.

the earth (v. 13). The story makes two things clear: (1) Samuel did not cease to exist after death; and (2) he was somewhere in the underground. It is noteworthy that the terms רפאים (*vide infra*) and שאול do not appear in the episode. The woman is startled by Samuel's appearance and likens him to אלהים—not רפאים (vv. 12–13).[311] Saul recognizes the dead Samuel, an old man wrapped in a robe, regardless what Samuel's state might have been before he came up.[312] His complaint of the disturbance by conjuration suggests that he might have been asleep (v. 15).[313] Samuel converses with Saul but does not give any new information other than what he had already prophesied to Saul while he was still alive (vv. 17–18).[314] He knew, however, what would happen to Saul, his sons, and his army the very next day (v. 19). The writer does not disclose how Samuel knew the timing of Saul's death or the exact location of Samuel's abode, if he had known them. Whether the abode of the righteous dead is part of, or apart from, Sheol is anyone's guess.

Given the divine and legal prohibition of necromancy,[315] indeed being combatted by Saul himself (vv. 3 and 9), it is noteworthy that the biblical author neither suppressed the story, nor discredited the efficacy of necromancy. Instead, he has kept the En-dor episode intact.[316] What the story in 1 Samuel makes clear is that death is not extinction and that the idea of post-mortem existence in Israel can be found quite early in its history.[317] A question still lingers, however, whether the righteous dead indeed go to Sheol or what happens to them in Sheol, if they did. It is possible, but not certain, that Samuel came up from Sheol.

In a well-known passage about dry bones in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 37:1-14), Yahweh's words to Ezekiel may shed light on this point. The writer reports Yahweh saying twice: "I (will) open your graves (קברותיכם) and cause you to come up from your graves, My people" (vv. 12–13). Yahweh does not say that He will open the

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[311] David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 623–24, notes that the woman was startled (v. 12a) because אלהים of Samuel "might not have appeared or acted like the spirit(s) of the dead, like אוב or רפאים, which she was comfortable handling as a necromancer."
[312] H. C. Thomson, "Old Testament Ideas on Life after Death," in *Glasgow University Oriental Society: Transactions, Vol 22* (ed. McKane; Glasgow: Glasgow University Oriental Society, 1970), 48.
[313] Cf. 1 En. 91:10; 100:5 which indicate that the righteous are asleep (in a long sleep) after death.
[314] Cf. 1 Sam 15:18–23, 35. It is interesting to note that Samuel describes Saul's disobedience to Yahweh is like the sin of divination in v. 23. Yahweh's punishment for divination is death, and therefore the text in chapter 28 seems to imply that Saul dies for two accounts of his deadly sin.
[315] Deut 18:10, 14.
[316] Lewis, *Cults*, 117.
[317] Thomson, "OT Ideas," 48–49.

gates of Sheol (שערי שאול)[318] or bring them out of Sheol, but He will open and cause them to come out from their graves. According to Yahweh, *His* people are not in Sheol, but in their *graves*,[319] perhaps signifying the importance of proper burial. When Samuel died, all Israel gathered together, mourned for Samuel, and buried him in his house in Ramah, his home town (1 Sam 25:1), before his after-death appearance at En-dor.

It is true that these texts surveyed here are not fully conclusive about the ultimate destiny of the righteous dead. Simply put, however, Sheol seems to be assumed to be the place where everyone goes after death, by modern readers and perhaps even by ancient Israelites, because no other place is mentioned as an alternative abode of the righteous dead in the OT, like the Egyptian Field of Reeds or the Greek Elysium. Even if Israelites believed that all would go to Sheol, it appears that they also believed that the righteous would not stay in Sheol forever. Psalmists certainly have expressed such hope and faith, as noted above. Israelites generally viewed Sheol as a place where sinners deserve to go, the wicked will be taken alive, and into which some whose life has horribly gone awry can fall. Ninety-seven percent of the texts where Sheol occurs in the OT apparently testify to that effect.

Sheol is the Israelite's undesirable destination after death, although they do not know what alternative there is, when faced with death. Descent to Sheol provides no better alternative to this life but a *shadowy existence* which is depicted as "miserable,"[320] "disgusting, hopeless, and gloomy,"[321] a "drear [*sic*], joyless"[322] kind of continuation of the human personality,[323] but not a new start of life after death.[324] Barr comments that "Sheol is a blind alley. It does not constitute immortality, and it does not really lead towards resurrection either."[325] Murphy states that existence in

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[318] The phrase appears in Hezekiah's writing about Yahweh's pronouncement of his unexpected death (Isa 38:10).
[319] Cf. Ezek 32:17–32, the judgement oracle on Egypt's descent to Sheol where other nations (the uncircumcised, slain by the sword) lie. Daniel I. Block, "Beyond the Grave: Ezekiel's Vision of Death and Afterlife," *BBR* 2 (1992): 132 [esp. n. 112], notes: "None of the technical terms relating to Sheol that occur in 32 17-32 is found in 37 1-14."
[320] Ben C. Ollenburger, "If Mortals Die, Will They Live Again? The Old Testament and Resurrection," *ExAud* 9 (1993): 33.
[321] Harris Birkeland, "Belief in the Resurrection of the Dead in the Old Testament," *ST* 3 (1950): 63.
[322] Ovid R. Sellers, "Israelite Belief in Immortality," *BA* 8 (1945): 3.
[323] Cook, "Funerary," 661; see also Edmund B. Keller, "Hebrew Thoughts on Immortality and Resurrection," *IJPR* 5 (1974): 21.
[324] Birkeland, "Belief," 63.
[325] Barr, *Garden*, 29.

Sheol cannot be called "After*life*" but rather it is "non-life."[326] Everything to do with death and Sheol is negative throughout Scripture[327]—it is the result of disobedience to God. Alexander stresses: "The belief that *Sheol* was the final abode of the wicked is in keeping with the idea . . . that the Hebrews perceived death as punitive rather than as natural."[328] Sheol is clearly more to do with unexpected death, which is construed as a divine judgment (Job 24:19).[329] It is such a loathsome realm that the Israelites imagine it as a place suited for the wicked for retribution.[330] Key remarks that "existence in Sheol is not denied, but it is not to be desired."[331]

Descent to Sheol is therefore not a "life after death but is part of the reality of death itself . . . Its value seems to lie in its negativity, which is thought to prove that existence *without bodily life* is no life at all," comments Barr.[332] In other words, when one dies, the body obviously decays and the bones remain; but the bodiless "dead soul" (נפש מת)[333] may go down to Sheol. Sheol is a place for some reduced being of the dead. The Israelites appropriately call those who reside in Sheol by a collective name רפאים,[334] which is often translated as "shades" (RSV),[335] evoking the meaning of "the shadowy, insubstantial existence."[336] Sheol is not a place of continuance in a mirror image of this life after death, where chthonic gods reside and rule as elsewhere in the ancient Near Eastern world. No god or ruler is in the Hebrew Sheol, neither do

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326 Roland E. Murphy, "Death and Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity Part 4, Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (eds. Avery-Peck and Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 102. Author's emphasis.
327 Wright, "Death Pt.1," 28.
328 Desmond Alexander, "The Old Testament View of Life after Death," *Them* 11 (1986): 44. Author's emphasis.
329 Johnston, *Shades*, 80–81; Cook, "Funerary," 669; Barr, *Garden*, 29; Levenson, *Resurrection*, 82.
330 Ps 9:18 [ET 17]; 49:15 [ET 14]; 55:16 [ET 15]. Brandon, *Judgment*, 59. However, it should be clarified that "the biblical Sheol is not the same as the Christian hell or the rabbinic Gehinnom (Gehenna), the condign post-mortem destination of sinners, whether permanent or temporary." Johnston, *Shades*, 73; Levenson, *Resurrection*, 82.
331 Andrew F. Key, "The Concept of Death in Early Israelite Religion," *JBR* 32 (1964): 246.
332 Barr, *Garden*, 29–30. Emphasis added.
333 The phrase נפש מת appears in Num 6:6; cf. נפש חיה in Gen 2:7. Gen 35:18 where it says, "Her soul (נפש) was departing for she died," and 1 Kgs 17:21–22 where Elijah prays to God, "Let this child's soul (נפש) return into him" and it returns to the child and he revives. The passages imply that נפש separates from the body when one dies.
334 Amazingly, the term appears only 8 times in the OT, all in poetic passages: Job 26:5; Ps 88:11 [ET 10]; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Isa 14:9; 26:14, 19. Rephaim with the same spelling, a collective name of possibly pre-Israelite inhabitants of Palestine, appears 19 times in mostly historical narratives. John F. Healey, "The Last of the Rephaim," in *Back to the Sources: Biblical and Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Dermot Ryan* (eds. Cathcart and Healey; Dublin: Glendale, 1989), 33–44.
335 Also as "spirits of the dead," "departed spirits" or simply "the dead" (NASB) or "ghosts of the dead" (CJB). "In the hymn in *KTU* 1.6 VI the following terms are found in parallel with each other: *rp'im/'ilnym/'ilm/mtm*. . . . *r^{e}pā'īm* and *metīm* are found parallel to each other in Hebrew (Ps 88:11; Isa 26:14; 26:19)," notes Healey, ibid., 37.
336 Johnston, *Shades*, 128.

the ghosts of the dead return and haunt the living unless they were continually fed and remembered as in Mesopotamia. The dead in Israel neither continue their life nor face an impending judgement in Sheol as in Egypt. No judgement takes place in Sheol, even though Sheol is under Yahweh's power and jurisdiction. Its function therefore is distinctively different from the netherworld of the ancient world, some similar characteristics such as its location and conditions for existence notwithstanding.

In spite of the negative depictions in almost all its appearances, as shown above, a common view of Sheol among biblical scholars seems to be as how Gray depicts it: "Sheol is the shadowy, insubstantial underworld, *the destination of all, good and bad without discrimination*, where existence is wholly undesirable,"[337] although not without dispute more recently.[338] Gray's notion of "the destination of all, good and bad without discrimination" may be an overstatement when compared with what the biblical texts actually say, as surveyed above and reported elsewhere.[339] This leads us to examine whether or not there are biblical texts which support Gray's depiction of Sheol. Two poetic texts, Ps 89:49 [ET 48] and Eccl 9:10, imply that Sheol is the destination of all the dead.[340] Ecclesiastes' passage will be discussed later in detail, but briefly Qohelet's view almost equates Sheol with the grave, which would not wholly support Gray's definition. In the Psalm text:

מי גבר יחיה ולא יראה־מות ימלט נפשו [341]מיד־שאול סלה

> What man shall live and not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah,

death and Sheol appear in parallel. "The power of Sheol" is used most likely for a poetic expression to mean "the power of death." Here, the emphasis is probably death, not Sheol (the place of destination), from which no man can escape; thus the text is not fully supportive of Gray's definition.

Nevertheless, one of the reasons that death and Sheol often seem to be equated or expressed in parallel may be because both cause an ultimate separation from Yahweh,

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[337] John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (2nd fully rev. ed.; OTL; London: SCM, 1970), 102. Emphasis added.

[338] See Levenson, *Resurrection*, 35–81 [esp. 35–36, 71–73]; and Rosenberg, "Sheol," 173, who rejects Gray's description as normative; also Johnston, *Shades*, 79–83.

[339] See, e.g., Rosenberg, "Sheol," 173, points out that such a premise is based on poetic sections (e.g., Ps 89:49 [ET 48]) where death and Sheol are in parallel. She criticizes Gray's view that has become a norm, and vehemently disagrees: "Considering the fact that Sheol is mentioned far more often in other contexts with more specific intent, such generalization is not justified."

[340] Cf. Johnston, *Shades*, 82–83.

[341] Literally, "from the hand of Sheol": metaphorically, יד signifies "power."

which basically amounts to divine judgement in the biblical writers' understanding. Johnston emphasizes that Sheol is "almost exclusively reserved for those under divine judgment, whether the wicked, the afflicted righteous, or all sinners,"[342] thus it is the most undesirable place to be, as has already been seen. Since there is no judgement in Sheol, ancient Israelites may have assumed that divine justice must be executed in this life: either the reward of a blessing with a long life or punishment by death and Sheol, especially by untimely violent death. Such a death which led to Sheol was probably viewed more or less as an exception rather than a rule in normal circumstances—perhaps a reason for the limited number of the term's occurrences in the OT. The concept of Sheol in Israel is an early indication that ancient Israelites did not believe in death as extinction. God promises life, yet humans still die, even the righteous.[343] Sheol is not a suitable place for the righteous dead, where they will be completely cut off from Yahweh. Another solution is needed for the righteous to keep relationship with Yahweh. In a way this may be one of the factors why some biblical writers eventually embrace post-mortem divine judgement and resurrection.

In Israel Yahweh is *the* King (המלך)[344] and the ultimate legislator and executor of משפט, *the* Judge (השפט).[345] Yahweh's ultimate responsibility is then to fight and punish the rebellious people within and without the Israelite nation. Divine judgement in this context functions on a national level for the security of Israel's existence among the nations. Accordingly, Israelites including their kings relied on and expected Yahweh's protection as a nation, and therefore divine justice for individuals was not emphasized. After the Exile without their own ruler or land, Israelites lost such national security under Yahweh's protection. Israelites individually had to turn and seek divine justice and favour for their own survival, just as Egyptians had to turn directly to their god(s) when their king lost the aura of godhead and could no longer protect them.

A next step is to discuss the development of Israelite belief in a beatific afterlife, namely, resurrection, which emerged during the postexilic era.

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[342] Johnston, *Shades*, 83.
[343] Cf. Ezek 37:25.
[344] Ps 98:6; Isa 6:5; Jer 46:18; 48:15; 51:57.
[345] Gen 18:25; Judg 11:27; Isa 33:22.

1.2.2 Development of Belief in the Resurrection of the Dead in Israel

Belief in a discrete beatific afterlife, namely, the resurrection of the dead, in Israel is often characterized as a late development, mainly because the phenomena of apocalyptic eschatological belief did not surface until at least the 3rd century BCE. Naturally, a question may be raised concerning the background which led up to what would become the ultimate hope in Israelite religion.

A concept of "afterlife" or more accurately a belief in a possibility of "life beyond death" appears to have germinated and become known quite early among individuals in Israel. The OT contains records that at least two men neither died nor went to Sheol when they disappeared from the earth. Genesis very briefly recounts the first instance that Enoch walked with God and he disappeared because God took (לקח) him (5:24). This is generally interpreted that Enoch was taken up alive to heaven.[346] In the second instance Elisha witnesses Elijah being taken up alive into heaven, which Elijah himself, Elisha, and over fifty prophets knew would happen; they knew beforehand that Yahweh would take (לקח) Elijah, and Elisha saw it happen (2 Kgs 2:3–17).

According to the biblical records, Elijah and Elisha independently raise a dead child through their intercession to Yahweh (1 Kgs 17:17–22; 2 Kgs 4:32–32). In both instances the texts say that a young boy was dead[347] and was revived through prophet's intercession.[348] What happened to the boys or how long they lived after resuscitation is not recorded. The key emphasis of both texts is that the young boys were apparently dead but were made alive through intervention by the men of God. In another instance, even Elisha's bones after his death revived a dead man (2 Kgs 13:20–21). Setzer stresses: "The three resuscitation stories . . . indicate that death may be reversed, or overcome."[349] The point of these stories is that people witnessed that Yahweh could give back life to the dead. The story of the Shunammite's son in 2 Kgs 4:8–37 is the clearest account in the OT that Yahweh gives life, takes it away, and

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[346] Later, one of the Jewish apocalypses is written and named after Enoch because it is understood that Enoch "went to heaven and received revelation."

[347] The child's condition was explicitly expressed with the verb מות "die" in both 1 Kgs 17:18, 20 and 2 Kgs 4:32. Cf. Shaul Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life: Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2010), 392.

[348] Some argue that these are not genuine resurrection because those children were probably not dead or that they eventually died, even if they had been raised from the dead.

[349] Claudia Setzer, "Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Christianity," in *The Human Body in Death and Resurrection* (eds. Nicklas, et al.; DCLY 2009; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 2.

gives it back. The story implies that it is all Yahweh's doing: He gives a child,[350] who dies in sickness, and brings him back to life.

All these accounts can signal that death is not *the* end or extinction and that Yahweh spares some lives from death and He also has the power to revive the dead, however small the numbers or however temporary those examples may be. Hannah can sing, "Yahweh kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam 2:6), because she was barren, but Yahweh caused her dead womb to bring forth a new life. Indeed the bicolon is preceded by "even the barren gives birth to seven" (v.5). A barren womb is likened to Sheol in Proverbs: it is never satisfied because it cannot fulfil its desire (30:16). Hannah comes to believe that Yahweh can make whatever the dead object—womb or corpse—come alive as she shares her affirmation and joy with her foremothers, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Manoah's wife, who were all barren but whom Yahweh enabled to bear children.[351] A belief in Yahweh's power to create and give life even to the dead, therefore, was already embedded in the Israelite cultic concept and belief.

Passages generally dated late, such as Dan 12:1–2 and Isa 25:8–9; 26:19 which prophesy eschatological judgement and reward, also portray a late development of apocalyptic eschatology, particularly of its bodily resurrection concept.[352] John Day, however, argues in detail that Isaiah 26–27 echoes Hosea 6 and 13–14, and Daniel 12, in turn, is influenced by Isaiah 26, 52:13–53:12, in which parallel texts use the same vocabularies, phrases, imageries,[353] and the "resurrection locutions" such as עור, קיץ "be awakened," קום "raise, rise" and חיה "revive, make alive."[354] Elsewhere Sawyer

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[350] The text makes a point that the Shunammite's husband was old (v.14) and that the Shunammite accuses Elijah of the death of the child that she did not ask for (v.28).

[351] A psalmist sings: "He causes the barren woman dwell in the house as a joyful mother of children. Hallelujah!" (Ps 113:9).

[352] This was initially reinforced with the story of the famous martyrdoms of a mother and her seven sons in Chapter 7 of 2 Maccabees, dated in the 2nd century BCE but apocalyptic texts of 1 Enoch now can be safely dated in the 3rd century BCE by the discovery of Dead Sea scrolls. James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (CBQMS 16; Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1984), 79–88, 111–14.

[353] E.g., Hos 6:2–3 // Isa 26:19 (raise/rise, dawn, dew/rain); Hos 13:4 // Isa 26:13 (know no other gods but Yahweh); Hos 13:13 // Isa 26:17–18 (labour pains); Hos 13:14 // Isa 26:19 (deliverance from Sheol/death); Hos 13:15 // Isa 27:8 (east wind); Hos 14:6–8 [ET 5–7] // Isa 26:19 and 27:2–6 (dew, blossom like the vine); Hos 14:10 [ET 9] // Isa 27:11 (discernment) and Isa 26:19 // Dan 12:2 (lie/sleep in the dust, awake); Isa 52:13 // Dan 12:3 (prosper/prudent, שכל); Isa 53:11 // Dan 12:3 (justify the many/lead the many to righteousness); Isa 66:24 // Dan 12:2 (abhorrence, דראון; appears only in these two verses in the OT).

[354] John Day, "Resurrection Imagery from Baal to the Book of Daniel," in *Congress Volume: Cambridge 1995* (ed. Emerton; VTSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 125–33; John Day, "The Development

lists eight verbs (חיה, קום, עמד, קיץ, עור, שוב, עלה, צוץ) and nineteen passages "which, in the final form of the text as it was probably understood in the context described . . . , refer to or describe the resurrection of the dead."[355]

The resurrection motif, therefore, is not a totally foreign or new concept, but appears also in what are probably earlier texts such as Psalms 49, 73, 88, and Ezekiel 37. In particular, Ezekiel's vision (37:1–14) depicts dry bones coming to life when the life-breath (הרוח) was breathed into them after the bones were reconnected by sinews and covered with flesh and skin (vv. 10, 14). The story indicates that all is done by Yahweh, probably assimilating with the Creation story of the first human (אדם, Gen 2:7).[356] The vision symbolizes an Israelite national restoration but the resurrection imagery is astonishingly vivid.

The emergence of apocalyptic eschatology, a belief in discrete beatific afterlife (resurrection) in Israel, thus appears to be a culmination of beliefs in both post-mortem existence and a possibility of "life beyond death," which eventually coalesced, rather than solely a late theological development.

The eschatological judgement is distinct from post-mortem scenarios in the netherworld of the wider ancient Near East. In the latter, judgement, if it happens, seems to occur immediately after each individual death or possibly after burial. The former is the general judgement of both the living and the dead, both the righteous and the wicked. It is a universal judgement which is expected to take place at the end of the age when Yahweh judges every individual and every nation according to each of their deeds. It is the day of retribution when the righteous will be rewarded with a resurrection body and eternal life, while the wicked get their just deserts. It is the day of judgement on a cosmic scale. Early or late, a belief in the eschatological judgment

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of Belief in Life after Death in Ancient Israel," in *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (eds. Barton and Reimer; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 248–57.

[355] John F. A. Sawyer, "Hebrew Words for the Resurrection of the Dead," *VT* 23 (1973): 218–34 [esp. 230]. The passages are: Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; 1 Kgs 17:22; Isa 26:14, 19; 53:11; 66:24; Ezek 37:10; Hos 6:2; Ps 1:5; 16:10–11 (org. 16:19); 17:15; 49:16 [ET 15]; 72:16; 73:24; 88:11 [ET 10]; Job 14:12; 19:25–27; Dan 12:2 [Note: An error in the original paper was corrected and ET verse numbers added to the citation].

[356] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London: SPCK, 2003), 120.

has uniquely emerged within Israelite history.[357] It is the ultimate hope in Israel's cult, and lacks any precise parallel in other ancient Near Eastern religions.[358]

Apocalyptic literature probably began to flourish sometime in the third century BCE. The belief in eschatological judgement, a central doctrine of apocalyptic literature, was most notably exhibited during the religious persecution by Antiochus IV. Both came to the fore in the Hellenistic milieu in a context that is not long after the likely composition of Ecclesiastes.

1.3 Summary and Conclusions

Davidson writes:

> Death is the god-decreed and inevitable lot of mankind, one of the most important factors which differentiate man from the gods.[359]

The preceding brief survey of the concepts of death, afterlife, and divine judgement in the ancient world shows a common thread: the cult of the dead and afterlife die hard. Ancient civilizations have somehow recognized that divine beings exist, often through nature, and that there is a clear divide between divine and human since the earliest times: gods are immortal but humans are destined to die. The ancient people nonetheless regularly refused to accept extinction as their ultimate fate and sought ways of continuing life after death. They sometimes believed that their "soul" or "spirit" in some form would survive death, and that the "afterlife" would be a continuation of this life in the netherworld. Although manners and ways to deal with death varied among the peoples, a common thread runs through the ancient concept: after death the "shades" or the "ghost" of the dead can exist in a deep, dark, gloomy netherworld, from which none return to the living world, with few exceptions. The continuing being of the deceased lacks a body or vitality; it is nothing like the living being but an insubstantial shadowy existence. A similar concept of post-mortem existence in Sheol also develops early in Israel.

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[357] Andrew Chester, "Resurrection and Transformation," in *Auferstehung=Resurrection: The Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium "Resurrection, Transfiguration and Exaltation in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity" (Tübingen, September, 1999)* (eds. Avemarie and Lichtenberger; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 65.

[358] Bill T. Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (ed. Walls; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30–31; Ernst Jenni, "Eschatology of the OT," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia; Identifying and Explaining All Proper Names and Significant Terms and Subjects in the Holy Scriptures, Including the Apocrypha* 2:127.

[359] Robert Davidson, *The Courage to Doubt: Exploring an Old Testament Theme* (London: SCM, 1983), 27.

The above survey suggests that there is some evidence that people begin to question their traditional beliefs and search for new ideas when they find their tradition has become unsatisfactory or questionable, perhaps especially when extensive changes in their society begin to threaten their individual security and future. This is clearly seen in the case of Egypt. When foreign invasion and dominance demolished the native king's status as "god incarnate" and social order was disrupted, Egyptians began to seek directly divine *mз't* (truth, justice, order). They sought gods directly when reliance on the king became no longer tenable. This shift from the traditional belief became apparent especially during the Hellenistic period. But being directly under divine rule also brought new questions. Egyptian demotic wisdom literature expresses puzzlement over fate and fortune which are controlled by inscrutable divine freedom.

In Greece there were always philosophers who tried to challenge traditional religious beliefs with new ideas from the sixth century BCE onward. Plato was "highly critical of traditional mythology and, to a lesser degree, of traditional cult"[360] and tried to spread the idea of an independent, immortal soul, although it is questionable if the general populace in the Greek world accepted or believed Plato's teaching. Alexander's conquests brought a new era, but his death shortly thereafter brought major political and social upheavals, which also prompted changes in "philosophical theology": namely, the development of scepticism, Epicureanism and Stoicism in reaction to Platonism.[361]

The cultic practices of neighbours in the Levant affected Israelite religious life. Especially after the Exile some seem to have thought that Yahweh no longer intervened for Israel because of their sin and rebellion, and He seemed to have become distant and silent. Some began to question their traditional beliefs in retributive justice and Sheol and seek individual security and survival during the Second Temple period.

Dominance by the Persian Empire followed by the conquests and death of Alexander of Macedon brought consecutive political upheavals and social changes in the entire ancient Near Eastern world. Nations in the region were ushered together into the Hellenistic period. Reassessment of traditional beliefs and values among

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[360] Graf, "Theology," 543.
[361] Ibid., 544.

people in those nations was likely. It is no coincidence that Israel, a nation much affected by foreign domination, experienced this impact. Ecclesiastes seems to have been written in, or at least for, such a context.

Chapter 2

HOW SHOULD WE READ ECCLESIASTES?

In an attempt to make sense of conflicts and contradictions that are found in the book, this chapter explores how best Ecclesiastes is to be read. The chapter begins with a brief survey and assessment of two main approaches to reading Ecclesiastes as a whole, and then devises a modified alternative reading of Ecclesiastes by analysing its literary characteristics. The final section of the chapter will expand how the proposed reading may shed a new light on Qohelet's inconsistencies to bring the epilogue and Qohelet's monologic discourse into a coherent whole.

2.1 Reading Ecclesiastes as a Unity

Unsatisfied with conventional critical approaches, modern scholars have gradually revived reading Ecclesiastes as a unity. An unresolved main issue has been how the epilogue is to be read and related to the main body of the text. Two approaches which deserve attention arose in the 1970s for reading Ecclesiastes as a unified whole. One is Michael V. Fox's "Frame-Narrative" reading[362] and the other is the canonical approach by Sheppard and Childs.[363] This section will review and assess the two approaches as I seek how Ecclesiastes should be read.

2.1.1 Canonical Approach by Brevard Childs

The canonical approach that Childs initiated in the '70s is often connected with the canonical criticism that James A. Sanders coined and developed as a biblical critical method subsequent to form and redaction criticism.[364] Although they share common concerns regarding the nature, function, and authority of canon, and particularly the meaning of the text within its canonical context, their approaches and emphases are

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[362] Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 83–106.
[363] Sheppard, "Epilogue," 182–89, a part of his dissertation work that is later published; i.e., Gerald T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study of the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (BZAW 151; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 121–29; Childs, *Intro to OT*, 580–89.
[364] James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), ix.

not identical. While Sanders seeks to determine the hermeneutics employed in the canonical process, Childs focuses on the shape and function of the final received form of the canonical text. Childs disavows the term *canonical criticism* and calls his approach a "canonical approach." He dislikes for his approach to be considered another historical-critical technique alongside source, form, and rhetorical criticism, or the like.

This short discussion briefly touches on Childs' canonical approach in *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (*IOTS*) and his student Gerald Sheppard's approach in *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study of the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (*WHC*). As it is focused mostly on Childs' description of a "canonical approach," I will let his own words outline the nature of his approach. A brief comparison is also made between Childs and Sheppard for their particular emphases or differences. The comparison is limited to their overall approach and its application to Ecclesiastes in contrast to Fox's approach to Ecclesiastes in his 1977 essay, which will be discussed in the next section.

Childs states early in his book concerning the growth or formation of canon:

> Essential to understanding the growth of the canon is to see this interaction between a developing corpus of authoritative literature and the community which treasured it. The authoritative Word gave the community its form and content in obedience to the divine imperative, yet conversely *the reception of the authoritative tradition by its hearers gave shape to the same writings through a historical and theological process of selecting, collecting, and ordering*. The formation of the canon was not a late extrinsic validation of a corpus of writings, but involved a series of decisions deeply affecting the shape of the books. Although it is possible to distinguish different phases within the canonical process—the term canonization would then be reserved for the final fixing of the limits of scripture—the earlier decisions were not qualitatively different from the later.[365]

He explains what is involved in the canonical process:

> The heart of the canonical process lay in transmitting and ordering the *authoritative tradition* in a form which was compatible to function as scripture for a generation which had not participated in the original events of revelation. The ordering of the *tradition* for this new function involved a profoundly hermeneutical activity, the effects of which are now built into the structure of the canonical text. For this reason an adequate interpretation of the biblical text, both in terms of history and theology, depends on taking the canonical shape with great seriousness. When seen in this light, the usual practice of the historical-critical Introduction of relegating a treatment of the canon to the final chapter is entirely misleading and deficient.[366]

Childs notes the goal of the canonical approach is "to take seriously the significance of the canon as a crucial element in understanding the Hebrew scriptures

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[365] Childs, *Intro to OT*, 58–59. Emphasis added.
[366] Ibid., 60. Emphasis added.

and yet to understand the canon in its true historical and theological dimensions" (p. 71). Its major task is "descriptive" and "seeks to understand the peculiar shape and special function of these texts which comprise the Hebrew canon." He says such an approach "does not assume a particular stance or faith commitment on the part of the reader because the subject of the investigation is the literature of Israel's faith, not that of the reader" (p. 72).

The canonical approach focuses on "the final form of the text itself" and "treats the literature in its own integrity." Its concern lies in studying the features of the peculiar set of religious texts in relation to their usage within the historical community. It "studies them as historically and theologically conditioned writings" and seeks to "do justice to a literature which Israel transmitted as a record of God's revelation to his people along with Israel's response," but it "does not make any dogmatic claims for the literature apart from the literature itself." It seeks to "work within that interpretative structure which the biblical text has received *from those who formed and used it as sacred scripture*"[367] (p. 73). Childs clarifies that "the canonical approach differs from a strictly literal approach by interpreting the biblical text in relation to a community of faith and practice for whom it served a particular role as possessing divine authority" (p. 74). He further notes:

> to take the canon seriously is also to take seriously the critical function which it exercises in respect to the earlier states of the literature's formation. A critical judgment is evidenced in the way in which these earlier states are handled. *At times the material is passed on unchanged; at other times tradents select, rearrange, or expand the received tradition*. The purpose of insisting on the authority of the final canonical form is to defend its role of providing this critical norm. To work with the final state of the text is not to lose the historical dimension, but it is rather to make a critical, theological judgment regarding the process. The depth dimension aids in understanding the interpreted text, and does not function independently of it.[368]

He emphasizes "to work from the final form is to resist any method which seeks critically to shift the canonical ordering," such as overarching *Heilsgeschichte* or a historical-critical reconstruction attempt (p. 77). Childs remarks that "those responsible for the actual editing of the text did their best to obscure their own identity" and the "canon formed the decisive *Sitz im Leben* for the Jewish community's life, thus blurring the sociological evidence most sought after by the modern historian" (p. 78). He claims that the canonical shaping serves "to chart the boundaries within which the exegetical task is to be carried out" (p. 83).

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[367] Emphasis added.
[368] Childs, *Intro to OT*, 74. Emphasis added.

In sum Soulen captures Childs' canonical approach as a critical response to the biblical theology movement[369]:

> Contrary to Sanders . . . the stance developed by Childs focuses on the shape and function of the final canonical text. Childs carefully describes and analyses the final received form of the OT books. His primary concern is not with any particular editorial layer but rather with the final resultant product. According to Childs this final shape is of special significance because (1) it alone displays the full history of revelation witnessed to by scripture; (2) in it the community has exercised its critical judgment on the received traditions and modified them accordingly; and (3) by showing how the texts were actualized by generations removed from the original event and composition of the writings, the canonical shape may provide a hermeneutical key as to how we may actualize the text *in our day*.[370]

Childs applies his method to show an overall canonical shape of the final received form of each OT book in his *IOTS*.

Applying Childs' canonical approach, his former student Gerald Sheppard focuses on and defines his approach as "canon conscious redactions":

> strictly the attempts by editors to relate one canonical book or a part of a book to some other canonical book or collection of books. These redactions reflect occasional efforts to overcome at points the apparent independence of biblical traditions by introducing an overt literary link between them, one which exceeds the actual historical connections original to the different literatures.[371]

He qualifies by saying, "Canon conscious redactions do not succeed in harmonizing the diverse and even contradictory traditions within the Bible. However, they do enhance the presumption of biblical unity by creating explicit interpretive contexts between books or groups of books."[372] Sheppard specifically demonstrates his approach to wisdom's role in the OT in the postexilic period and describes it in *WHC* (1980).

In his book Sheppard first analyses three select passages in Sirach (24:3–29; 16:24–17:14) and Baruch (3:9–4:4) to show and claim their "canon conscious" interpretation of Torah. Then he applies a similar analysis to select passages in the OT (*prologue* of the first two Psalms and *epilogue* of Ecclesiastes, Hosea, and 2 Samuel) to present a similar tendency for the canonical shaping of OT books. Through his analysis of a series of presumptive secondary redactions, Sheppard identifies wisdom

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[369] Childs, *Biblical Theology*.

[370] Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (4th ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 33, Emphasis added; Christopher Seitz, "Canonical Approach," *DTIB*:101, notes: "A canonical reading is, self-consciously, a modern form of reading."

[371] Gerald T. Sheppard, "Canonization: Hearing the Voice of the Same God through Historically Dissimilar Traditions," *Int* 36 (1982): 23.

[372] Ibid., 25.

as a hermeneutical construct of the non-wisdom tradition, more specifically Torah, in the canonical context of the OT books in the second century BCE.

Both Childs and Sheppard focus on "understanding the theological implications of the present shape of the canon"[373] in their method. They work from and analyse the final form of the received texts "to understand the nature of the theological shape of the text rather than to recover an original literary or aesthetic unity" (p. 74). They presume that the canonical redactors have edited the received texts for the final shape and function, although Childs appears to reckon with continual editorial activities—sometimes unchanged and other times selected, rearranged, or expanded—throughout the history of canon formation. Childs apparently considers that each OT book contains its canonical shape with theological and hermeneutical implications. Sheppard concentrates on the postexilic canonical editors' attempts to relate one canonical book or a part of a book to other canonical books for biblical unity by creating explicit interpretive contexts particularly through prologue or epilogue.

Sheppard usefully applies his approach to explain an implication of the epilogue in the book of Ecclesiastes from a broader canonical perspective,[374] which Childs fully supports as saying, "Few passages in the Old Testament reflect a more overt consciousness of the canon than does this epilogue" (p. 585). In the next subsections, I will outline the canonical approach to Ecclesiastes by Childs and Sheppard.

2.1.1.1 Childs' Interpretation of Ecclesiastes[375]

At the beginning of his canonical reading of Ecclesiastes, Childs sets out with a concise summary of a number of historical-critical problems associated with (a) authorship, (b) date, (c) composition, (d) structure, (e) theological contribution, and (f) discerning the book's canonical role.[376] He observes the overall canonical shaping of Ecclesiastes in the superscription (1:1, 12), in Qohelet's sayings (the main body of the book), and in the epilogue (12:9–14).

As for the superscription, he writes regarding how Qohelet is portrayed as Solomon:

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[373] Brevard S. Childs, "A Call to Canonical Criticism," review of James A. Sanders, Torah and Canon, *Int* 27 (1973): 90.
[374] Sheppard, "Epilogue," 182–89.
[375] For a detailed analysis and critique of Childs' canonical approach, see Bartholomew, *Reading*, 99–107.
[376] Chapter XXXVIII: Ecclesiastes in Childs, *Intro to OT*, 580-89 [esp. 582-83].

> In its canonical form the identification assures the reader that the attack on wisdom which Ecclesiastes contains is not to be regarded as the personal idiosyncrasy of a nameless teacher.[377] Rather, by his speaking in the guise of Solomon, whose own history now formed part of the community's common memory, his attack on wisdom was assigned an authoritative role as the final reflection of Solomon. As the source of Israel's wisdom, his words serve as an official corrective from within the wisdom tradition itself. Once this point was made, the literary fiction of Solomon was dropped.[378]

Childs has little to say about Qohelet's monologue, the main body of Ecclesiastes. He interprets Qohelet's sayings as having arisen "in reaction to an assumed body of wisdom tradition. Therefore, almost every topic within the traditional teachings of the sages is touched upon in Ecclesiastes" (p. 587). He notes that "Qohelet's sayings do not have an independent status, but function as a critical corrective, much as the book of James serves in the New Testament as an essential corrective to misunderstanding the Pauline letters" (p. 588).

Not surprisingly, Childs views the epilogue as "[t]he most obvious sign of canonical shaping" (p. 584). In a historical-critical approach the epilogue is generally considered a work of two or more editors (or redactors) and has been downplayed in relation to the rest of the book. In the canonical approach the editorial layers do not make any difference as the focus is on the epilogue's effect on the interpretation of the book in its final received form. Childs remarks that in vv. 9–10 Qohelet is

> characterized as 'wise.' His sayings are not just pessimistic emotions, but designated as part of Israel's wisdom. Moreover, his words are put into the larger context of his teaching ministry. He had an office or at least a function within the community. His use of wisdom was not just a private affair, hence the name Koheleth.[379]

Childs views the nature of Qohelet's crucial role in the wisdom collection especially in terms of his critical judgement. Childs sees vv. 11ff as setting Qohelet's work into the larger context, legitimating Ecclesiastes as divine wisdom and warning against other books, "which the writer explicitly excludes from the community as a distraction from the canonical collection," although such indication is not quite clear from the text (p. 586). Childs surmises that a final summary and particularly the final instruction to fear God and keep His commandments in v. 13 "could only have been heard in the broadest context of the Jewish faith," and thus he concludes:

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[377] Childs interprets "Qohelet" as a title, "an office of some kind," rather than a name or a pseudonym (p. 583).
[378] Childs, *Intro to OT*, 584.
[379] Ibid., 585.

> The epilogue offers an overarching theological rubric under which all human behaviour was to be viewed, namely, the judgment of God. God's hidden wisdom penetrates the secret things of this world and thus relativizes all human strivings by his final act of distinguishing the good from the evil. In the present form of the book this eschatological motif finds its confirmation in such verses as 3.17, 8.11f., and 11.9.[380]

2.1.1.2 Sheppard's Interpretation of the Epilogue in Ecclesiastes (12:9–14)[381]

Sheppard starts with an assumption that the epilogue of Ecclesiastes (12:9–14) is a "canonical" redactor's work. He rejects a direct redactional relationship between the epilogue and Proverbs, saying that "the purpose of wisdom in vv. 13-14 cannot be seen simply as a corrective to the skepticism of Qoheleth measured against the more optimistic teaching of Proverbs. A number of features weigh against such a conclusion" (p. 184). He first claims, "The specific combination 'fear God and observe his commandments' does not occur elsewhere in a similar formula either in Proverbs or in Qoheleth" (pp. 184–85). He then remarks, "The parallels in vocabulary and content between the epilogue and the body of Qoheleth vastly excel correspondences with Proverbs . . . the potential redactional links are shared even better within Qoheleth. Moreover, the content of Qoheleth is in even greater continuity with the epilogue" (p. 185). Nonetheless, Sheppard has not entertained a possibility of the book by a single author. Instead, he identifies two separate efforts of a "thematizing of the book": first in 1:2 and 12:8, and the second in the depiction of wisdom in the epilogue. He remarks without detailed exegesis of the first:

> Each thematizing has seized upon a particular dimension *within* the plastic structure of sayings and responses which cluster together in loose units throughout the book. Each is an oversimplification and a selective contextualizing of all the diverse forces latent in the previous literature. Certainly, the presence of two such divergent orientations for Qoheleth's contents must witness strongly against a reduction of the book as literature to any single, harmonized intention in the mind of the original anonymous sage.[382]

Sheppard interprets the difficult verses 9–12 in the epilogue without detailed exegetical discussion as follows:

> The description of Qoheleth in vv 9-10 is followed by a *māšāl* governing the activity of wisdom collections in general. The next verse (12) warns against any attention beyond "these" (מהמה). If בעלי אספות is taken to signify "overseers of the collections," then the antecedent to "these" must be those same collections or "the words of the wise," that is, a reference to a set of existent collections or books inclusive of, but larger than, Qoheleth. Hence, the particularity of focus on Qoheleth is loosened by

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[380] Ibid., 586.
[381] Sheppard, "Epilogue," 182–89. Page numbers in the following discussion of Sheppard refer to his CBQ paper, unless noted otherwise.
[382] Ibid., 186. Author's emphasis.

> the generalization of wisdom collections in the *māšāl* of v 11 and this broader category of literature, of which Qoheleth is presumed to be a part, is evaluated. The admonition of v 12 has "books" for its concern and warns against the production of more. The force of the argument is that "these" are sufficient to communicate the goal of wisdom as given in vv 13-14. Other wisdom books would only weary their readers when the purpose of sacred wisdom is already achieved through "these."[383]

He compares his analysis particularly of Sirach with vv. 13–14 and claims, "only Sirach has exactly the same ideology as Qoh 12:13-14, a perspective not expressed in the body of Qoheleth itself. We must conclude that the redactor of Qoh 12:13-14 either knew of Sirach or shared fully in a similar, pervasive estimate of sacred wisdom" (p. 187). He then concludes:

> With its epilogue Qoheleth has been overtly thematized by a particular theological understanding of wisdom which closely resembles that in Sirach and Bar 3:9-4:4. Therefore, the epilogue provides a rare glimpse into a comprehensive, canon-conscious formulation of what the purpose of biblical wisdom is. When the ideological coherency of the wisdom collection is clarified along these lines, the complementarity in perspective between the wisdom collection and certain inner-biblical sapientializing redactions becomes all the more obvious and compelling. . . . [W]e find a similar theological view of wisdom at the dawn of canon-consciousness, a perspective that offers an inner-biblical perception of wisdom with an important hermeneutical function for interpreting canonically non-wisdom traditions.[384]

By "at the dawn of canon-consciousness" it appears that Sheppard means, without discussion, postexilic redactors at ca. 200 BCE or later. It is not clear whether he applies this only to wisdom redactors or other OT redactors as a whole. He claims that wisdom as a hermeneutical construct appears also in non-wisdom OT books in certain limited ways (i.e., prologue and epilogue of texts), as already noted.

In sum, a canonical approach by Childs or Sheppard identifies the epilogue as the key passage which shapes and explains how Ecclesiastes is to be read as part of canonical Scripture. Thus they privilege the epilogue as integral to the whole of the book, in contrast to many historical-critical approaches which treat it as a secondary addition merely to correct Qohelet's unorthodox stance.

2.1.2 Frame-Narrative Reading by Fox[385]

In 1977 Fox broke off from the traditional historical-critical assessment of Ecclesiastes as a multi-editorial work, and pioneered to propose and define the

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[383] Ibid., 188.
[384] Ibid., 189.
[385] For an extensively detailed analysis and critique of Fox's frame-narrative in Ecclesiastes, see Bartholomew, *Reading*, 143–70.

composition of Ecclesiastes with a "frame-narrative" structure by a single hand.[386] He "defended the epilogue as part of the original work"[387] and argued that

> the *Book of Qoheleth* is to be taken as a whole, as a single, well-integrated composition, the product not of editorship but of authorship, which uses interplay of voice as a deliberate literary device for rhetorical and artistic purposes.[388]

Fox identifies the literary characteristics of Ecclesiastes as narrative, in which there are two voices speaking: Qohelet's and another voice which, first of all, speaks "in the phrase *'āmar (haq)qōhelet,* in 1:2, 7:27, and 12:8," although "certain presuppositions of modern biblical scholarship have kept it from being listened to carefully enough" (pp. 83–84).[389] He notes:

> Many commentators have connected the speakers of these three phrases with the speakers of the epilogue. This is reasonable, since if we hear Qohelet spoken about at the beginning, middle, and end of his words as well as afterwards in a postscript, it is natural to hear the same voice in all these places.[390]

Fox points out that "a third-person quoting-phrase in the middle of a first-person sentence" in 7:27 in particular indicates another person speaking in these verses. He then looks for signs of editing in the book, namely if the speaker(s) of the epilogue can be called an editor (pp. 84–85). Fox considers three types of editors are possible, "ranging along the scale of scope of involvement in the formation of the finished book: (1) a passive editor, (2) a rearranger, and (3) a compiler and arranger of small units" (p. 85) but rejects them all by his argument as follows.

Fox starts by saying, "An author might identify the speaker however often he wishes, but an editor would interrupt the author's words to do so only if he felt a lack of clarity. . . . [W]hoever is responsible for *'āmar haqqōhelet* in 7:27 is far more

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386 Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 83–106; Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (JSOTSup 71; Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 315; more recently, Krüger, *Kohelet*, 375 [ET 215], follows Fox's approach and explains the underlying goal of the same literary strategy.

387 Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (JSJSup 125; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 115.

388 Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 83. However, he qualifies his statement in n. 2: "This thesis is not meant to exclude the possibility of minor revisions and glosses by later writers in a finished, unified composition." Page numbers here and the following in this section refer to this essay, unless noted otherwise.

389 Regarding 7:27 Fox clarifies (p. 84, n. 3): "MT אמרה קהלת is unquestionably to be divided אמר הקהלת as in 12:8." The MT reads אמרהקהלת in the text as אמרה קהלת (feminine verb), but אמר הקהלת is probably the better or correct letter division as the other occurrences of (ה)קהלת in Ecclesiastes are associated with masculine nouns, adjectives, or verbs; thus common sense guides the emendation. See Christian D. Ginsburg, *Coheleth, Commonly Called the Book of Ecclesiastes: Translated from the Original Hebrew with a Comentary, Historical and Critical* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861), 1; McNeile, *Ecclesiastes*, 1; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 95; contra Mitchell Dahood, "The Phoenician Background of Qoheleth," *Bib* 47 (1966): 277.

390 Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 85.

active than a mere phrase-inserter. He is active on the level of the composition of individual sentences" (p. 86). The same is true of 1:2 and 12:8.

Concerning the epilogue, Fox states:

> The epilogue . . . begins with a phrase of continuation, as if someone had been speaking and is following up with a few words of summary retrospect. In 12:12 the speaker suddenly addresses *b^enî* "my son." This address creates an epic situation (the setting, implied or explicit, in which a first-person narrator is speaking), one familiar to the ancient reader — the father-son instruction situation of all didactic wisdom literature. Why would an editor whose editorial activity was restricted to insertion of phrases and addition of an epilogue create for himself a fictitious epic situation?[391]

He identifies Ellermeier as the only scholar who attempts a thorough investigation of hypothetical editor's works in the book and finds Ellermeier's argument unconvincing (pp. 88–90).[392] He argues that "the epilogue and the other third-person phrases are integrally connected with Qohelet's words" and that "certain words are in a different voice does not mean that they are by a different hand."[393] He then suggests that "all of 1:2–12:14 is by the same hand—not that the epilogue is by Qohelet, but that Qohelet is 'by' the epilogist," namely, the epilogist is a frame-narrator who tells the *story* of Qohelet, simply the transmitter, not the creator, of Qohelet's words (p. 91). Fox then discusses several examples of "an anonymous third-person retrospective frame-narrative encompassing a first-person narrative or monologue," a well-known narrative technique in Egypt (*The Instruction for Kagemeni, The Prophecy of Neferti, The Complaint of Ipuwer,* and *The Instructions of ^cOnchsheshonqy*) and in Israel (Deuteronomy and Tobit). Fox illustrates his thesis of Ecclesiastes as a frame-narrative by an analogy from modern literature, J. C. Harris's *Uncle Remus* (pp. 92–94).

Fox explores the meaning of the epilogue, the frame-narrator's most clear voice, in 12:9–14 in terms of its relationship to the first-person narrative, the main body of Ecclesiastes (pp. 96–104). The didactic tone of the father-son situation in the customary wisdom fashion is easily recognizable to the early readers of Ecclesiastes. Thus the epilogist implicitly identifies himself as a wisdom teacher. His first function

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[391] Ibid., 86.

[392] Referring to Friedrich Ellermeier, *Qohelet, Teil I, Abschnitt 1: Untersuchungen zum Buche Qohelet* (Herzberg am Harz: Jungfer, 1967).

[393] Gordis, *Man*, 350, also notes: "there is no contradiction within this section, and the progression of thought in the passage is thoroughly satisfactory. . . Hence the entire Epilogue is best regarded as a unit. Hertz. recognizes that the various verses are not in conflict with each other."

as the frame-narrator is to testify to the reality and credibility of Qohelet and his voice:

> The epilogist of Qohelet succeeded in convincing many readers that he had an intimate familiarity with Qohelet, and it is clear that this is one of the epilogue's purposes. The reader is to look upon Qohelet as a real individual in order to feel the full force of the crisis he is undergoing.[394]

The frame-narrator's second function relates to his stance, showing respect for Qohelet as a sage but keeping a certain distance from him. The epilogist tells that Qohelet is a public figure who taught people wisdom and knowledge, dedicated to seek to find, arrange, and write wise sayings and words of truth (vv. 9–10). Fox perceives a reserved attitude in the frame-narrator's praise of Qohelet which lacks affirmation of success in Qohelet's search. Fox interprets the analogy of the words of the wise with goads/nails in v. 11 negatively as something dangerous to prick and hurt, rather than as something immovable to prod one on to better actions. The reserve in the epilogist manifests itself as a note of caution in v. 12, "where he warns his son against excessive writing and speaking as wearisome, pointless activities, . . . the very activities to which Qohelet dedicated himself" (p. 101). In his final charge to his son, "the epilogist relegates all the words of the wise, Qohelet's in particular, to a place of secondary importance by summing up the essence of human knowledge: Fear God and keep his commandments, for his judgment is thorough and ineluctable" (p. 103). Fox agrees with a commonly held view of a strong opposition between wisdom and law in the epilogue.

Finally, Fox discusses an implied author—the voice behind the voices in every work of literature—in relation to the frame-narrator, the epilogist. Fox reminds the reader that the frame-narrator is also a literary persona, not necessarily being identified with the implied author, and therefore his view is not necessarily the implied author's whole view. The frame-narrator's orthodox tone may be assuring, but it neither dominates the book nor cancels out Qohelet's view. The author has created a certain ambiguity between the two radically different views and thus has allowed the reader to choose which voice has more affinity to him (namely, to the implied author), Qohelet's or the epilogist's. Fox notes:

> The use of a frame-narrative in itself puts a certain protective distance between the author and the views expressed in his work. This distance may be important even when the author is anonymous, because it may prevent the book as a whole from

[394] Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 100.

> being violently rejected. The author blunts objections to the book as a whole by implying through use of a frame-narrator that he is just reporting what Qohelet said, without actually rejecting the latter's ideas.[395]

Fox goes on to explain that

> the epilogist too is a literary creation, not to be simply identified with the implied author. The author has given him a conventional—and fictional—epic situation. He is a type-character, speaking in a typical style. In a book where the author shows himself capable of diverging radically from the conventional and effectively attacking orthodox ideas, a conventional character is not likely to be the closest representation of the author's viewpoint.[396]

He in effect implies that Qohelet's voice is the author's view, which he confirms in his 1989 commentary, saying, "Qohelet is a persona: it is *the author's voice* we hear speaking through the mask."[397] Thus he makes unclear where exactly the implied author stands in his relation to the frame-narrator who affirms the orthodox wisdom teaching in the epilogue. Weeks writes that

> the presentation of ideas through speeches and narrative offers writers an opportunity to air views which are not their own. This is most obvious in dialogues, where the author may espouse radically different views through the words of different characters—and none of these views need correspond to his own opinions.[398]

He even criticizes Fox's view, saying, "Fox does not go far enough . . . Qoheleth may be something quite different from a mere disguise, and . . . this book may be one in which the author and his character stand some way apart."[399]

2.1.3 Summary and Assessment

In contrast to many conventional historical-critical approaches which treat the epilogue as an addition of secondary importance, Bartholomew observes that the canonical approach by Childs and Sheppard "privileges the epilogue as *the* major sign of canonical shaping. This reverses the general value judgement of the epilogue and foregrounds it as the key to the canonical interpretation of the book."[400] Conversely, Qohelet's monologic discourse which occupies the most of the book is given less detailed attention than it might deserve, although Qohelet's voice seems to be

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[395] Ibid., 103.
[396] Ibid., 104–5.
[397] Fox, *Contradictions*, 316. Emphasis added; cf. Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 105, n. 46.
[398] Stuart Weeks, "Whose Words: Qoheleth, Hosea and Attribution in Biblical Literature," in *New Heaven and New Earth—Prophecy and the Millennium* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 157–58. Interestingly, in the Introduction of his latest JPS commentary, Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xiii, states, "We cannot assume that any one statement of Koheleth's expresses the book's teaching," without changing his original reading strategy.
[399] Weeks, "Whose Words," 159.
[400] Bartholomew, *Reading*, 106. Author's emphasis.

affirmed as one to which attention must also be paid. The canonical approach to Ecclesiastes by Childs and Sheppard has enjoyed little reception as of date.[401] What is perhaps most strange and conspicuous in their treatment of Ecclesiastes is the absence of a discussion of, or even reference to, Fox's 1977 seminal essay on the unity of Ecclesiastes by authorship rather than by editorship, which in principle was available to both Childs and Sheppard.[402] This was a missed opportunity for them to compare their premise of the redactor's work for the book's canonical shaping to a significant alternative.

Fox's thesis on the single authorship of Ecclesiastes has caught the attention of scholars and has influenced subsequent studies of the book as a unified whole.[403] However, Fox also seems to have missed an opportunity to reassess his analysis on the types of editors, overlooking another type of editor: a canon-conscious redactor proposed by Childs and Sheppard. Moreover, Fox's view of the relationship between the frame-narrator and the implied author and his choice of the reliable narrator[404] in the canonical form of Ecclesiastes are contestable and need further examination (*vide infra*). Bartholomew evaluates Fox's reading of epilogue and summarizes:

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[401] Several scholars have critically discussed Sheppard's 1977 article: Krüger, *Kohelet*, 372–75 [ET 213–15]; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 395–96; Andrew G. Shead, "Reading Ecclesiastes 'Epilogically'," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 87–88; Gerald H. Wilson, "'The Words of the Wise': The Intent and Significance of Qohelet 12:9–14," *JBL* 103 (1984): 181, n. 14; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 853; Fox, *Contradictions*, 320–21; Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear down and a Time to Build up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 375–76. In both of his 1989 and 1999 commentaries Fox gives essentially the same criticism of Sheppard's approach. Fox disagrees with Sheppard's claim that Ben Sira has "exactly the same ideology as Qoh 12:13–14." Fox states: "Unlike Sir 1:26, the postscript does not say that obedience to God's commandments *produces* wisdom, nor does it bring wisdom under the aegis of Torah or identify the two, which is Sira's great contribution in chapter 24. On the contrary, the postscript implies a *distinction* between the words of the sages on the one hand and pious obedience on the other. Neither part of Qohelet's ending reveals any "canon-consciousness" (1999, pp. 375–76. Author's emphasis). The last criticism by Fox stems from their different interpretations of difficult phrases: בעלי אספות in 12:11 and ויתר מהמה in 12:12a: Sheppard interprets from the two phrases "these collections" to mean a "broader category of literature," i.e., canon, of which Qohelet is a part (1977, p. 187), whereas Fox contends: "'These' in v. 12a are the words of the wise whatever they may be" (1999, p. 376). Seow holds a similar objection against Sheppard's argument, even though Seow considers 12:13b–14 as a redactor's addition.
[402] Childs cites a 1978 commentary in his book in 1979 and Sheppard likely had an opportunity to include Fox in the publication of his dissertation in 1980.
[403] E.g., Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 111, 113; Andrew G. Shead, "Ecclesiastes from the Outside In," *RTR* 55 (1996): 24–37; Krüger, *Kohelet*, 19 [ET 5]; Tremper Longman, III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 21; Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 202; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 74; Agustinus Gianto, "Ecclesiastes," *NIDB* 2:179; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 8.
[404] On the reliability of the biblical narrator, see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Yairah Amit, "'The Glory of Israel Does Not Deceive or Change His Mind': On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative," *Proof* 12 (1992): 201–12.

> In his view the narrator affirms an orthodox perspective but the implied author wishes to create room for Qoheleth's type of view to be heard. One is thus left uncertain as to precisely where the implied author stands, the implications being, especially when one considers the large amount of space given to Qoheleth, that he is sympathetic to Qoheleth's affirmations of life as absurd! This makes Fox's position very similar to the major historical critical readings in which an orthodox editor has added an appendix to a radical text in order to make it more acceptable, and certainly undermines the notion of foolproof composition in Ecclesiastes.[405]

In sum, both the canonical approach and reading Ecclesiastes as a frame-narrative recognize the inner coherence of the book: Childs and Sheppard by canonical redaction and Fox by authorship. Nonetheless, both approaches summarized above seem to need further modification or refinement to tighten their arguments. What follows is a brief assessment and my preference between the two methods with a modification to read Ecclesiastes as a literary unity.

Childs in his canonical approach interprets Qohelet's sayings as a critical corrective in reaction to wisdom tradition. He does not elaborate how exactly or what misunderstanding Qohelet's monologue is correcting, which supposedly parallels the Epistle of James countering the misunderstanding of Pauline teaching in the NT.[406] No specific example of Qohelet's sayings for such analysis in their work may be one of the reasons which keep some readers unpersuaded by Childs' and Sheppard's canonical approach.[407] A canonical approach to read Ecclesiastes as a unity is attractive. The approach is probably viable for "a theological decision about what the proper parameters for interpretation are."[408] But it remains fundamentally no less conjectural than any other account of redactional purposes in antiquity.

This thesis will explore a possible significance in the likely historical underpinnings of Ecclesiastes' context. Qohelet's preoccupation with death is extreme and extraordinary among all the biblical texts. Qohelet not only observes what death does to human existence, but also arguably assesses everything based on death's reality. Death and the absence of divine judgement in his society are huge issues to Qohelet. Sombre and pessimistic tones in his monologue convey helplessness and uncertainty about the future under the oppressive regime(s) in which he lives. No other biblical writers express such borderline heretical sentiments while still clinging to some of the traditional wisdom teaching as Qohelet does. The epilogue may then be

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[405] Bartholomew, *Reading*, 168–69.
[406] Childs, *Intro to OT*, 588.
[407] Although their critics listed above seem to be unpersuaded by their analysis of the epilogue itself or its larger canonical context (*vide supra*).
[408] *DTIB*:101; contra Barton, *Method*, 95.

a response to Qohelet's agonizing observations which may also be a reflection of the topsy-turvy world of postexilic Israelite society in the early Hellenistic milieu.

I will argue the thesis that the extremely unconventional content of Qohelet's monologue (and its retention) perhaps bears a certain historical significance in postexilic Israel at the time of Ecclesiastes' composition. A more integrated approach to study the complicated texts within Qohelet's monologue and the epilogue may be warranted. This leads me to side with Fox's approach, with its need for some modification notwithstanding, to explore the inner coherence of Ecclesiastes as a crafted literary composition, whose distinct voices enable the issues of Qohelet's day to be probed in a fresh way.

2.2 How Should We Read Ecclesiastes?

2.2.1 Re-Defining the Frame-Narrative: Towards a Modification of Fox's Approach

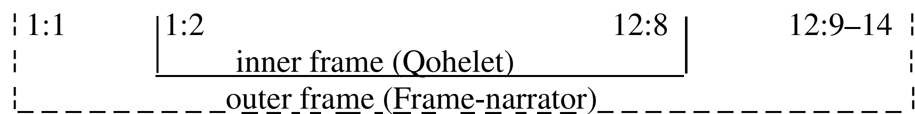
In the canonical form of the text, there are two voices speaking in Ecclesiastes. The dominant voice is Qohelet who mostly speaks in the first person "I" about his experience, observation and knowledge. Qohelet's voice first appears in 1:2, pronouncing his famous motto which is interrupted by another voice in the middle. His final voice repeats his motto *verbatim*, although not repeating the second הבל הבלים in 1:2, again interrupted by the third person in 12:8. The two verses unmistakably form an *inclusio*, implying not only that הבל הבלים הכל הבל is the key statement of Qohelet, but also his monologue likely starts at 1:2 rather than 1:12 where Qohelet's actual "I" statement appears.[409] The latter implication may also be supported by parallels in vocabulary and content between the two poems in 1:2–11 and 12:1–8 which seem to be wittingly contrasted, as we shall see. The *inclusio* also suggests that Qohelet's monologic discourse may be a framed story narrated by another voice.

The second voice apparently introduces the main character Qohelet, navigates Qohelet's monologic discourse, and closes the book with a closing statement. We hear this "third person" voice introducing the main character Qohelet in 1:1, interrupting his monologue in a phrase "says Qohelet" in 1:2, 7:27, and closing Qohelet's monologue by the same phrase in 12:8. This voice then proceeds to summarize

[409] Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 113.

Qohelet's activity as of the wise and warns his "son," to whom the story of Qohelet is apparently told, with a conclusive final instruction (12:9–14). The close examination of the two voices which speak in Ecclesiastes seems to show continuity and interrelatedness.

Based on a literary analysis, this thesis reads Ecclesiastes in the canonical form as written by an author with a "frame-narrative" structure as Fox does: namely, the first person monologic discourse which is narrated by the third person, a "frame-narrator." A "frame-narrative" naturally consists of a framed story, by *inclusio* in the case of Ecclesiastes, within which a character appears, and his story is transmitted by the frame-narrator. In such a setting, a space between the frame-narrator and the character becomes more distinctive than in a simple narrative, because the character's speech is essentially confined in an "inner frame" (1:2–12:8) and controlled by the frame-narrator.[410] The frame-narrative structure creates even more distance between the author and the character if the whole narrative is framed by an outer frame (1:1–12:9–14):[411]



Fox assumes that both Qohelet and the frame-narrator are a literary persona. He then postulates an implied author behind the frame-narrator, based on Wayne Booth's work.[412] The outer frame can be formed but is not necessary (thus shown by the dotted line in the above scheme) because there is in effect only one framed story in Ecclesiastes. The frame-narrator in Ecclesiastes is in effect a narrator who framed Qohelet's discourse by the *inclusio*. Thus he may be named a "frame-narrator," but he is simply *the* narrator of Qohelet's story. Fox has created a complicated relationship between the implied author and the frame-narrator to interpret Ecclesiastes, because he has to explain the frame-narrator's role as a less reliable literary persona than Qohelet. The implied author then is less likely the author's guise.

[410] But the frame-narrator may enter into the inner frame as in 7:27, of which importance will be elaborated in the ensuing discussion.
[411] Cf. Shead, "Reading," 68; Shead, "Ecclesiastes," 24–37, for his analysis of a double frame structure in Ecclesiastes. Shead treats the frame-narrator as the narrator of the book, not a fictional persona.
[412] Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 104 [esp. nn. 43 & 44]; see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 76–77 for definition and literary implication of an "implied author."

Regardless, a distance between the character and the frame-narrator, most likely, is intentionally created by the author who wishes to communicate his message in certain fashion for his advantage.[413] There are two advantages that the "frame-narrative" affords the author: (1) he can place a distance between himself and the character(s); and (2) he can agree, disagree, or stay neutral with any or all of the characters in the narrative plot.[414] The key to understanding the frame-narrative is, then, to assess the interrelationship and distance between the author, the frame-narrator, and the character(s).[415] What needs to be clarified for Ecclesiastes is how the frame-narrator and Qohelet, the book's single character and main speaker, interrelate to each other, but more importantly how they are positioned in their relative importance in the overall scheme for the author's purposes.

2.2.2 The Frame-Narrator's Role

What is the frame-narrator's role? In his analysis of the literary characteristics of Ecclesiastes, Fox has made the point that a presupposition of the epilogue as a later addition has inhibited scholars from carefully listening to the third person's voice in the book, as if the epilogue is the only time that the third person speaks. Many scholars likewise have treated the small phrase אמר (ה)קהלת in other parts of the book as also a later addition or a gloss. In the literary structure of the book as a frame-narrative, one needs to examine what the frame-narrator is doing. The following outline may clarify the frame-narrator's role and responsibility in the book:

1:1 Introduce the character Qohelet in the framed story – **Frame-narrator**
1:2 Open Qohelet's monologue: "הבל הבלים," ***says Qohelet*** — *Framed story narrated*
7:27 Interrupt Qohelet's discourse in the middle: ***says Qohelet*** –by **Frame-narrator**
12:8 Close Qohelet's monologue: "הבל הבלים," ***says Qohelet*** — (forming *inclusio*)
12:9-14 Finish with Closing remark and Conclusion – **Frame-narrator**

[413] The author may be male or female. One gender pronoun (m.) is used for the third person designation throughout in this thesis for simplicity.
[414] E.g., Galileo employed this strategy in his *Dialogue* (1632) to convey his new scientific view of the cosmos "through the mouths of dramatis personae" in order to distance himself. Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love* (New York: Walker, 1999), 144.
[415] Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 122, notes that "a key element in the . . . interpretation of Ecclesiastes is to be aware of the different voices and to inquire about their interrelationship."

The above outline illustrates that it is the frame-narrator who may own or at least be responsible for narrating the entire discourse.[416] What the outline makes clear is that the third person narrative is an integral part of the entire book, be it a short phrase or a longer statement. The frame-narrator introduces Qohelet, the main character (1:1), transmits Qohelet's monologic discourse (1:2–12:8), commends Qohelet's work as a sage and a teacher, and presents the ultimate wisdom instruction of an Israelite sage in conclusion (12:9–14).[417] The frame-narrator does not interact with or correct Qohelet during the latter's discourse. As such, it appears that the author has entrusted Qohelet's story to the frame-narrator as a reliably accurate presenter and transmitter of Qohelet's monologue.

In other words, the plot in Ecclesiastes appears to be that: (a) the frame-narrator sets the tone of Qohelet's monologic discourse at the beginning and starts narrating (1:1–2); more importantly, (b) the frame-narrator interrupts in the middle of Qohelet's discourse to remind the audience that he is still in control, while navigating Qohelet's monologue (7:27); and most importantly, (c) the frame-narrator wraps up Qohelet's story (12:8–12) and gives the final word at the end (12:13–14). Thus it appears: "It is the frame narrator who thereby gains the final word, and who is depicted as having ultimate control not only over the canonical form, but at least partly over the book's overall ideology," as Christianson puts it.[418] The ensuing discussion will engage in a detailed analysis of how the frame-narrator's role unfolds in those passages, especially in 7:27, but let us first examine the relationship between the frame-narrator and the character Qohelet of the framed story.

The name of the frame-narrator is unknown but he appears to be very familiar with Qohelet's profession.[419] He identifies Qohelet as a sage,[420] who teaches people knowledge, weighs, searches out, and carefully arranges many proverbs (12:9), and

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[416] Naoto Kamano, *Cosmology and Character: Qoheleth's Pedagogy from a Rhetorical-Critical Perspective* (BZAW 312; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 247, points out that "the frame-narrator, not Qoheleth, is the actual teller of the discourse—the frame-narrator never speaks with first-person speech. Instead, Ecclesiastes is a treatise in which the frame-narrator makes use of Qohelet's first-person speeches, reporting these speeches and persuading the audience by means of them."

[417] Detailed exegesis of the passage, see chapter 5.

[418] Christianson, *Time*, 61–62, makes this statement in his biblical frame-narrative analysis of Deuteronomy, which this thesis regards as aptly applicable to Ecclesiastes.

[419] "The epilogist of Qohelet succeeded in convincing many readers that he was intimately familiar with Qohelet," says Fox, *Contradictions*, 317.

[420] Roland E. Murphy, "The Sage in Ecclesiastes and Qoheleth the Sage," in *Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (eds. Gammie and Perdue; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 263–71; see Fox, *Contradictions*, 330–32 for detailed analysis of "sage" as profession in Wisdom literature; cf. Weeks, *Scepticism*, 38–39.

sometimes calls him “the Gatherer” (הקהלת).[421] The frame-narrator’s familiarity with Qohelet’s work suggests that they are probably in the same professional circle.[422] His ultimate admonition: “Fear God and keep His commandments”—an orthodox wisdom teaching—to his son (or pupil) regardless of what he has heard (12:13) identifies the frame-narrator likely as an orthodox Judahite wisdom teacher who has probably lived in Jerusalem.[423] His primary audience is most likely Israelites.

The question may be raised what role the frame-narrator plays in the overall scheme, because he hardly speaks anything but the concluding remark at the end in Ecclesiastes. In other words, the reader may need to ask how each speaker may be positioned and related to each other, and ultimately how the first-person narrative (Qohelet’s monologue) and the third person narrative (the epilogue) may be brought together to cohere as a literary whole. It now calls for a closer examination of the third person narrative sections, especially 7:27.

Scholars have noticed this particular insertion not because of its role or significance, but because of the two possible word divisions for אמרהקהלת: אמרה קהלת (MT) or אמר הקהלת (preferable emendation), as Fox already noted. He brings the importance of 7:27 to attention as “a delicate reminder of the presence of a frame-narrator’s voice in the background.”[424]

Although one may not be persuaded by Fox’s conjecture for the role of 7:27 and especially the resultant shaping and interpretation of the whole book of Ecclesiastes, neither can one too quickly dismiss the insertion by the frame-narrator as an accidental addition or gloss by a later editor or copyist.[425] An addition or gloss may be possible, especially if the book contained later editorial work, but it would be unlikely if the book were surrounded by a “frame-narrative” by a single hand. It is unclear why a copyist should have made the addition or gloss at such a point where it would appear to make no difference. The text reads well without the insertion if it were not

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[421] *Vide infra*.
[422] Fox, *Contradictions*, 311.
[423] Ernest Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament, Vol. 3: The Psalms and Wisdom Literature* (London: SPCK, 2003), 148, writes: “What little evidence there is in the book points to Jerusalem as its place of origin. There are references to local conditions such as the rain (Eccl. 11:3; 12:2), the changes of the wind (1:6; 11:4), the use of wells and cisterns for water storage (12:6) and the almond tree (12:5), which are, in fact, not compatible with an Egyptian setting for the book [re theory of Alexandrian origin] but are characteristic of Judea. Most significantly there are the references to the temple and sacrifice (5:1; 9:2).” See also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 37–38.
[424] Fox, “Frame-Narrative,” 86.
[425] E.g., David Castelli, *Il Libro del Cohelet, Volgarmente detto Ecclesiaste. Tradotto dal Testo Ebraico con Introduzione critica e Note* (Pisa: Tipografia Nistri, 1866), 268.

there to start with.[426] However, "*Says Qohelet*" in 7:27 is perfectly in line with 1:2 and 12:8 within the "frame-narrative" structure. Bartholomew points out: "7:27 in particular indicates that the frame cannot be regarded as just a frame put on a complete first-person narration. The evidence points to deliberate shaping";[427] but he does not explain how exactly 7:27 is functioning in the frame-narrative. This thesis proposes two or possibly three functions that the author may have had in mind for the frame-narrator's interruption in 7:27 to shape the book for his purpose.

The first possible function of 7:27 is a "reminder of the presence of the frame-narrator's voice" in the middle of Qohelet's discourse to distance himself from Qohelet, as Fox suggests.[428] The frame-narrator is reminding the audience that what they are hearing is Qohelet's view, not his. The insertion clarifies that the frame-narrator is simply reporting or transmitting what Qohelet says, and enforces the fact that the frame-narrator/author may or may not agree with Qohelet or may even have a different view.

More importantly, it can also serve as "a reminder of the presence of the frame-narrator's voice" in the *foreground*, not necessarily "in the *background*" as Fox has it,[429] for the second but more significant function. The insertion "*says Qohelet*" in 7:27 signals to the audience of Ecclesiastes that the frame-narrator has not disappeared after his introduction of Qohelet only to reappear in the epilogue, while Qohelet has his free rein to take control. It is a reminder that *the frame-narrator is telling the story of Qohelet* and the entire discourse is of the frame-narrator, not of Qohelet. The frame-narrator is the one who is actually presenting and in control of Qohelet's discourse.

The third function of 7:27 may be incidental but may further strengthen and confirm that the book is composed by one hand, especially if the first two functions as described above were correct. To the reader of Ecclesiastes the epilogue (12:9–14) often appears drastically different from Qohelet's monologue: the main reason that the epilogue is often treated as a later addition or by other hand(s) to this day. Such an assumption can easily be made if the reader did not understand the significance or

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[426] F. J. Backhaus, "Der Weisheit letzter Schluß! Qoh 12:9–14 im Kontext von Traditionsgeschichte und beginnender Kanonisierung," *BN* 72 (1994): 43; Bo Isaksson, *Studies on the Language of Qoheleth with Special Emphasis on the Verbal System* (SSU; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 107; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 580–81.
[427] Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 70.
[428] Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 95.
[429] Ibid., 86. Emphasis added.

purpose of the frame-narrator's interruption in 7:27, which seems often to be the case. The assumption probably becomes even easier to make, if the frame-narrator's insertion in 7:27 was not there, which gives an impression that the entire book, except the epilogue, is controlled by Qohelet. The difference of the epilogue from Qohelet's monologic discourse can then be even more pronounced. The author may have realized that his work could be open to misunderstanding because of the difference between Qohelet's monologue and the epilogue, and thus added the frame-narrator's interruption in the middle of Qohelet's utterance to remind the reader who was delivering and navigating Qohelet's monologue.

2.2.3 Qohelet and His Role

Who is Qohelet? The book of Ecclesiastes opens with: "The words of קהלת, the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). At first glance, קהלת "Qohelet" looks like a proper noun and it appears as though the author uses a pseudonym, because there has been no known king in Jerusalem by that name. But the definite article attached to the noun in 12:8 and probably in 7:27 is also suggestive of an appellative.[430] From early times the term has generally been identified as a title or an office, denoting assembler, gatherer, convener, convoker, collector, etc., which is derived from the root קהל "gather, assemble."[431] Moreover, one may recognize that the two occasions where הקהלת is used are by the frame-narrator of the book. The frame-narrator's use of הקהלת "the Gatherer" in his narration may be deliberate[432] for later describing Qohelet as a sage-teacher in his epilogue (12:9–10).

In the opening of the book, the frame-narrator introduces the character "Qohelet" (1:1). Interestingly, the case has been made that Qohelet is not really presented as a

[430] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 96; and Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste*, 128–34 suggest that an epithet or a common name was in transition to become or has become a proper name; but Weeks, *Scepticism*, 180–96, points out an inconsistent use of the article in LXX, which may suggest a confusion during the text transmission. He suggests after his extensive analysis that Qohelet is most likely the proper name of the character. Both arguments seem plausible. LXX translates ה/קהלת with a definite masculine article in all three places (1:2; 7:27; 12:8) where the frame-narrator narrates: εἶπεν ὁ Ἐκκλησιαστής "said the Ecclesiast" (NETS), including 1:2 which does not have an article in MT. In 12:9, 10 he uses the term without an article maybe because Qohelet is the familiar name known in his circle including his son (12:12), so in the introduction (1:1) and in Qohelet's self-introduction. Thus Qohelet may be a nickname rather than a proper name, see Krüger, *Kohelet*, 98 [ET 40].

[431] Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 68. Other examples of feminine ending (proper) names, which probably were all originally epithets: ספרת "scribe" (Ezra 2:55; Neh 7:57 and פכרת הצביים "binder of the gazelles" (Ezra 2:57; Neh 7:59); See also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 96–97.

[432] Possibly an allusion to 1 Kgs 8:1 (?). The verb קהל is used only relating to people, not to animals or things. H.-J. Fabry, et al., "קָהָל," *TDOT* 12:550; Paul Joüon, "Sur le Nom de Qoheleth," *Bib* 2 (1921): 53–54.

king, even though the frame-narrator introduces Qohelet as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem," and the main character also claims it in his self-introduction: "I am Qohelet. I have been king over Israel in Jerusalem" in 1:12. Traditionally, this introduction along with his description of possessing massive wealth, wisdom, and power; his interests in international trade, building operation, forestry and gardening; and his sensual pleasures that he has pursued in 2:4–10ab, has been interpreted as a claim of King Solomon.[433] In spite of such allusions to Solomon, however, the argument that Qohelet is not a king appeals to the fact that the main character calls himself Qohelet, and the name Solomon never appears in the book. The kingship role completely disappears after chapter 2 in the book, and it can be argued that the author could not have written the criticism of kings in 4:13 and 10:16, if the character of Qohelet had been Solomon or even any other king, although this argument is unpersuasive.[434] The epilogue does not recapitulate that Qohelet is the "king of Israel in Jerusalem" in the important concluding section, although it does reiterate that Qohelet is a wise man and adds that he is a teacher.[435]

Despite these silences, a possible interpretation of Qohelet as "Solomon"—fictional or otherwise—remains strong as the current consensus shows,[436] because the author in certain ways does depict Qohelet as a Solomon-like king. The author does

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[433] E.g., Timothy Walton, "Reading Qohelet as Text, Author, and Reader," in *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation: Studies Presented to Professor Eep Talstra on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (eds. Peursen and Dyk; SSN 57; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 123, notes: "The king's activities described in 2:4–9 can be understood as allusions to various aspects of Solomon's reign found in 1 Kings 5–11"; also Tremper Longman, III, "Qoheleth as Solomon 'For What Can Anyone Who Comes after the King Do?' (Ecclesiastes 2:12)," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (eds. Dell and Kynes; LHBOTS 587; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 42–56.

[434] It is possible that Qohelet criticizes those in power if he is no longer a king (cf. הייתי מלך in 1:12: perfect tense), and especially if they were foreign ruler(s). Cf. Christianson, *Time*, 141. At any rate, his criticism of the king and warning against unwise kings are general without targeting any one specific ruler.

[435] In his recent monograph Weeks seriously doubts Qohelet is a Solomonic persona or a king, owing to the weakness of allusions to Solomon in his view and the lack of kingly role of Qohelet. Instead he proposes a portrait of Qohelet as businessman because of his familiarity with business terms: Weeks, *Scepticism*, 12–43 and passim. However, there is no surprise if a king is familiar with economic and business terms; in fact, he should be acting as an administrator of his kingdom. Besides, the author's purpose is unlikely to present Qohelet's "kingship" but to show a human struggle for finding the meaning of life in the face of unavoidable death, even by someone like Solomon with all his "wealth and wisdom."

[436] See Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 30–37; Walton, "Reading," 123; Christianson, *Time*, 147; C. L. Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (eds. Beck, et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 275–87; Tremper Longman, III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 120–23; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 17–20; and R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 46, remarks: "The reflections attributed to Qoheleth-Solomon are not peculiar to him but are echoed throughout the book."

not imply that Qohelet must be Solomon but only someone like Solomon so that the audience would think, or be reminded, of Solomon.[437] That may be the reason why the author's allusion is not so precise, simply letting Qohelet claim to be king and leading his audience to believe that Qohelet is or was a Solomon-like king.[438] In such a scenario, Qohelet may be regarded as a fictional Solomonic persona created by the author.[439] The author may have hoped to evoke the memory of Solomon immediately in the mind of Israelites "in a manner reminiscent of other superscriptions in the wisdom literature (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1)."[440] Solomon's kingship or rule is not obviously the focal point of the author's purpose, but he may be attaching to Qohelet the kingly credentials of Solomon's wealth, wisdom, and reputation. Qohelet's kingship, particularly as a wise king like "Solomon," would capture the attention of his Jewish hearers who seek answers to the harsh realities of their life and injustice in their society.[441] If anyone has an answer, surely it must be "Solomon" who has achieved all that man would desire for: power, fame, wealth, and wisdom for success above all. Astoundingly, what the hearers find in Solomonic utterances is their own crying, frustration, and powerlessness.

Once the audience find that life's enigma is no respecter of persons, and that even "Solomon" faces life's challenges and his struggle is no different from their own "under the sun," Qohelet's status as a king does not need further mention, and the description of his kingship completely disappears from the book. The author then lets Qohelet delve into issues that people face in their lives and in the society in which they live—work, wealth, pleasure, power, wisdom, greed, rivalry, oppression, corruption, nature, time, God, and above all human fate of death—to reveal that even the wisest, the richest, and possibly the most powerful king in Israel (2:9–11) does not

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[437] Hengstenberg, *Prediger*, 43 [ET 44]. Miller notes, "We may surmise that the figure of Solomon had become symbolic by the time Ecclesiastes was written" in Douglas B. Miller, "What the Preacher Forgot: The Rhetoric of Ecclesiastes," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 229–30. The author might have thought that a mention of "son of David" would immediately conjure up the image of Solomon in the mind of Israelites. Just hearing בן־דוד, therefore, may have been enough to convince audience with Qohelet's high status, reinforcing it with the description that he was wiser than all, successful in all his undertakings, and enjoyed all pleasures of men like Solomon.

[438] Cf. Isaksson, *Language*, 190, notes: "The narrative of the thread is of the résumé type, . . . the events [in chapter 2] . . . are picked out as important single events and then juxtaposed."

[439] Christianson, *Time*, 148; Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, xxxiii; Yee V. Koh, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth* (BZAW 369; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006); Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 97; Sneed, "Social Location," 47.

[440] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 97.

[441] Solomon's wise administration of justice is recorded in 1Kgs 3:16–28 and probably was known widely among Israelites (see v. 28).

have answers to the life's mystery, dichotomies, and injustice "under the sun." The author perhaps has desired to evoke reactions and provoke responses in the mind of his audience by deliberately placing the Solomonic persona, King Qohelet, with whose views and opinions they should wrestle. Thiselton notes:

> Such texts as Job, Ecclesiastes, and the parables do not function primarily as raw-material for Christian [or Jewish] doctrine. . . . Their primary function is to invite or to provoke the reader to wrestle actively with the issues, in ways that may involve adopting a series of comparative angles of vision.[442]

2.2.4 Which Voice—Qohelet's or the Frame-Narrator's?

In contrast to the conventional interpretation that the author expresses his view of life and of God through Qohelet as his mouthpiece, this thesis contends that Qohelet's voice may reflect the Israelite outcry in an unjust society "under the sun" that the author has observed.[443] The author probably discerned that his audience might acknowledge his message as that of a wise man but would not necessarily respond to it unless they could identify its content as corresponding to their own life experiences.

This thesis therefore disagrees with Fox's literary ploy, and proposes that the frame-narrator (i.e., the epilogist), rather than Qohelet, is most likely *the* reliable narrator and navigator in Ecclesiastes. In essence, therefore, the frame-narrator and the implied author are one and the same (i.e., the author's disguise) as Sternberg suggests.[444]

In the "frame-narrative" structure, the author has a purpose for confining Qohelet's monologue in a frame: namely, the frame-narrator has a role to play. Positioning his voice at the beginning, middle, and end of Qohelet's monologue, followed with a conclusion, appears as a literary device which signals the frame-narrator's full participation, arguably with very limited but effective interruptions during the whole discourse. Consequently, the audience may become aware in the end that the author has allowed the frame-narrator to "exert control over the narrative perspective throughout while lending the book his own stamp of authority."[445]

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[442] Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 65–66. [or Jewish] added for relevance; cf. Weeks, "Whose Words," 165.

[443] Contra Sneed, "Social Location," 47, who contends that Qohelet "is not reporting as some eyewitness, but rather, in general terms, he relates what is typical and timeless"; see also Weeks, "Whose Words," 164. Such a view is possible, but reporting as a personal observation seems to go beyond describing something in general terms. It may not be Qohelet's experience but what *the author* may have observed in his society and put into Qohelet's mouth.

[444] Sternberg, *Poetics*, 74–75, maintains that the narrator and the implied author are the same in a biblical narrative, which may likewise apply to Ecclesiastes; also Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 79.

[445] Christianson, *Time*, 61.

This scenario of the relationship between Qohelet and the frame-narrator can also explain the apparent contradictions, disjunctive phrases, and enigmatic schemes in Ecclesiastes. Ambiguities in Qohelet's vocabulary, statements, and questions are probably not intended to have a single, clear-cut meaning but rather to reflect concurrently two different thoughts: Qohelet's and the author's.[446] The author may have deliberately chosen and put in Qohelet's mouth specific words,[447] expressions,[448] and rhetorical questions in particular,[449] which can convey more than one implication or cast a range of connotations. The manner or tone of voice that the frame-narrator may project in his transmission of Qohelet's message can provoke reactions and responses in the hearer's mind, especially if the book were orally communicated (which was likely in the ancient world) or perhaps even performed.[450] Qohelet's language is "colloquial or dialectal Hebrew" and is fitting for oral presentation.[451] The author cleverly employs a poetic prose style which can also serve such purposes, because poetic expressions often contain more than one meaning which the author may wish to convey, even if Qohelet's monologue were not orally delivered.[452]

It may also be a reflection of the author's particular pedagogic style, somewhat reminiscent of an oriental sapiential/philosophical approach, in which a teacher does not plainly express or quickly provide a straight answer to his pupils, much less to his

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[446] Cf. Thomas Krüger, "Meaningful Ambiguities in the Book of Qoheleth," in *The Language of Qohelet in Its Context: Essays in Honour of Prof. A. Schoors on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (eds. Berlejung and Hecke; OLA 164; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 63–74; Doug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (LHBOTS 431; New York: T&T Clark, 2006).
[447] Such as הבל, רוח, עולם, אחרי, חלק, and שאול.
[448] E.g., רעות/רעיון רוח, עת ומשפט, or שומר מצוה.
[449] E.g., see 3:17, 21, 22b; 6:12b; 9:10b; 11:9; 12:7.
[450] For a recent major work on oral transmission of biblical literature, see David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 111–73; see also Frank H. Polak, "Book, Scribe, and Bard: Oral Discourse and Written Text in Recent Biblical Scholarship," *Proof* 31 (2011): 118–40; Michael V. Fox, "Wisdom and the Self-Presentation of Wisdom Literature," in *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines* (eds. Exum and Williamson; JSOTSup 373; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 153–72. Fox notes: "The Wisdom books are to be read to oneself and studied, but they are also to be read *aloud* (that is, to others) and taught from" (p. 165, Author's emphasis) and "the teachings of Wisdom . . . are given a performance setting, namely, a teaching event with a complex nexus of speakers, audiences, media and purposes" (p. 169).
[451] David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 453–44; cf. Antony F. Campbell, "The Reported Story: Midway between Oral Performance and Literary Art," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 77–85; Antony F. Campbell, "The Storyteller's Role: Reported Story and Biblical Text," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 427–41.
[452] Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2010), 339; Cf. Joseph Azize, "The Genre of Qohelet," *DL* 2 (2003): 123–38 [esp. 133]; John F. Genung, *Ecclesiastes: Words of Koheleth Son of David, King in Jerusalem* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), 198.

general audience, although subtle hints may be embedded all along in his discourse.[453] In the case of Ecclesiastes, Qohelet's long monologue may be serving essentially as a prelude to the frame-narrator's final word to attain the acme of his message. In other words, the character Qohelet may be positioned to play a role of *antagonist* (like a "hostile witness"), rather than of *protagonist* (the author's mouthpiece), against the real message by the author[454] who plays an "engaged outsider" through the frame-narrator's role.[455] The frame-narrator does not deny the reality of death and injustice that Qohelet observes in his society, but his epilogue stands as the final word of a wisdom teacher. The author's pedagogical style and literary device, the "frame-narrative," controls the entire discourse. Interestingly, Qohelet warns against much talk and many words as folly (5:1, 2, 6 [ET 2, 3, 7]; 6:1; 10:12–13, 14, 20), while he is the main speaker in the book. The statement about a proper time to speak or to be silent (3:7) and that "the words of the wise heard in quietness are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools" (9:17) may arguably resonate with the author's philosophical wisdom and oriental pedagogy rather than Qohelet's. Thus the audience may realize that Qohelet might have had to bite his tongue, realizing his folly, if he could hear the frame-narrator's conclusion in 12:13–14.

The contention here is that the author had a consistent strategy throughout, when he penned Ecclesiastes. He caps all that Qohelet decries within the *inclusio* formed by the infamous motto: "Futile, utterly futile, everything is futile" (הבל הבלים הכל הבל) at the beginning and at the end of Qohelet's discourse (1:2: 12:8), and then attaches his conclusion in the frame-narrator's voice (12:9–14). Indeed, he may have written the *inclusio* and the conclusion first as the framework of Ecclesiastes; and the rest may have been just "filling in the blanks," while adding the introduction (1:1) at the end of the process. Qohelet's monologue concentrates on death and injustice as life's

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[453] Staples, "Vanity," 142, warns against the reader's tendency to take the words of the Bible and endow them with concepts of the present Western world instead of the Semitic world of the author's time.

[454] Contra Fox, *Contradictions*; For author–character relationship of the literary device, see H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2nd ed.; CIL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). According to Porter, Qohelet may be called an unreliable or discordant narrator (p. 76); Booth, *Rhetoric*, see especially "The Uses of Authorial Silence," 271–310; M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (THL 8; trans. Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 51, on the distance between the hero and the author; cf. Alan Holmes, *Robert Musil, "Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften": An Examination of the Relationship between Author, Narrator and Protagonist* (AKMLW 259; Bonn: Bouvier, 1978), 191–205 (The Narrator and His Role), 289–97.

[455] Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (SBLSemS 38; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 36.

realities, which all humans face under the sun but are unsolvable on this side of death, while the frame-narrator's final conclusion points to a solution which still lies ahead (12:14). It is debated on which side of death God's judgement will occur in Ecclesiastes, but the inclusion of every deed and every hidden thing, whether good or evil (12:14), is more suggestive of the eschatological judgement, which can occur on the other side of death.[456] This interpretation is reasonable if the frame-narrator does not share Qohelet's view. Qohelet's advice for life is "enjoy it while you can," whereas the frame-narrator's is "fear God and keep His commandments." The frame-narrator neither rejects nor approves Qohelet's resolution. A choice seems to be left to the audience for whichever they prefer, with a reminder of the consequences.[457] The author's final counsel seems simply to remind Qohelet's (and his) wider audience of the basic tenets of Israelite faith: Fear God, for He holds the key to solve the unsolvable under the sun. Qohelet exhausts his wisdom in his search but does not find *the* answer for life's enigma. Fisch summarizes, by saying that the creator of

> Qohelet never quite says, like the author of Psalm 111, that the *beginning* of *ḥokmā* is the fear of the Lord but his final statement seems to say that the *end point* of *ḥokmā* is the fear of God! "The end of the matter, when all is said and done: Fear God and keep his commandments, for that is the whole of Man."[458]

The book's overall scheme for the authorial purpose seems to lie in the frame-narrator's role as the presenter and transmitter of Qohelet's monologic discourse in order to present these two potential answers to life's most difficult questions. Having identified that the frame-narrator plays the key role, it is now time to visit Qohelet's monologue and investigate how the frame-narrator navigates and shapes the narrative discourse of Ecclesiastes.

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[456] Further discussion *vide infra*.

[457] Cf. Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 105, expresses a similar opinion but from a different angle (due to ambiguity in the implied author's position).

[458] Harold Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (ISBI; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 175. Author's emphasis. More succinctly Kidner sums up: "The Alpha of Proverbs has become the Omega of Ecclesiastes" in Derek Kidner, *Wisdom to Live By: An Introduction to the Old Testament's Wisdom Books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, with Some Notes on the Teachings of Israel's Neighbours and of the Old Testament Apocrypha* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 122.

Chapter 3

ISSUES OF DEATH AND INJUSTICE IN QOHELET'S MONOLOGUE

Qohelet's monologic discourse, the majority of Ecclesiastes, baffles the reader with its enigmatic language and the message, especially in contrast to the book's conclusion. Qohelet sums up his observations on life: הבל הבלים הכל הבל, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (a still familiar translation).[459] This chapter probes what has caused or driven him to draw such a caustic maxim on life.

Before starting a discussion, one may note, however, Qohelet does not appear recklessly stating life's reality with the drastic ultimatum, saying, "Everything is *hebel*." His reflection on life reveals his serious attempt to understand and reconcile his observations which conflict with traditional Jewish beliefs, while confronting the reality of death with its implications. Within the *inclusio* of 1:2 and 12:8, there seems to be two frames of reference which dictate Qohelet's maxim in his monologic discourse: (1) *under the sun* and (2) the reality of *death*.

First of all, everything that Qohelet observes happens "under the sun" (תחת השמש). The phrase תחת השמש is unique to Qohelet and occurs twenty-nine times only in Ecclesiastes.[460] His use of the phrase appears deliberate. A few times Qohelet also uses another phrase תחת השמים "under the heavens,"[461] which distinguishes between

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[459] On the issue of this English translation for modern readers and an analysis of the meaning of הבל will be discussed in due course.

[460] The phrase "under the sun" also appears in two Phoenician tablets dated early 5th century BCE (*KAI* 13:7–8; 14:11–12) and in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Tablet III.iv.6–8, *ANET*, p. 79). It is, therefore, probably not a loan phrase from Greek ὑφ' ἡλίῳ as some suggest. See Ranston, *Ecclesiastes*, 55; contra E. H. Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes; or, the Preacher, with Notes and Introduction* (CBSC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1881), 104.

[461] In 1:13; 2:3; 3:1. Similar expressions מתחת השמים (8 times), תחת כל־השמים (7 times) and Aramaic תחות שמיא (once in Jer 10:11) appear elsewhere in the OT. Most scholars do not see any difference between "under the sun" and "under heaven" in their meaning, but a few scholars think that there is a subtle difference and nuance in each phrase. E.g., Seow notes, relating to the Phoenician tablets mentioned above, that "the expression 'under the sun' is associated with the realm of the living and contrasted with 'a resting place with the shades.' . . . Thus, 'under the sun' is simply the realm of the living—'this world' as opposed to the netherworld (which is without the sun). . . . In other words, 'under the heavens' simply means the cosmos (a term of universality), whereas 'under the sun' is a

divine and human domains in 5:1 [ET 2]: God is *in* heaven, but humans are on earth, namely, *under* heaven. Qohelet predominantly and emphatically uses his unique phrase תחת השמש along with the virtually synonymous על־הארץ "on the earth."[462] It is clear that Qohelet's main concern and focus lie in the sphere of the human domain: their existence, activities, and things of this world,[463] namely all things sublunary, whether he uses תחת השמש, תחת השמים, or על־הארץ.

Secondly, Qohelet cannot but help reflecting on one fact of life, "death," in all his activities and observations. No one can escape death, and all die on this planet. What people generally prefer to do is avoid the subject of death altogether in thoughts or words, if at all possible, and focus on life's necessities and activities in normal circumstances. To Qohelet, however, "death" seems to be not a simple, matter-of-course, happenstance (מקרה)[464] that he can easily accept, lightly brush aside, or forget about. Qohelet brings this uncomfortable subject to the forefront in his monologic discourse as if to impress upon his listener that one must think and face death's reality at all times in everything one does. Qohelet has a lot to say about death, but he does not offer any new solution to the problem of death and its unwanted effects on human life. After all is said and done, his utterance—"Eat, drink, and enjoy yourself"—is almost an absurdly mundane commendation. The subject of death itself or Qohelet's resolution to enjoy life while one can is nothing new. What seems extreme or shocking to many people when they read Ecclesiastes is probably not so much to do with the content of Qohelet's monologue but the fact that Qohelet so brazenly and squarely faces death and openly expresses his view of it and its consequences. This may be one of the reasons scholars tend to focus on probing the enigmatic character rather than on investigating the what and why of death in Qohelet's monologic discourse. But a key to understanding Qohelet and therefore Ecclesiastes' message

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term for 'this world' as opposed to the netherworld (see 9:6)." One should note, however, that Qohelet does not make the contrast as Phoenicians do but his contrast is realms of between God (in heaven) and humans (on earth), and that the netherworld or Sheol is also under the sun. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 105; for a helpful discussion on this subject, see Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 253–57.

[462] Seven times in 5:1 [Et 2]; 8:14, 16: 10:7; 11:2, 3; 12:7. See Qohelet's use of the phrase "on the earth" in parallel with "under the sun" in his monologue, e.g., in 8:14–17. Ranston, *Ecclesiastes*, 55; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 156; Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 44; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 220.

[463] Cf. Ps 115:16. Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 254–55; J. Stafford Wright, "The Interpretation of Ecclesiastes," in *Reflecting with Solomon. Selected Essays on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (ed. Zuck; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994 [originally published in *Evangelical Quarterly* 18 (1946), 18–34]), 19; Azize, "Considering," 190–92; S. Sims, "Problems with Ecclesiastes . . . ?," *KTR* 12 (1989): 50. Sims notes that Targum prefixes the phrase "under the sun" with another phrase "in this world" to imply the existence of another life.

[464] Cf. Ruth 2:3; 1 Sam 6:9; 20:26. On מקרה in Ecclesiastes, *vide infra*.

may lie in closer attention to the content of Qohelet's utterance of, and his obsession with, *death*.

3.1 Qohelet's View of Death

Qohelet is obsessed with death—the crux and the archenemy of life on earth. The root word מות "death/die" appears fifteen times in Ecclesiastes,[465] admittedly not as many as other favourite terms that Qohelet uses.[466] However, Schoors rightly notes: "Although in all these instances these lexemes simply refer to the fact of dying or the state of death, from the contexts in which they occur, it appears that 'death' plays a major role in Qoh."[467] This is apparent from references to death in almost every chapter in Ecclesiastes, although the term death itself may not appear: for example, 1:4, 11; 5:15–16; 6:3–6; 9:10, 11:8–12:7,[468] besides those direct references to מות listed above. No one in the OT so poignantly and acutely feels and expresses the sting of death as Qohelet does. Incredibly, death constantly preoccupies Qohelet's mind while he is not even dying as he speaks about it. "Nowhere else is death the theological problem that it is for Qoheleth," notes Burkes.[469] What makes Qohelet's view of death unique also has to do with his use of certain terms such as מקרה, הבל, or הכל in association to express what death is or does, as will soon become apparent in the following discussion. Context-rich language characterizes Qohelet's monologue.

This section analyses why Qohelet is so obsessed with death and how his view of death influences and shapes his attitude towards life and his view of divine justice.

3.1.1 One Fate for All

Qohelet makes Ecclesiastes unique among all other books in the OT with three aspects by: (a) his character; (b) his message; and (c) his language. It is the last of the three which makes an accurate interpretation of the book most challenging. Qohelet

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[465] Nine times as verb: 2:16; 3:2; 4:2 [bis]; 7:17; 9:3, 4, 5 [bis]; and six times as noun: 3:19 [bis]; 7:1, 26; 8:8; 10:1.

[466] For a simple list of some recurring and important lexemes, see Peter Enns, "Ecclesiastes 1: Book Of," *DOTWPW*:130–31; for a more comprehensive and thorough treatise, see Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth. Part II, Vocabulary* (OLA 143; Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

[467] Schoors, *Preacher II*, 205.

[468] Slightly different from the list of Burkes, *Death*, in n. 100, p. 59. She writes that chapter 10 is without even one verse on death. Obviously she does not count זבובי מות in 10:1, referring to death.

[469] Ibid., 74; the most recent treatment of the subject of death in Ecclesiastes, see Christoph Berner, "Evil and Death in the Book of Qohelet," in *Evil and Death: Conceptions of the Human in Biblical, Early Jewish, Greco-Roman and Egyptian Literature* (eds. Ego and Mittmann; DCLS 18; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 57-73.

uses a number of terms which are peculiar to him in their own right along with known words in his own idiosyncratic meaning.[470] One of the words which Qohelet specifically uses in relation to death is מקרה "accident, chance, happenstance," namely, "what happens" by chance. Qohelet's use of the term מקרה therefore needs to be clearly understood before one can discuss Qohelet's view of death in his monologue.[471]

The term מקרה is a known word but rarely occurs in the OT,[472] of which seven occurrences are in Ecclesiastes (2:14, 15; 3:19 [tris]; 9:2, 3) and the other three in Ruth 2:3; 1 Sam 6:9; 20:26. The term מקרה conveys an unexpected occurrence that one can neither foresee, nor control, nor frequently understand the reason for it at the time of occurrence. It usually happens "by itself w/o any assistance or wish of person involved, w/o any known originator"[473] to a person. This is how the term is used in Ruth and 1 Samuel: that is, by chance Ruth happened (ויקר מקרה)[474] to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz (Ruth 2:3b). In 1 Sam 6:9, the Philistine diviners tried to determine whether their recent national disasters happened by Yahweh's hand or by chance (מקרה הוא "it is a chance"). Similarly, Saul attributed David's first absence from a cultic meal to an accident (מקרה הוא) in 1 Sam 20:26.

The term מקרה in Ecclesiastes is often translated as "fate," rather than a "chance" or a simple "happening" in the English Bibles. The precise term "fate," however, does not appear to exist in Hebrew.[475] How then does the term carry this connotation in Qohelet's use? When Qohelet uses מקרה specifically related to death, he attaches a modifier אחד to mean "same," the commonality, not the singularity, of event[476] that

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[470] Schoors lists sixty-one words which are idiosyncratic (29) or typical of Qohelet (32) and forty words which appear only in Ecclesiastes in Schoors, *Preacher II*, 3–196, 197–260, and 423–70.

[471] See Peter Machinist, "Fate, *miqreh*, and Reason: Some Reflections on Qohelet and Biblical Thought," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (eds. Zevit, et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 159–75 for Qohelet's unique use of the term.

[472] Ten occurrences in total. The verb קרה occurs three times in 2:14, 15, and 9:11 with another word פגע for "chance."

[473] William L. Holladay, *CHALOT*:213; see also Machinist, "Fate," 169.

[474] ויקר מקרה literally means "her chance happened": Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 140–41, paraphrases it "as luck would have it." Without Ruth's knowledge she happened to step in to Boaz's field by lucky chance. In Ecclesiastes *figura etymologica* appears in 2:14 (שמקרה אחד יקרה) and 2:15 (כמקרה הכסיל גם־אני יקרני); cf. 9:11 (ופגע יקרה). *Vide infra*.

[475] Another Hebrew term פקדה (Num 16:29) which is translated "fate" in ESV/NASB, is derived from its meaning "visitation, punishment" (*vide infra*).

[476] Of 19 occurrences of אחד (including two f. form), 7 relates to death or life breath and means "same": מקרה אחד (2:14; 3:19; 9:2, 3); מקום אחד (3:20; 6:6); רוח אחד (3:19). All other occurrences not relating to death has the meaning "one."

happens to *all* human beings (מקרה אחד לכל).[477] Numerous events can happen to humankind. Some among them may be the same event that happens to different people. The same event, however, may or may not happen to everyone. But one event which happens unequivocally without fail to all living beings is none other than death, and only death among all events befalls all. It is the "fate" of all the living—humans, animals, and plants. Even if Qohelet does not use the term מות itself, he means death by מקרה אחד because only death is truly common human experience. Therefore, in Ecclesiastes Qohelet apparently uses מקרה, especially מקרה אחד, connoting "death,"[478] while drawing on its semantically traditional meaning.

Qohelet probably labels death מקרה because it is an occurrence that happens beyond human control or understanding; it can occur unexpectedly, and happens "by itself without any assistance or wish of person involved," just as the term מקרה normally means. In a strict sense, however, death is not an unexpected occurrence, because it befalls all living beings and every person knows that he will die someday. Death in Qohelet's view certainly is not "the example par excellence for everything 'contingent' and 'not at one's disposal' that a person *can* 'encounter' (קרה)."[479] Qohelet does not say by מקרה that death is simply a chance happening that *can* occur. Instead, he reinforces his view by מקרה אחד, saying that death is the "common event" that *does* happen to all without exception, and thus rightly connotes "fate."

Qohelet uses another term פגע "occurrence, chance" when the matter is not related to death (9:11), which may or may not happen, clearly making a distinction between death by מקרה and other chance happenings by פגע:[480]

> שבתי וראה תחת־השמש[481] כי לא לקלים המרוץ ולא לגבורים המלחמה וגם לא לחכמים לחם וגם לא לנבנים עשר וגם לא לידעים חן כי־עת ופגע יקרה את־כלם[482]:

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[477] *Vide infra* specifically in 9:2–3; also see 2:14 (שמקרה אחד יקרה את־כלם).

[478] Machinist, "Fate," 170; Hengel, *Judentum*, 220 [ET 119].

[479] „Vielmehr ist der Tod das Beispiel *par excellence* für alles ››Kontingente‹‹ und ››Unverfügbare‹‹, das den Menshcen ››treffen‹‹ kann". Krüger, *Kohelet*, 144 [ET 69]. Emphasis in English translation added.

[480] LXX translates פגע: ἀπάντημα; מקרה: συνάντημα (all in Eccl), περίπτωμα (Ruth 2:3), σύμπτωμα (1Sa 6:9; 20:26); קרה: περιπίπτω (Ruth), συναντάω (Eccl). It is extraordinary both מקרה and קרה are translated differently in the three books where they occur.

[481] Literally, "I turned so to see under the sun that." The translation shown in the text is preferable. Gordis, *Man*, 308, notes that "תחת השמש is an instance of 'anticipation,' the phrase being drawn from the subordinate to the main clause, שבתי וראה תחת השמש כי לא לקלים המרוץ."

[482] את־כלם here probably points to every category of people, but could also be every event/thing, mentioned in the verse. Cf. Schoors, *Preacher II*, 7.

> Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the mighty, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favour to the knowledgeable; for time and chance befall them all. (9:11)

He makes a point that the swift, the strong, the wise, the intelligent or the knowledgeable do not always win the race, battle, bread, wealth, or favour as expected, but rather their success or failure depends on chance and time.[483] He seems to say that (mis)fortunes[484] in human life are governed by time and sheer chance, but humans do not know when they happen:

> כי גם[485] לא־ידע האדם את־עתו[486] כדגים שנאחזים במצודה רעה[487] וכצפרים האחזות בפח כהם יוקשים בני האדם[488] לעת רעה כשתפול עליהם פתאם:

> For humans do not even know their time: like fish which are caught in a bad net, and like birds trapped in a bird trap, so[489] humans are ensnared at a bad time when it suddenly falls on them. (9:12)

Those (mis)fortunes may or may not occur to everyone. In contrast, Qohelet uses מקרה as saying it happens to *all* and emphasizes it with אחד, the "same, common" event

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[483] Cf. Prov 13:15a; 14:24; 21:20. Interesting to note here is that participants in each activity is in plural but the desired result is in a single form. It seems to imply that many can strive for a reward, but it is available only to one winner, and Qohelet here alludes the winning is up to time and chance, not to their ability or merit.

[484] One other occurrence of the noun פגע (with רע) in 1 Kgs 5:18 denotes misfortune. Schoors, *Preacher II*, 410, notes "the root פגע, 'meet, encounter, reach', is neutral, and that is the case for פֶּגַע, as well as for its Greek equivalent in the LXX, ἀπάντημα." However, it tends to carry negative connotations in Postbiblical Hebrew, see Marcus Jastrow, *DTTBYML*:1135.

[485] For emphatic גם with כי here, see Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth. Part I, Grammar* (OLA 41; Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 133–34.

[486] Kamano, *Cosmology*, 207, notes: If 9:12 is explaining the preceding verse, the suffix of עתו may refer to פגע. עת רעה "evil time," or more likely "the time of misfortune," which does not necessarily signify death as v. 11 indicates, and 9:12b gives further examples of fish and birds caught by a net/snare. However פגע in v. 11 points back to every event described in the verse (כלם) which is a much closer antecedent of עתו than פגע and makes sense: "its/their time."

[487] רע here does not have an ethical connotation of "evil": i.e., "grievous" or "bad, unpleasant, giving pain, unhappiness, misery," *BDB*:948. The term רע/ה appears 32 times in both masculine רע (15) and feminine רעה (3) adjective forms as well as feminine (13) and masculine (1) nouns in the book. Qohelet utters all but one (12:14) of their occurrences with both ethical and non-ethical meanings. Ten of them have a clear ethical/moral meaning (7:15; 8:6, 8:11 with רעה [n. f.]; 4:3, 17; 8:3, 11, 12; 9:3; 12:14 with רע [m. adj.], and the context of 8:5, 9 connotes an ethical/moral meaning. Both רעה and רע appears in 8:11 with an ethical/moral meaning. Reason for using both forms in the same sentence without any difference in meaning or function is not clear. Timothy K. Beal, "C(ha)osmopolis: Qohelet's Last Words," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (eds. Linafelt and Beal; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 295; Schoors, *Preacher II*, 77, 145–52 (1.15 רַע, רָעָה), notes that "עשה רע always has an ethical connotation." In contrast, the term טוב/ה appears 45 times in both masculine טוב (29) and feminine טובה (3) adjective forms and masculine noun (13); טוב and רע appear in the same sentence for only two times (8:12; 12:14) in Ecclesiastes.

[488] Literally, "the sons of man." Interestingly, in Ecclesiastes (ה)אדם appears 49 times, of which 10 times are without an article, and occurs predominantly with a general sense of "human being, man." For those cases, both (ה)אדם and בני האדם will be translated as "human(s), human being(s)" or collectively "humankind" in this thesis.

[489] Literally, כהם "like them." Some emend כהם יוקשים as כה מיוקשים (Podechard, Hertzberg, Gordis), see Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 308.

connoting death, which is not a sheer “chance happening.”[490] Rudman describes the difference as: “If such events which determine the outcome of one's efforts are not coordinated, then they may be denoted by the term ‘chance’. If they are coordinated in some way, then the outcome of one’s actions are [*sic*] subject to Fate.”[491] Rudman maintains that פגע is still divinely predetermined because he presupposes Qohelet’s determinism. Rather, the difference seems that death is a sure thing, but a misfortune does not always happen. Death is fate because it *does* occur to everyone regardless.

Qohelet, for example, pronounces that the same event befalls all humans, be they wise or foolish, righteous or wicked, pious or impious (2:14; 9:2, 3); and humans share the same fate even with animals (3:19).[492] An unmistakable reference to death as the common event מקרה which happens to both the wise and the fool in 2:14 is explained by the following vv. 16–17; both alike die and are forgotten:

> החכם עיניו בראשו והכסיל בחשך הולך וידעתי גם־אני[493] שמקרה אחד יקרה את־כלם:
> ואמרתי אני בלבי כמקרה הכסיל גם־אני יקרני ולמה חכמתי אני אז[494] יותר ודברתי
> בלבי שגם־זה הבל: כי אין זכרון לחכם עם־הכסיל[495] לעולם[496] בשכבר[497] הימים
> הבאים[498] הכל[499] נשכח ואיך ימות החכם עם־הכסיל: ושנאתי את־החיים כי רע עלי
> המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש כי־הכל הבל ורעות רוח:[500]

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[490] Schoors, *Preacher II*, 204, although some biblical texts seem to describe exceptions, as already noted.

[491] See Dominic Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup 316; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 34–40, for his analysis of מקרה and פגע.

[492] Schoors, *Preacher II*, 276.

[493] גם here is often translated in an adversative sense as “yet.” Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 93, notes that it should come at the beginning of the sentence, if it were adversative, but not always, see 4:8. Of 28 occurrences of the phrase גם־אני in the OT, in almost all instances גם modifies אני and is translated “I also,” “even I,” or “I myself,” with a possible exception of Job 7:11. In the verse here ו of וידעתי logically serves as adversative and the phrase may be translated as “I also” or “I myself.” Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 134–35, unnecessarily interprets both ו and גם as adversative.

[494] Logical “then” with a conclusive force. See Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 93–94; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 185. Some MSS of LXX omit the word according to different division of the passage, but it is confirmed by Jerome in his commentary (*tunc*). Historically scholars found difficulty with it but it seems straightforward for interpretation if אז and יותר are treated separately rather than as connected to each other. יותר: adv. “exceedingly, extremely,” modifying חכמתי. Cf. 7:16. For other use of יותר (noun) in Ecclesiastes *vide infra*.

[495] עם: “(compared) with = as well as, just as much as (Gen 18:23) = like (Ps 73:5 Job 9:26)” *CHALOT*:275.

[496] The term עולם occurs seven times in Qohelet’s monologue (1:4, 10; 2:16; 3:11, 14; 9:6; 12:5). Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 61, notes: “It does never mean ‘eternity’ in the traditional philosophical sense, but it rather refers to the remote ages in the past as well as in the future, a connotation that may include the sense of an unlimited duration and of invariabilty [*sic*].” Qohelet’s use of עולם is always temporal in meaning and is suggestive of the time span of “existence” (or non-existence if in a negative statement). Antoon Schoors, “Theodicy in Qohelet,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (eds. Moor and Laato; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 382.

[497] ב + ש + כבר. בש = באשר (7:2; 8:4) “inasmuch . . . already” or “because . . . already.”

[498] Many interpret הימים הבאים “the coming days” or “the days to come,” pointing to the future. Qohelet puts himself at a point in the future and looks back (McNeile, *Ecclesiastes*, 60); thus the pf. verb may be used as future perfect: “will have been forgotten” (Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 94). If the tense of הבאים is

The eyes of the wise are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness; and yet I know that one fate befalls both of them. Then I said in my heart, "As (is) the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said in my heart that this too is futility. For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise as well as the fool, because already the days have come when all have been forgotten; and how the wise dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because the work which has been done under the sun is grievous to me, for everything is futility and chasing after wind. (2:14–17)

Death as the same fate of all human beings regardless of their moral/ethical or religious conducts is inferred in 9:2–3 "for all have the same fate . . . and after that (after their life) they go to the dead":

הכל כאשר לכל[501] מקרה אחד לצדיק ולרשע לטוב ולטהור ולטמא ולזבח ולאשר איננו זבח כטוב כחטא הנשבע כאשר שבועה ירא: זה רע בכל אשר־נעשה תחת השמש כי־מקרה אחד לכל וגם לב בני־האדם מלא־רע והוללות בלבבם בחייהם ואחריו אל־המתים[502]:

It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked, for the good, and for the clean and for the unclean, for him who sacrifices and for him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; one who swears is as one who is afraid of an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun that there is one fate for all. Moreover, the heart of humans is full of evil and madness is in their hearts during their lives; and after that—they go to the dead! (9:2–3)

Death as the common fate between humans and animals is defined by the clause כמות זה כן מות זה "as one dies so dies the other" in 3:19b and by 3:20 "All go to the same place. All are from the dust and all return to the dust," meaning they all alike die:

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dictated by נשכח, it translates to "because already the days have come when all (or both: the wise and the fool) have been forgotten," which may be more straightforward.

[499] A small word כל "all, every, each, the whole" is Qohelet's favourite word, by far the most frequently used among all other terms. Total occurrences of כל in Ecclesiastes are ninety-one, and appear in three forms: הכל, כלם, and כל. Qohelet often uses הכל to mean "both" after he compares or contrasts two distinct, often antithetical, entities, which come to naught by the same מקרה, i.e., death. Cf. Schoors, *Preacher II*, 3–10.

[500] The term רוח appears 24 times in Ecclesiastes, of which 13 times Qohelet apparently utters רוח to mean "wind" and 11 times as "breath" or "spirit" (3:19, 21 [bis]; 7:8 [bis], 9; 8:8 [bis]; 10:4; 11:5; 12:7), although meanings may be interchangeable according to how one interprets each text. Cf. Schoors, ibid., 161, counts 16 occurrences as "wind" and 8 instances as "breath/spirit." Twenty-one occurrences of רוח in Ecclesiastes are f. noun, but in 1:6 [bis] and 3:19, m. noun; the usage seems to be arbitrary. The meaning of רוח "wind, breath, spirit, or life" comes from its primary meaning "air" and secondarily derived from "air in motion." S. Tengström and H.-J. Fabry, "רוּחַ," *TDOT* 13:365–402 [esp. 368]. On רעות רוח, *vide infra*.

[501] Literally, "everything is as that is to everyone."

[502] ואחריו אל־המתים: Literally, "and after that to the dead" or "and to the dead after that." אחריו, literally "after him" or "after that." The 3m./sg. suffix does not agree with בחייהם, is thus considered a fossilized suffix like יחדיו and interpreted as "afterwards" (Ehrlich, Levy, Gordis, Schoors), but this is not convincing because "afterward(s)" is usually expressed by אחר or אחריי־כן in the OT. Krüger, *Kohelet*, 299 [ET 166–67], interprets "each one of the previously named 'human beings'." Rather it may be each one of their lives (בחייהם).

כי מקרה בני־האדם ומקרה הבהמה ומקרה אחד להם כמות זה כן מות זה ורוח אחד[503]
לכל[504] ומותר[505] האדם מן־הבהמה אין כי הכל הבל[506]: הכל הולך אל־מקום אחד[507]
הכל היה מן־העפר והכל שב אל־העפר[508]:

For the fate of humans and the fate of the animal—they have the same (one) fate. As one dies so dies the other, for all have the same breath, and there is no advantage for humankind over the animal; indeed, all are fleeting. All go to the same place: all are from the dust and all return to the dust. (3:19–20)[509]

Qohelet says that there is an appropriate or appointed time to die: עת ללדת ועת למות "A time to give birth and a time to die" (3:2) but it is not clear whether or not he means it to be "predetermined," as many scholars presume. Qohelet never says that death is a מתת אלהים,[510] something that God has ordained or allotted to humans as he indicates that life and חלק "portion" is a *gift* of God. He does not call death חלק or מתת from God. An implication that human wickedness brings death to humans can be traced in his utterances (7:16–17, 20, 29), the last of which may be an allusion to Genesis 3 (*vide infra*). Moreover, he seems to mean in 7:17 that human behaviours affect or change the actual timing of one's death:

אל־תרשע הרבה[511] ואל־תהי סכל למה תמות בלא עתך:

Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool. Why die before your time?[512]

Qohelet believes that God sets an appointed time for every event (3:1–8, 11, 17; 8:6). The question: "Why die before your time?" (17c) presupposes that time of one's death

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[503] ורוח אחד: Literally, "one spirit" or "one breath." It is the life-giving breath that God breathes or places into His creatures so that they become living beings. It is the same רוח in 12:7b.

[504] כל in this verse probably means "both" human and animal.

[505] Noun from יתר "remain over", thus related to יותר and יתרון. LXX read מותר as מה יתר, a question to which the answer is אין "nothing, nought" and very frequently as particle of negation "not." אין appears 44 times in Eccl, a sign of Qohelet's negativism. Here at the final position of the clause is for emphasis: "The advantage of human over the animal *there is not*" (Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 305).

[506] Graham S. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (2nd ed.; RNBC; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 61–62. כי הכל הבל here is most likely indicating brevity of life, both human and animal. Qohelet's acute sense for the brevity of life is expressed in 2:3; 5:17 [ET 18]; 6:12; 9:9. Qohelet most likely does not mean that life itself is הבל. More on הבל, *vide infra*. כי is asseverative here, rather than causal, a concluding statement.

[507] מקום אחד here denotes the earth, "which, as in ch. 6[6], is conceived as the great cemetery" says Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 109. Clearly it is not Sheol from the immediate explanation followed, thus Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste*, 311, is correct; contra Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 306. Qohelet here seems speaking about the destination of both human and animal corpses: the earth, because both are made from the dust of the earth.

[508] Cf. Gen 3:19: עפר אתה ואל־עפר תשוב.

[509] Cf. Ps 49:11–13, 21 [ET 10–12, 20]: "Man cannot abide in his pomp, he is like the beasts that perish" (RSV).

[510] See 3:13; 5:18 [ET 19]. מתת: a noun form of נתן. The term מתת means "gift" or "reward" of God (*BDB*:682), but Qohelet may mean "allotment" or "appropriation" by this rare noun; cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 21; Schoors, *Preacher II*, 93–98. Qohelet almost equates מתת with חלק. More on מתת and נתן *vide infra*.

[511] An adverb: "much, too much, excessively."

[512] בלא עתך: literally, "when not your time."

may already be prescribed but can be altered. The warning not to be too wicked in v. 17 implies excessive wickedness can hasten one's death—to premature or untimely death. It is then a kind of death that one can avoid (by will/choice). There is a time to die, but Qohelet apparently supposes that God can change it according to how humans behave.[513] These verses indicate that Qohelet does not deny freedom of human will or choice to be too righteous or too wicked, which is contrary to determinism. He apparently recognizes God's sovereign power over His creation and an appropriate time for every event, but he does not say whether or not the appropriate time is predetermined. What is clear is that humans do not know their time. Qohelet probably calls death מקרה "what happens" to all the living under the sun, also because its timing is unpredictable and may be changeable. He is certain that death is a human "fate" but seems not sure if its actual timing is predetermined. Qohelet's מקרה has deterministic undertones but his view of death (and God's sovereignty) is probably more of "absolutism" rather than "determinism"—in the sense of "certainty," but not necessarily "predetermined" especially with regard to time.

Qohelet's label of מקרה on death, however, does not appear to be a resignation but more a frustration, or perhaps a protestation, because Qohelet apparently values life but loathes death: In his comment on 11:7, "The light is sweet, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun" (ומתוק האור וטוב לעינים לראות את־השמש[514]), Barton notes:

> The pessimistic mood of ch. 4[3], which had passed away from Qoheleth when he wrote 9[4] has not returned. He recognizes in this verse the *primal delight of mere living*.[515]

Gordis describes Qohelet as a man with "a passionate love of life."[516] In fact, the term חי "alive, living" (21 times) appears more than מות "death/die" in Qohelet's monologic discourse, even if the ever-present threat of death overshadows his view of everything in life. Qohelet does not seem to do anything halfway or half-heartedly but with zest for life. He is not a reclusive philosopher or merely a wise man who did not engage in active affairs, but simply observed the world around him, before he reached his view of life and death. Qohelet claims to have engaged in many activities and excelled in

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[513] See, e.g., Exod 32:14; Amos 7:3; Jon 3:9–10; cf. Isa 37: 1-5; however, Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29. See also R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 107–43, for a thoughtful treatment on נחם in chapter 4: "Does God Change?"

[514] ראה השמש "to see the sun" means "to live" (also cf. 6:5; 7:11; Ps 58:9 [ET 8], חזו שמש). Schoors, *Preacher II*, 59–60.

[515] Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 184. Emphasis added. On 4:3 and 9:4 *vide infra*.

[516] Gordis, *Man*, 78.

whatever he did (2:3–10). He has set out to gain far more surplus than required for his present necessity so that he may have no want in any area of his life and perpetually enjoy all the good that life offers materially or otherwise. His well-versed familiarity with economic terms betrays his motivation and pursuit, as if being an astute "entrepreneur."[517] Energy and vigour in his activities manifest his love of life and seem unrivalled by his contemporaries.[518] Qohelet has succeeded in all kinds of enterprises that he undertook, most astonishingly for a king, with his own hands and for his own benefits.[519] He has sought pleasures that his heart and eyes desired and did not deny himself anything as a reward for all his labour (2:1, 10). Qohelet was driven to work and did not seem to know any other way to achieve life's satisfaction than to accumulate surpluses from his toil.

After all his toil and endeavours, however, it dawns on this high achiever that there is one formidable obstacle in the way of all his accomplishment: death (2:18–20). No matter what things, wisdom, or knowledge Qohelet acquires, his destiny is no different from any other, having no more advantage than anyone else against death. Death waits for him just as it does for everyone else in its own time, and Qohelet has no power or means to circumvent or swerve from it. His wealth, power, or wisdom guarantees nothing and comes to naught when death knocks at his door. He has no control over his destiny because there is no exception to death's rule. In desperation Qohelet cries out, "I hated life" (2:17), not because he does not wish to live, but because he will die sooner or later and be forgotten just like the fool. He realizes that there is no reason to work harder or be wiser than anybody else for that matter. There is no difference between the wise like himself and the fool he despises, since death catches up with both of them (2:14–16). Wright is surely correct when he says: "Death can make a man hate life not because he wants to die, but because it renders life so futile."[520] Neither life nor death is under one's own jurisdiction.

In another instance Qohelet utters, "I hated all my toil" (2:18), but Qohelet also exhorts his audience to enjoy their toil, the simple act of eating or drinking, and life with their spouses (5:17 [ET 18]; 9:9). He even urges: "Everything that your hand finds to do, do it *with all your might* (בכחך)" (9:10a). Qohelet never discounts the

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[517] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 22.
[518] 1:16; 2:9; cf. 1 Kgs 10:7.
[519] In 2:4–9 Qohelet uses the phrase לי "for myself" nine times: 2:4 [bis], 5, 6, 7 [bis], 8 [bis], 9.
[520] Wright, "Ecclesiastes," 25; Jastrow, *Cynic*, 137, notes: "Koheleth may talk about hating life . . . but he does not really think this."

value of labour; neither does he deny the wealth of all that he has acquired. In fact, he very much wishes to keep what he has acquired with his toil. What Qohelet hates is not his toil or its fruit, but the cruel reality of death which terminates his control and ownership of all that he has gained, while passing his possessions to whoever comes after him. His expressions of "hate" are likely his exasperation over the futility that death brings into his life and toil.

However short or fleeting life may be, Qohelet affirms that life is better than death. Even the lowest of the low, a live dog is better than a dead lion, he declares:

כי־מי אשר יבחר[521] אל כל־החיים יש בטחון[522] כי־לכלב חי הוא טוב מן־האריה המת:

> For whoever is joined with all the living, there is hope; surely a live dog is better than a dead lion. (9:4)[523]

The living *still* has hope, even if one may hate his toil because what he gets is more often pain, grief, and restless night than the reward that he should enjoy (2:22–23), and even wisdom does not bring the desired result, because the more wisdom, the more aggravation it brings, and the more knowledge, the more pain (1:17–18). After all, life is where the action is, whereas there is no activity in death (cf. 9:10); therefore, he never says, "I want to die" or "I would rather be dead." In Qohelet's mind suicide never seems an option for anyone even in despair or in a horrific life situation. Qohelet congratulates the one who is already dead or a miscarried infant only under a specific circumstance such as severely undue oppression (4:2–3),[524] but never hints at suicide.[525] On the contrary, Qohelet exhorts his audience to enjoy what

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[521] Qere יחבר has many versions support: Heb. MSS, LXX, and Syr.

[522] Only two other occurrences in OT: 2 Kgs 18:19; Isa 36:4 "trust, confidence"; here most translate "hope."

[523] In spite of the textual difficulty (K/Q: יחבר/יבחר; and a question of לכלב as subject, although ל of לכלב is most likely emphatic as "*even* a dog"), the gist of the message is clear: what is alive is better than what is dead—a contrast between life and death. The dog was always despised in the OT (Deut 23:19 [ET 18]; 1 Sam 17:43; 24:14; 2 Sam 3:8; 9:8; 16:9; Job 30:1; Prov 26:11), whereas the lion was considered kingly and was feared (Gen 49:9; 2 Sam 17:10; Job 4:10–11; Amos 3:8; Mic 5:7). Cf. Gordis, *Man*, 305; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 662–64; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 300. See E. Kautzsch ed, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (2nd ed., GKC; Oxford: Clarendon, 1910. Repr., Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006), §143e for emphatic ל.

[524] However, not in 6:3–4.

[525] Charles Colson, *The Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 193, notes: "The philosopher Albert Camus faced life's possible absurdity without God and determined that the first philosophical question anyone should ask is whether to commit suicide," but certainly not Qohelet. Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Ecclesiastes 3:1–15: Another Interpretation," *JSOT* 20 (1995): 55–64, in which Blenkinsopp interprets עת ללדת ועת למות in 3:2a as "a time to give birth and a time to put an end to one's life," thus hinting a suicide by a Stoic influence (B. thinks 3:2–8 is not authored by Qohelet but a quotation from a stoicizing Jewish sage). If the writer meant as 'to put to death" or "kill," he should have used the verb מות in Hiphil or Hophal rather than Qal form, or another verb להרוג as in 3:3. Many scholars, therefore,

God has allotted to humankind: toil during fleeting life.[526] He even declares it good and fitting in 5:17 [ET 18], as if finding enjoyment in toil should be the purpose of living, for what else is there for people to do (cf. Gen 3:17b)? What one can enjoy now has become far more important to Qohelet than what one wishes to continue after death with no guarantee, because life now is all that one has in Qohelet's view.

Qohelet's concern over death seems to have foreshadowed his dismal view of the traditional Israelite belief for what "good life" constitutes, such as death in ripe old age with a proper burial, continuance of one's life through descendants, or remembrance by later generations.[527] Israelites regarded being able to keep their family name and property through descendants as a sign of God's blessing and a reward for the righteous. Having riches and wealth but not having an heir is basically a curse and a disgrace in ancient Israelite society.[528] Qohelet argues, however, saying:

> אם־יוליד איש מאה ושנים רבות יחיה ורב[529] שיהיו ימי־שניו ונפשו לא־תשבע מן־
> הטובה וגם־קבורה[530] לא־היתה לו[531] אמרתי טוב ממנו הנפל[532]: כי־בהבל[533] בא ובחשך

take ללדת as intransitive and passive in meaning ("to be born"). It is not necessary, however: The phrase 2a may mean "a time to give birth (give a [new] life) and a time to die (give up life)"; and giving up life can involuntarily occur through sickness, old age, accident, war, or God's punishment; it does not have to be voluntary such as through suicide. It is a God-ordained appropriate time for one to die. Humans do not have control over time of birth or death: they may approximate, set, or guess such a time but can never control the exact timing and make such event happen at one's disposal including suicide. James L. Crenshaw, "The Shadow of Death in Qoheleth," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien* (ed. Gammie; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 216 (n. 36), notes that, outside Israel, suicide was endorsed by pessimists in the ancient Near East; see, e.g., "The Dispute Between a Man and His Ba" in Lichtheim, *AEL1*, 163–69. See also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 160; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 236–37.

[526] Possible allusion to Gen 3:17: The human will toil in all his life which God has allotted.

[527] Qohelet thinks there is no longevity in human remembrance. See 1:11; 2:16; 9:5; 9:15.

[528] See Gen 30:1, 23; 1 Sam 1:1–20; 2 Sam 6:13–23; 2 Kgs 4:8–17; Isa 47:8–9; Hos 9:11–16. Krüger, *Kohelet*, 236 [ET 125].

[529] Defective concord between ורב (sg.) and שיהיו ימי־שניו (pl.), although not unusual in Qohelet's monologue.

[530] קבורה means "proper, dignified burial" rather than קבר "grave" (Gordis, *Man*, 258); but Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 211, objects the connotation for the burial rite and interprets it as the place of burial, "burial site." However, the importance of proper burial has been well attested in the OT.

[531] **וגם־קבורה לא־היתה לו:** a difficult clause. The question is to whom לו refers here, איש or הנפל? It can refer to הנפל (n.m.) "miscarriage, stillborn" as well as to איש. Most scholars interpret the clause in the difficult v. 3 as referring to a man (איש), thus translate it "and also he has no burial." The commentators have been perplexed with it because they think Qohelet seemingly puts an unusual emphasis on the proper burial. But Qohelet is taking burial seriously also in 8:10. He does not undermine the significance of proper burial in Israelite society as prescribed in the OT. More perplexing is why the man has no burial if he had הטובה "good things" which should have afforded him to have his burial. Schoors, *Preacher I*, 173, notes that "the perfect היתה follows after a series of imperfect forms in a conditional clause. It seems to express a definitive and lasting fact, after a series of facts that are transitory." Actually, the verb היתה (pf.) should be תהיה (impf.) if לו refers to the man because his burial is still a future event, not past; but it makes *perfect* sense if לו refers to הנפל, for which there was most likely no proper burial in ancient Israel. וגם may be taken as a concessive clause (e.g., Jer 36:25; Ps 95:9; Neh 6:1), and v. 3c can be translated as shown (cf. NAB, 2nd rev). This makes the contrast between a man and a stillborn much more striking: A stillborn with no length of life without burial is

ילך ובחשך שמו יכסה: גם־שמש[534] לא־ראה ולא ידע נחת לזה מזה: ואלו חיה אלף שנים פעמים וטובה לא ראה הלא אל־מקום אחד הכל הולך:

> If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years however many the days of his years may be, but his soul is not satisfied from the good things, then, even if it had no burial, I say the stillborn is better [off] than he, though it comes in *hebel* and goes in darkness; and its name is covered in darkness. Although it has neither seen the sun nor known anything, this one has more rest than the other. Even if he[535] lives a thousand years twice but has not enjoyed good things[536]–do not all[537] go to one place? (6:3–6)

Thus he disputes traditional values of a long life and many children. Moreover, Qohelet considers human memory fleeting and short-lived even with a proper burial (cf. 8:10).[538] All that humans can hope for is enjoyment of good things while they are alive. So Qohelet declares that the stillborn even without burial is better off than a man who enjoys none of the good things of life, because the former may have a better rest without knowing or seeing any evil in life than the latter who sees and experiences evil without enjoying life's good things. The ultimate question that matters to Qohelet is, though, "Do not both (or all) go to the same place?" To Qohelet, living two thousand years or zero makes no difference when both come to an end (6:4).

What counts to Qohelet, therefore, is a life that he lives now, because he can keep working and enjoy the fruit of all his toil under the sun. Qohelet says that he hates life, probably because what is so precious does not last and is taken away from him. That is what is at stake, and he knows that he will lose it, because he believes that all die and go to the same place, which he will say more about later in 9:10. Qohelet finds his total inability to change his מקרה, "what happens" to his life or to his possessions, because neither his wealth nor his wisdom can ransom or redeem his

better off than a man who lives many years with many children but with no enjoyment in life. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 120, 126–27; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 467; cf. Walther Zimmerli, "Das Buch des Predigers Salomo," in *Sprüche/Prediger/Das Hohe Lied/Klagelieder/Das Buch Esther* (eds. Ringgren, et al.; ATD 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 196; and Whitley, *Koheleth*, 57–58, who places the וגם clause after ולא ידע in v. 5; for a concessive clause with גם, see Kautzsch ed, *GKC*, §160b.

532 Cf. Ps 58:9 [ET 8]; Job 3:16.

533 Concessive כי, rather than causal which does not make sense of v. 3c–4: "I say the stillborn is better [off] than he, *because* it comes in vain and goes in darkness; and its name is covered in darkness" (causal). H. L. Ginsberg, "Supplementary Studies in Koheleth," *PAAJR* 21 (1952): 44; Gordis, *Man*, 259, says "כִּי is adversative = 'though'," but probably meant concessive.

534 Concessive גם as in 6:3c. Cf. 2:23.

535 Contextually, a man with a long life and a stillborn is compared through 6:3–6, and therefore a man in v. 3 and here may be the same person.

536 Literally, "has not seen good" (וטובה לא ראה). LXX rendering: ἀγαθωσύνην οὐκ εἶδεν, or do not enjoy good things in 6:6b.

537 Or "both" a man and the stillborn here, although it may also mean inclusive of "all" humans.

538 See also 1:11; 2:16; 9:5; 9:15.

life.[539] What he has gained or accumulated is totally worthless and useless when faced with death.[540] Exactly as he is born, so will he die without being able to take anything with him (5:14 [ET 15]).[541] One fate to all without exception: Everyone is destined to die.

3.1.2 Death, a Leveller

Not only does Qohelet underscore that death is the inescapable fate of humankind, but he also characterizes death as a leveller. In the midst of all the inequities and iniquities due to a huge divide between the oppressors and the oppressed (4:1–3; 8:9) and a disintegration of social order (3:16; 5:7 [ET 8]; 8:10–11),[542] Qohelet ironically finds equality for all the living under the sun in an uncanny twist: death levels and nullifies all distinctions. Not only is death the fate of all on the earth, but it is also non-discriminatory, disregarding every moral, ethical, educational, or material distinction that one may achieve (9:2). All such advantages make no difference: everyone faces death and none is exempted from this equal fate. According to Qohelet, death predicates equality for all to be indistinguishable even between humans and animals (3:18):

> אמרתי אני בלבי על־דברת בני האדם לברם[543] האלהים ולראות שהם־בהמה המה להם[544]:
>
> I said in my heart concerning humans, "God has surely made clear that they see for themselves that they are animal(s)."[545]

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[539] Cf. Ps 49:8–11 [ET 7–10]; Mitchell, "God," 374–75.

[540] Edward Noort, "Death and Justice: Shifting Paradigms in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism," in *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament* (ed. Dell; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 267.

[541] Echo of Job 1:21.

[542] For more on this issue, *vide infra*.

[543] The verb is Qal inf. const. with 3m./pl. suffix of √ברר, "purify, select." In the difficult text, לברם is translated "to test" specifically for this verse, which is neither attested anywhere else in BH, nor makes good sense in the context. Some scholars emend it to לבראם. In *DTTBYML*:197, one finds ברר meaning "to make clear, prove, ascertain"; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 297–99, suggests the MH meaning of "make clear, bring to light" (e.g., *Sabb*, 74a; *Keth*. 46a) for interpreting it here, which perfectly fits the context and makes sense. This thesis concurs, and follows his suggestion, while preserving the MT, interpreting it as Qal pf. with an emphatic ל and God as subject.

[544] ולראות שהם־בהמה המה להם (cf. Ps 49:13, 21 [ET 12, 20]). ולראות Qal inf. const., used as a finite verb with המה (בני האדם) as subject; ש-clause is probably moved to front for emphasis. By changing its vocalization, Hiphil inf. (ולהראות) "to show" with God as subject is also possible, so interprets LXX. Others interpret ולראות as a consec. inf. used for a finite verb in continuation with אמרתי: "and I saw" (Whitley, *Koheleth*, 37; Y. A. P. Goldman, "Qoheleth," in *General Introduction and Megilloth* (eds. Waard, et al.; BHQ 18; Stüttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004), 77*; F. J. Backhaus, *"Den Zeit und Zufall trifft sie alle": Studien zur Komposition und zum Gottesbild im Buch Qohelet* (BBB 83; Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1993), 137–38), but it is unlikely due to the distance between the two verbs; cf. Gordis, *Man*, 237.

Qohelet observes and realizes first-hand how any distinction comes to naught by death which levels and nullifies all differences between right and wrong, between good and bad, or between the wise and a fool. Most disturbing to Qohelet is that everything for which one has laboured does not stay with him but goes to an undeserving other: death unjustly equalizes and razes haves and have-nots.

Qohelet has also increased wisdom (1:16) and has set his mind to know and distinguish wisdom from madness and folly. He has wisely used his mind to seek his pleasure (2:3) and endeavoured to build his fortunes by wisdom (2:4–9). He is convinced that wisdom excels folly (2:13), yet he cannot help but admit that there is one fate that befalls all, regardless of one's intelligence or wisdom. The wise cannot avoid death any more than a fool can. His wisdom becomes as powerless and useless as folly in the face of death. "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me," says Qohelet and realizes that there is no point of being exceedingly wise (2:15). Wisdom and folly are levelled and nullified. Moreover, his wisdom tells him that eventually no one remembers the wise or a fool, especially when he sees how much alike both actually die (2:16). It is not just the fool who will be forgotten, but also the wise, once they die (9:5).

Moreover Qohelet observes that death occasions an unjustifiable effect even before it befalls everyone. He has seen that there is a righteous person perishing in his righteousness and the wicked prolonging his life in his evil doing (7:15): there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous (8:14).

It makes no difference whether one is rich or poor, wise or foolish, just or unjust, king or subject, ruler or peasant, oppressor or oppressed. All die regardless, whether their heart is filled with righteous motivation or full of evil and madness (9:3). There seems no consequence if one loves, hates, or lives with passion, because all that one has cherished will be left behind, while the memories of the dead fade into obscurity (9:5–6). Death visits every person and negates whatever is done on this earth to an absurd equality.

[545] 3:18 is a difficult verse due to interpretive complexities of the two infinitives (לברם and לראות) and their subject (God or human). Various interpretations have been proposed (see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 295–301, for a summary). For the purpose of this discussion all the details aside, what Qohelet basically conveys here is that humans and animals are the same with reasons followed in vv. 19–21.

Qohelet also observes the levelling effect of death reaches beyond the human realm. While alive, humans and animals lead totally different lives. Humans aspire to make their life better, richer, and longer with their intelligence, wisdom, and skills, whereas animals merely live with instinct to survive each day without future consciousness. And yet humans have no more advantage than animals in the face of death. All apparent advantages cease at death which abases both to the same degradation.[546] Avery-Peck aptly notes that "live, a person is recognized as human. But dead, the body has no humanity, so that it is unable even to command the respect of animals."[547] Qohelet has observed wickedness being carried out in the places where it is not expected to take place (3:16). It seems humans are just as animals (cf. 3:18). Indeed he can perceive no difference between humans and animals, since both die and become the dust of the earth (3:19–20). Death levels and nullifies all the meaning of human activities, equalizing all human life to absurdity, if death is final as Qohelet presumes. Basically human beings cease to be human at death. Qohelet apparently has more to say about the true implication of death when he considers what it does to humankind. What Qohelet really thinks of death is the next topic to follow.

3.1.3 Death Is Evil

What is death? It is the destination of all the living on the earth (3:20). Death comes to everyone, and it is not something that ancient Israelites disputed or questioned. When it occurred unexpectedly, suddenly, or prematurely, then they feared and considered it to be God's punishment.[548] If one may generalize from the survey of the historical context in the first chapter, Qohelet's Israelite forefathers apparently accepted death as a natural course of human life at the end of a ripe old age. They were not preoccupied with death like the people in the ancient Near East whose elaborate funerary cults indicated their fear and preoccupation with death, especially among the elite in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Death was not something that Israelites focused their minds on in normal circumstances, although in what manner one should die mattered to them. What concerned them most was unexpected, violent, or premature death: that

[546] Cf. Ps 146:4: "His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his thoughts [or plans] perish."
[547] Alan J. Avery-Peck, "Death and Afterlife in the Early Rabbinic Sources: The Mishnah, Tosefta, and Early Midrash Compilations," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity Part 4, Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (eds. Avery-Peck and Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 246.
[548] Knibb, "Life," 403.

was altogether another matter. In general, however, they held no pessimistic or negative view of life due to the inevitability of death. Rather, they desired and maintained a posture to live a full life with God's blessing because life was God's gift[549] and reward to them.[550] Living to a full old age and dying in peace to be gathered to their ancestors was satisfactory to them as the fulfilment of life as God intended.

Qohelet stands out among the Israelites in this regard, even though he agrees that life is God's gift (8:15). In his view life seems to be too short and is fleeting (6:12).[551] It is just a "portion" (חלק) that God grants to humans (5:17–18 [ET 18–19]).[552] Qohelet evaluates and assesses everything from the perspective of death because he recognizes that death can override everything that humans do. The reality of death is apparently a constant reminder in all that Qohelet does and observes. Death seems to preoccupy Qohelet's mind, even when he himself does not appear to have been in grave danger of adversaries, illness, or misfortunes in his own life. On the contrary, he has amassed a great fortune, increased wisdom, and sought all kinds of pleasure in life. Yet he has found all his riches and accomplishments wanting, unsatisfactory, or meaningless (2:11). No amount of money, power, or wisdom secures life for its lasting fulfilment and enjoyment. No scheme of precaution or prevention avoids death's intrusion, which brings every activity in one's life to a screeching halt. Against such anticipation and realization Qohelet cries out, "Everything is *hebel*." Qohelet probably does not mean that life itself is *hebel* even when he labels human life as "one's *hebel* life (חיי הבל').[553] But death seems to deprive a human not only of all his possessions but also of all the meaning or value of what he has done or

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[549] Job 12:10; 33:4; 34:14–15; Eccl 12:7; Isa 57:16; Zech 12:1.
[550] Ps 127:3; Pro 22:4; cf. Eccl 5:17 [ET 18]. See Martin-Achard, *Death*, 6, 8.
[551] The phrase מספר ימי־חיי הבלו "the few days of his fleeting life" in 6:12 expresses both short and fleeting nature of human life. מספר ימי־חי occurs elsewhere in 2:3; 5:17 [ET 18], and חיי הבלך 9:9 [bis]. The second occurrence in 9:9 is considered dittography, but possibly Qohelet's emphasis? Qohelet also says one's young and prime life is also fleeting (הבל) in 11:10. Cf. McNeile, *Ecclesiastes*, 150; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 302. As already noted, Qohelet likely means by these phrases that human life on earth is "fleeing" or "ephemeral," not necessarily "futile" or "meaningless," as his many טוב sayings indicate to encourage his audience with "Enjoy" while they can.
[552] The term חלק literally means "portion, share" in an inheritance (e.g., land). *BDB*:324; Rudman, *Determinism*, 55–60, notes translating חלק "reward" (e.g., NKJV, NRSV, NASB) may be imprecise, except "in the sense of the rightful reward for one's labour (2:10; 3:22; 5:17 [ET 18], . . .; 9:9)," because the term itself is morally neutral. One may call God's allotment of חלק as "reward," but LXX's rendering of חלק with μερίς/μέρος, which are theologically neutral. He adds 5:18 [ET 19]; 9:6 in the above list but חלק in those instances cannot be called "reward"; cf. Fox, *Time*, 109–11. NASB translates חלק as "reward," namely "all the days of your fleeting life" in themselves are a reward or a portion which God has allotted to humans in Qohelet's view.
[553] *Supra*.

achieved. It is an unseen destructive force behind every activity in life, a threat which strips off much of energy and one's meaningful existence that humans strive with their activities. It also ruins every plan and activity for the future, and converts all human striving, toil, or effort into something totally meaningless, futile, or useless. To Qohelet it seems that death "barricades the future against all human wishes and desires."[554] He seems to be particularly annoyed that one who toiled is deprived of and must leave all its benefit and enjoyment to someone else. He calls the situation both *hebel* and evil (2:21; 4:8; 6:2). Qohelet is acutely cognizant of death's unwelcome intrusion into human life, which humans cannot predict or prevent. Death creeps into his evaluation of everything and forces him to face its ultimatum. Death incessantly reminds Qohelet of its upper hand and seems to haunt him.

However, realization of the worst predicament is reserved for the end of all affairs and activities. "It is the same for all" (9:2a), says Qohelet. Whatever Qohelet observes, in the end it is the same: one and the same fate to all the living. What galls Qohelet most of all is that death neither differentiates nor discriminates with respect to person. There is no qualification or privilege in death: not only do both the wise and the fool die but the wise dies just like the fool; and not only do both the righteous and the wicked die but the righteous also suffer and die like the wicked. Being pious or impious does not make any difference. Human hearts can become full of evil and madness during their lives and die just like everybody else. Qohelet reminds himself and lays it to heart that the righteous, the wise, and their deeds are in God's hand (9:1); nevertheless, he can draw only one conclusion from what he has seen. He declares, "This is an evil among all that is done under the sun: that is, one fate for all" (9:3a). Qohelet's emphasis here can formulate an equation: an evil among all happenings (רע בכל) = one fate for all (מקרה אחד לכל) = death unto all. Death is the equal fate for all, unequal lives notwithstanding. Qohelet seems to mean it basically amounts to the greatest evil of all on the earth.[555] Fox comments: "A superlative does seem required here, for the universality of death is not a misfortune or evil *in* all events; it is rather *the* worst of all that happens, for it is a fundamental and irreparable

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[554] H. N. Bream, "Life without Resurrection: Two Perspectives from Qoheleth," in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (eds. Bream, et al.; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 55.
[555] Cf. John P. Weisengoff, "Death and Immortality in the Book of Wisdom," *CBQ* 3 (1941): 107.

inequity."[556] Gordis calls it "the root of the evil."[557] Moreover, it is the *same* fate (אחד מקרה) that befalls all the living, not just humans: "universal death" that results in every created being,[558] regardless of differences in species, life styles, behaviours, or choices that one makes. Death is totally amoral, irreligious, and irrespective of all concerned. This sounds as though death acts neutrally and fairly at first glance, equally treating everyone. Scholars often characterize death in Ecclesiastes as "a great equalizer"[559] or "the great leveller of humanity."[560] In Qohelet's view death is evil. Death spoils intention, purpose, and goal of all human activities because it invalidates them all. Death nullifies what makes humans human and denies human uniqueness, according to Qohelet's logic.

If Qohelet's reflection on death were any sign of sentiment in his society, then it would be no surprise that he found evil prevailing in his society, as he alludes in 9:3. Qohelet witnesses wickedness, unjust gains and losses increasing among people in his society. In the next section inequities and injustice that Qohelet has observed will be traced in view of how death plays out in his society.

But before discussing injustice, Qohelet's view of justice (משפט), namely, divine judgement against human iniquities, needs to be analysed, because of his firm stance on his belief in divine judgement. It is then followed by injustice observed and Qohelet's view of Sheol, the Israelite abode of the dead, in relation to his view of death and divine judgement.

3.2 Qohelet's View of Divine Judgement

3.2.1 משפט in Ecclesiastes

The Hebrew concept of משפט is developed and shaped by Yahweh's instructions as described in the Pentateuch and handed down through generations of Israelites. According to Booth, the semantic range and meaning of משפט within the human sphere may be developed in three stages (more or less in a chronological order) as

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[556] Fox, *Time*, 292. Author's emphasis. He suggests reading זה רע as זה הרע.
[557] Gordis, *Man*, 186.
[558] Denis Buzy, "L'Ecclésiaste," in *La Sainte Bible, VI* (eds. Pirot and Clamer; Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1941), 256: "mal universel."
[559] Lisa M. Wolfe, "Seeing Gives Rise to Disbelieving: Qohelet's 'Absurd' (הבל) Search for Divine Justice," *Proceedings: EGL & MWHS* 24 (2004): 35.
[560] Mark K. George, "Death as the Beginning of Life in the Book of Ecclesiastes," in *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust* (BS 71; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 287.

follows.[561] The earliest meaning is "manner" or "custom," based on the criterion "what is the customary thing"; but it is seldom used in this sense in later periods. The meaning in the second stage of development includes judicial decision, commandment of God or of man, and administration of law by God or by human judges, based on a "promulgated body of law." The third stage of development is "rightful due," "that which should be," or "proper administration of law by people," based on the idea of "the right" of individuals.[562] Not surprisingly, Qohelet's use of the term משפט falls in the third stage, and Booth identifies four categories of possible meanings in his classification: rightful due (once); that which should be (3 times); administration of law by man (2 times) or by God (4 times).[563]

The term משפט appears six times in Ecclesiastes (3:16; 5:7 [ET 8]; 8:5, 6; 11:9; 12:14) along with one use of the verb שפט (3:17), and all but 12:14 are used by Qohelet. In the first instance:

ועוד ראיתי תחת השמש מקום המשפט שמה הרשע ומקום הצדק שמה הרשע:

> Furthermore, I have seen under the sun, in the place of judgement there is wickedness, and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness. (3:16)[564]

Qohelet uses the term in a phrase מקום המשפט "the place of justice/judgement," namely, "the place of the administration of justice"[565] located under the sun: a human

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[561] Osborne Booth, "The Semantic Development of the Term מִשְׁפָּט in the Old Testament," *JBL* 61 (1942): 105–10 [see esp. 107–8]; cf. B Johnson, "מִשְׁפָּט," *TDOT* 9:86–98.

[562] Booth, "Semantic," 108, explains that "there are evidently three basic factors underlying the fundamental conception of מ׳: the custom, the law, and the right. Of these groups the first, based upon custom, seems the original. As custom does not develop from law, but law from custom, it is probable that the meaning of this word travelled in the same direction."

[563] Ibid., 106 (chart). Obviously Booth identifies משפט in some instances containing more than one possible meaning since the term appears only six times in Ecclesiastes.

[564] LXX slightly differs: εἶδον ὑπὸ τὸν ἥλιον τόπον τῆς κρίσεως ἐκεῖ ὁ ἀσεβής καὶ τόπον τοῦ δικαίου ἐκεῖ ὁ ἀσεβής "I saw under the sun in the place of judgement there *the ungodly*, and in the place of *the righteous* there *the ungodly.*" Goldman, "Qoheleth," 76*, suggests that the first part should be read with MT and the second with LXX, basically replacing הצדק in MT with הצדיק and translating it as "I saw under the sun: in the place of the judgment, there the wickedness and in the place of the righteous, there the wicked." With either MT or Goldman, the essence of text's meaning would not change: In the place where justice and righteousness should prevail, there was wickedness (by the wicked people, because it would not happen by the righteous people). Cf. Schoors, *Preacher I*, 25; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 285–86, in the earlier ref. Schoors supports MT rendering, while in the latter he agrees with Goldman.

[565] Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 108; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 287; however, cf. Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet* (BKAT 19; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 74, notes that "the place of justice" means not only the official site of jurisdiction, but all sectors of society in which justice should be implemented (»die Stätte des Rechts« meint nicht nur den offiziellen Ort der Gerichtsbarkeit, sondern alle Gesellschaftsbereiche, in denen Gerechtigkeit verwirklicht sein sollte). מקום means a standing place, a (certain) place/location. But the two occurrences in 3:16 could also mean "in place of" (like תחת) without reference to a particular place, giving a broader scope of all social situations as Lauha suggests; but *BDB*:879–80, notes that מקום functioning like תחת is rare and peculiar (e.g., Hos 2:1; Isa 33:21); cf.

judicial court where the judge should uphold the law, punishing the wicked, protecting the innocent, and granting the rightful due to the powerless and the oppressed, all based on the divine mandate in the Torah. What Qohelet observes, however, is the corruption of the human law court violating the individual rights of the powerless, perhaps due to favouritism, bribery, or political pressure (7:7).[566] In 5:7 [ET 8] Qohelet warns people not to be surprised at the oppression of the poor and denial of משפט וצדק in the province:

> אם־עשק רש וגזל[567] משפט וצדק[568] תראה במדינה אל־תתמה על־החפץ כי גבה[569] מעל גבה שמר וגבהים עליהם:
>
> If you see oppression of the poor and deprivation of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be astonished at the matter, for a high one from above watches over another high one, and there are higher ones above them.

The only place where the verb שפט appears is often construed as a later addition, mainly because Qohelet's statement in 3:17 agrees with an orthodox view of divine judgement that the epilogist concludes in 12:14:

> אמרתי אני בלבי את־הצדיק ואת־הרשע ישפט האלהים כי־עת לכל־חפץ ועל כל־המעשה שם[570]:
>
> I said in my heart: God will judge the righteous and the wicked, because a time (עת) for every matter (לכל־חפץ) and upon every work is there (שם). (3:17)

Schoors, *Preacher II*, 294. The definite construct state seems to indicate the place rather than the abstract concept, which is reinforced by שמה. Thus the term in 3:16 is taken as an adverbial accusative and translated as "in the place of," indicating a place (cf. 11:3). All other occurrences in Ecclesistes (l:5, 7; 3:20; 6:6; 8:10; 10:4) also denote a place. משפט here denotes "justice, the right order or an administration of justice," as parallel to צדק and opposed to רשע.

[566] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 25.

[567] Literally, "robbery."

[568] Literally, "justice and righteousness," or "justice and right," namely, a fundamental right of the people to have. Cf. Deut 10:18; Isa 10:2. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 407; Fox interprets the phrase hendiadys, namely, "righteous judgement." However, he translates it "justice and right" in Fox, *Time*, 52, 233–34; and "right and justice," in Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 25, as both terms have these meanings. Notably, combination of משפט וצדק(ה) or צדק(ה) ומשפט appears 36 times in the OT (mostly in Wisdom literature and Prophets), indicating that justice and righteousness often go hand in hand. On this subject, see also R. W. L. Moberly, "Whose Justice? Which Righteousness? The Interpretation of Isaiah V 16," *VT* 51 (2001): 55–68; Moshe Weinfeld, "'Justice and Righteousness'—משפט וצדקה—the Expression and Its Meaning," in *Justice and Righteousness* (eds. Reventlow and Hoffman; JSOTSup 137; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 228–46.

[569] "High, exalted, haughty," probably meaning official, but the כי phrase is difficult, and variously interpreted. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 203–4.

[570] שם is regarded a *crux interpretum*. Hebrew is read as שָׁם "there" or "name, designation," or as verb שׂם "put, set." LXX ἐκεῖ "there"; Vulg. *tunc* "then, thereupon;" both supporting MT, but it is not clear what "there" or "then" refers to. שם perhaps refers back to שמה and the context to the court of law in v. 16. Fox, *Time*, 215; cf. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 25; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 166–67; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 293–94.

However, 3:17 can be read in line with the context of 3:16 where Qohelet states his appalling observation that wickedness, instead of justice, prevailed in the human court of law. He then utters v. 17 in his heart. When Qohelet says, “God will judge,” he never affixes his favourite criterion “under the sun” in his statement; in other words, he never specifies *when* or *where* God will judge but only that God *will* judge both the righteous and the wicked according to every deed that they have committed under the sun (3:17; 11:9; cf. 12:14). Qohelet’s phrase “under the sun” emphatically frames the work and activities that human beings perform during their life on the earth. God’s work and activities have no boundary as such. The latter half of 3:17 lexically connects to, and echoes, 3:1 where he says:[571]

לכל זמן ועת[572] לכל־חפץ[573] תחת השמים׃

> For everything there is an appointed time (זמן); and an appropriate time (עת) for every matter (חפץ) under the heavens.

Since a time for wickedness exists and seems to be ripe in his society, it is reasonable to expect that there is a time for judgement as well.

The next two appearances of משפט occur with עת as a phrase עת ומשפט in 8:5–6, the interpretation of which has not attained a consensus among scholars or the Bible translators:[574]

שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע ועת ומשפט ידע לב חכם׃ (v. 5)
כי לכל־חפץ יש עת ומשפט כי־רעת האדם רבה עליו׃ (v. 6)

Some scholars even consider 8:5–6 is a gloss or a redactor’s addition.[575] Most commentators understand עת as functioning the same way as an “appropriate or appointed time” and “recognize some form of relationship between 8:5–7 and 3:1–8 and/or 3:17.”[576] The term משפט, however, seems to pose a problem and is translated

[571] Cf. Rudman, *Determinism*, 52.
[572] Both זמן and עת mean “an appointed time.” An Aramaic loan word and only in late texts, זמן always means a “predetermined or appointed time,” see Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 159; Anthony Tomasino, “זמן,” *NIDOTTE* 1:1114; עת means a “point of time” or a “lapse of time,” and is “usually associated with specific events and their occurrence,” not cyclical or linear within the continuous cycle as viewed in the ancient world. Anthony Tomasino, “עת,” *NIDOTTE* 3:56–64; *CHALOT*:287. Qohelet uses עת to mean an appointed or appropriate time.
[573] Usually חפץ means “delight, pleasure”; but here and in 3:17; 5:7 [ET 8]; 8:6, the word means “affair, matter, event or activity.” *BDB*:343; Schoors, *Preacher II*, 211–14.
[574] Other issues also exist with these texts, but the relevant focus here is mainly on the use and interpretation of משפט.
[575] Lauha, *Kohelet*, 149; Kurt Galling, “Der Prediger,” in *Die fünf Megilloth* (eds. Würthwein, et al.; HAT 1/18; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1969), 110.
[576] Rudman, *Determinism*, 52.

either "procedure,"[577] "way,"[578] or "judgement."[579] The LXX translates the phrase differently between v. 5 and v. 6: the former καιρὸν κρίσεως "time of judgement" without the conjunction [580]ו or as hendiadys; and the latter καιρὸς καὶ κρίσις "time and judgement," as the phrase cannot be a hendiadys in v. 6, since not every matter has a time of judgement:

> ὁ φυλάσσων ἐντολὴν οὐ γνώσεται ῥῆμα πονηρόν καὶ <u>καιρὸν κρίσεως</u> (*tempus et responsionem*) γινώσκει καρδία σοφοῦ (v. 5)
> ὅτι παντὶ πράγματι ἔστιν <u>καιρὸς καὶ κρίσις</u> (*tempus est et oportunitas*) ὅτι γνῶσις[581] τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πολλὴ ἐπ᾽ αὐτόν (v. 6)

Those who follow LXX for v. 6 as in v. 5, therefore, are forced to remove ומשפט in v. 6 as gloss.[582] The Vulgate (shown in parentheses) differently translates the phrase in the two verses: *tempus et responsionem* "time and response" in v. 5 and *tempus est et oportunitas* "time and procedure" in v. 6 for its coherent exegesis to be maintained.[583] Schoors translates משפט with an obscure use of "destiny" in both verses, but is unlikely the correct meaning in the context.[584]

Difficulties associated with all the above interpretations are: Firstly, the use of משפט to mean "manner, custom, procedure or way" which was a usage in much earlier times, as already mentioned; and it is doubtful if such use was common during the Second Temple period, even if it was not extinct.[585] Secondly, an obscure translation of משפט as "destiny" has not been observed anywhere else in the Bible. Thirdly, the term always means "justice" or "judgement" in all other places in Ecclesiastes including 11:9 and 12:14;[586] and fourthly, LXX translates all the occurrences of משפט in Ecclesiastes as "judgement" (κρίσις or κρίμα).[587]

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[577] E.g., NIV, NASB, and NET.
[578] E.g., ESV and N/RSV.
[579] E.g., N/KJV and JPS.
[580] Rudman, *Determinism*, 51, recognizes that "it suggests that the LXX translator used a variant manuscript in which the conjunction on משפט was deficient (15 Hebrew MSS contain this particular reading)."
[581] LXX also misreads רעת as דעת, i.e., γνῶσις "knowledge"; Qohelet denies any such knowledge in v. 7, even if the LXX reading were right.
[582] E.g., Fox, *Contradictions*, 248; contra Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 151; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 605; cf. Rudman, *Determinism*, 50–51.
[583] Rudman, *Determinism*, 52.
[584] Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 605–6; Schoors, *Preacher II*, 233–34. His citation of OT and Qumran texts containing משפט are all relating to "manner, custom," and never meant "destiny." His notion: "It is clear that here, does not have the legal force of 'judgment, lawsuit, justice, right, ordinance'," is incorrect.
[585] Rudman, *Determinism*, 50; Booth, "Semantic," 107–8; contra Johnson, *TDOT* 9:88.
[586] 12:13–14, a traditional view of divine judgement, is often considered a later editorial work. Similar phraseology in 12:14: "God will bring every work into judgement (כל־מעשה האלהים יבא במשפט)" and

Qohelet amply expresses his distress over the absence or delay of justice in his society, and his belief in God's judgement appears firm. Therefore his use of the term משפט to mean "judgement" is not unreasonable. A decisive test then may be whether the text of 8:5–6 reflects Qohelet's overall thought and concern, and whether it is also relevant to the immediate context.

Firstly, the text 8:5–6 echoes Qohelet's utterance in 3:17 lexically and in content when compared in parallel:

> He who keeps a commandment will know no evil thing, and a heart of the wise (לב חכם)[588] will know time (עת) and *mišpāṭ*. Indeed (כי),[589] for every matter (לכל־חפץ) there is time (עת) and *mišpāṭ*, because (כי) the evil of mankind is great upon them.[590] (8:5–6)
>
> I said in my heart (בלבי): God will judge (ישפט) the righteous and the wicked, because (כי) time (עת) for every matter (לכל־חפץ) and upon every work is there (שם). (3:17)

The words לב, עת, חפץ, and cognates (מ)שפט appear in both passages, which indicate that in 8:5–6 Qohelet is apparently referring back to his conviction in 3:17 that every work (or deed) will eventually be judged, namely, at an appropriate time, since there is a time for every matter.[591] This then leads משפט in 8:5–6 to be understood as "judgement." Rudman is surely correct, saying, "the context provided by the use of √שׁפט in 3.16–17 is a strong indicator that it should be interpreted with its usual sense of (legal) judgment in 8.5–6."[592]

Secondly, one may examine whether the immediate contexts before and after also illuminate משפט in 8:5–6 relevant to Qohelet's concern for judgement. The first comparison of the immediate context is between 8:2–4 and 8:5:

11:9: "against all these God will bring you into judgement (כל־אלה יביאך האלהים במשפט)" has led some scholars to interpret 11:9b as a gloss by the same editorial hand. Contra Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 791–92, who translates במשפט "in that condition," which is unlikely. A list of those who consider 11:9b an editorial gloss can be found on p. 792 (n. 9) in Schoors.

587 κρίσις (f. noun) in 3:16; 8:5, 6, 11:9; 12:14 and κρίμα (neut. noun) in 5:7 [ET 8], both cognates of κρινῶ "judge, decide" in 3:17. LXX's standard translation of משפט is used for Ecclesiastes. Johnson, *TDOT* 9:97.

588 לב "heart" as the subject of ידע means the mind, i.e., "the mind of a wise person" (cf. RSV); may also be translated "a wise heart" (NASB; cf. 1Kgs 3:12) or "the wise mind" (NRSV). Cf. Schoors, *Preacher II*, 89–90. Probably referring back to כהחכם in 8:1.

589 Antoon Schoors, "Emphatic and Asseverative *kî* in Koheleth," in *Scripta Signa Vocis: Studies about Scripts, Scriptures, Scribes and Languages in the Near East Presented to J. H. Hospers* (eds. Vanstiphout, et al.; Groningen: Forsten, 1986), 211; or Schoors, *Preacher I*, 106–7.

590 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 281. The similarity of the phrase כי־רעת האדם רבה עליו with כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ "the evil of mankind was great on the earth" in Gen 6:5a is striking and most likely Qohelet's allusion to the Genesis text, as his reflection shortly later in 8:11b also echoes Gen 6:5b. Seow is correct in that the האדם in 8:6 should be taken as a subjective genitive, namely רעת is the evil that the mankind do, not simply a misfortune, misery, or trouble of man, interpreting it as an objective genitive.

591 Rudman, *Determinism*, 53.

592 Ibid., 52.

> [I say][593] keep (שמור) the king's command (פי־מלך),[594] and (that) because of the oath of God.[595] Do not hurry to go from his presence. Do not stand in an evil matter (בדבר רע), for he will do whatever[596] he pleases. Since the word of the king is authority, so who will say to him, "what are you doing?" (8:2–4)

> He who keeps (שומר) a commandment (מצוה) will know no evil thing (דבר רע), and a heart of the wise will know time and judgement. (8:5)

The gist of the difficult text in 8:2–4 is that Qohelet exhorts his audience to obey the king's command, not to offend the king or conspire to do evil against him. Because the king will do whatever he pleases, he may punish whoever offends him regardless of the seriousness of offences: a trivial offence by leaving his presence too quickly on the one hand, or a grave offence by joining in to do evil against him on the other hand. No one can oppose the king, once he makes a decision (against any offence), even if it may be unreasonable or wrong. One can lose his own life by offending the king.[597] Keeping the king's command circumvents such calamity, on account of one's oath of allegiance to the king that one made before God. Since the king is also under God's authority, God will either protect the king's subject from his despotic decision, or will eventually punish the king for his recklessness. The text 8:5 then picks this up to affirm that he who keeps a command[598] will face no calamity because his wise heart will know that there is time and משפט "judgement" (by God). In 8:6 Qohelet reaffirms that there is a time and judgement for every matter,[599] meaning that every matter

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[593] Literally, אני. Scholars either delete it as a gloss or add אמרתי as is done here.
[594] Literally, "the mouth of the king," namely, king's word/command. Cf. פי יהוה "the command of Yahweh" (e.g., 1 Sam 12:14)
[595] The oath of God can be either an oath by God, the king, or the subject, but the most likelihood is "the oath of fidelity and allegiance to the king which they had taken in the name of God." Ralph Wardlaw, *Lectures on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Woodward, 1822), 358. Wardlaw translate ועל דברת "and (that) in regard of." The ו here is probably functioning as explicative or emphatic as it is done here; see Kautzsch ed, *GKC*, §154.a (n. 1(b). Qohelet has already made clear that once one made a vow (or oath) before God, one should keep it in 5:3–4 [ET 4–5]. Translating על דברת as "according to the manner of" is also possible, interpreting the phrase as modal rather than causal; cf. Ps 110:4, see Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Scherman, *Koheles: Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologised from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (2nd, rev. and corr. ed.; ATS; eds. Scherman and Zlotowitz; Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1977), 147; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 279; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 278.
[596] Literally, כל־אשר "all that."
[597] A record of such an example is found in Gen 40:20–22 where a king of Egypt restores the chief cupbearer to his office but hangs the chief baker when both offend him, probably owing to their poor food/drink services to the king: Likely similar offences but different verdicts on them by the king.
[598] According to Lange מצוה in 8:5 cannot be the king's command (*vide infra*). The term without an article or a pronominal suffix makes ambiguous whose command it is.
[599] Note here that עת ומשפט cannot be a hendiadys because not everything has a time *of judgement* as already pointed out above. Fox, *Contradictions*, 248; Rudman, *Determinism*, 53.

includes even the king's conduct, because the evil of mankind is great.[600] The same verb (שמר) and the phrase (דבר רע) both in 8:2–3 and 8:5 connect the two texts in that one who keeps a command would not engage in an evil matter (דבר רע in 8:3) or experience a calamity (דבר רע in 8:5), for a wise heart knows time and judgement.

The second comparison of the immediate context is between 8:6 and 8:7:

> Indeed, for every matter there is time and judgement, because the evil of mankind is great upon them. (8:6)
>
> But he does not know what will happen. Indeed who tells him when it will happen? (8:7)

Here in 8:6 Qohelet reaffirms that there is time and judgement, but the problem is that Qohelet, or anyone else for that matter, does not know when the appropriate time for God's action is, because such time and judgement are in God's hand. Qohelet expresses the frustration of not knowing in 8:7, which he already alluded to in 3:11b and which he would reiterate in 8:17,[601] and the connection between the two verses 8:6 and 8:7 makes perfect sense.

Furthermore, Qohelet reminds his audience that humans do not have authority to retain הרוח with הרוח[602] or authority over the day of death; . . . and wickedness will not deliver its owners[603] (8:8), again emphasizing that it is God, not the king, who has the ultimate authority over every matter. Thus, Rudman captures 8:1–6 as:

> The wise man knows that 'God will judge the righteous and the wicked' (3.17) and will obey the king's orders, biding his time in the sure knowledge that his master will be punished.[604]

In summary, in Qohelet's thought it is God who will judge both the righteous and the wicked, because there is a time for every matter under heaven: namely, for everything there is an appropriate time, and for every deed there is משפט under God's jurisdiction. When Qohelet uses the term משפט, he means judgement; more probably, *divine* judgement. Qohelet is apparently a firm believer in God's judgement. For a man of such conviction, his admonition and reminder to a youth that God will judge

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[600] האדם here could be subtly pointing to the king: the evil of the ruler is usually considered greater than his followers', and the punishment against him will be severer in the OT (see, e.g., 2 Sam 12:11–12).
[601] More on this complicated text, *vide infra*.
[602] "The wind" or "the spirit."
[603] Or "its lords" (בעליו), i.e., those who practise wickedness—may be implying the king by the term בעל (?). See Franz Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth* (BCAT 4; eds. Keil and Delitzsch; Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1875), 337; ET Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes* (CFTL Fourth Series; trans. Easton; vol. 54; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1891), 344.
[604] Rudman, *Determinism*, 54.

him according to his deeds even during his youth in 11:9 is a logical step.[605] Qohelet could certainly have given such a warning, and there should be no need to treat the verse as gloss.

3.2.2 Injustice Observed

Although Qohelet recognizes God's presence in the cosmos as its Creator and Ruler, his interest lies in what goes on in the earth with both human and divine activities. Whatever he speaks about is within the domain of the world of the living, where he can observe and evaluate all the works and deeds in human affairs.[606] It defines a frame of reference on which Qohelet's focus is fixed: on "matters and events which happen in this world,"[607] and how the reality of death plays out in that context. As already noted, keeping the relevance of these frameworks in mind is important when one examines what Qohelet says. It is now time to discuss what Qohelet has observed *under the sun* with regard to justice.

Justice must be served in a divinely ordered world (3:14–17), but what Qohelet observes and can discern from reality is that justice is often absent and is delayed at best (8:11): in effect, justice is not always executed in this world. Qohelet's utterance of "*Hebel*, utterly *hebel*, everything is *hebel*" undoubtedly manifests his exasperation, frustration, and acute sense of indignation against the unfairness and injustice which cripples one's effort in life. Qohelet's despair rings and echoes all around in what he discovers from his own experiences and observations. His is a particularly poignant assessment of life because it is not the utterance of an unsuccessful or foolish individual without talent or skill, but of one who has built his wealth, luxury, and possessions through his work with much wisdom and entrepreneurial skills.

Israelite traditional wisdom says that the righteous are blessed and prosper, but the wicked will be punished and live only a short time. What Qohelet observes and experiences in his society, however, contradicts God's retributive justice which the Israelite people have taken for granted in times past. Qohelet is a realist. He does not rationalize what he no longer sees, just because he may wish or expect it to happen.

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[605] Exegetical discussion in Chapter 5.
[606] Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 257.
[607] Wright, "Ecclesiastes," 19; L. Mazzinghi, "The Verbs מצא 'to Find' and בקש 'to Search' in the Language of Qohelet: An Exegetical Study," in *The Language of Qohelet in Its Context. Essays in Honour of Prof. A. Schoors on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (eds. Berlejung and Hecke; OLA 164; Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 109, notes that "Qohelet always starts from an experiential point of view; certainly he is speaking about reality but only that reality which mankind can experience *under the sun*." Author's emphasis.

He avoids conjecture or hearsay but relies on his first-hand information—what he observes and experiences—before he expresses his opinion or makes his judgment call on the matters which concern him. He claims that he "has seen everything": he is an observer. In his monologic discourse Qohelet uses the verb ראה "see, observe, perceive" forty-seven times, half of which are with respect to his own observation or seeing.[608] The verb appears fairly evenly throughout the book and more than once in every chapter except chapter 12 (where it appears only once). Qohelet is also a doer. He seeks, explores, toils, and labours in all his undertakings. Qohelet is earth-bound. He is interested in what happens around him in his society and gives more weight to what he sees as facts and truths than what traditional or conventional wisdom tells him. He gives credit to what he sees, and what he observes he tells them as it is.

Qohelet portrays himself as a king who actively engaged in all kinds of mental and physical activities in pursuit of every aspect of fulfilment in life. He has sought wisdom, built his house, planted vineyards, made gardens and parks, planted all kinds of fruit trees, irrigated a forest, acquired flocks and herds, bought male and female slaves, collected king's treasures, and sought all kinds of pleasure (1:12–2:10). Qohelet's zest for life and pleasure had no bounds:[609] he has toiled and exerted himself in all his works (to accumulate surpluses) and has regarded pleasure from all his toil as his חלק "portion" (2:10). He repeatedly describes his personal efforts by saying, "all my toil (עמלי) I myself have toiled (עמלתי or אני עמל)."[610] Qohelet has achieved everything that a man could ask for. He is a man of enviable position in all aspects of riches and pleasures that others could only dream of.

Having toiled much to fulfil his ambition, Qohelet discovers all the fruit of his labour still wanting and unsatisfying, because he realizes that he not only cannot keep

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[608] H. F. Fuhs, "רָאָה," *TDOT* 13:208–42; Antoon Schoors, "The Verb ראה in the Book of Qoheleth," in *"Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit. . .": Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit: Diethelm Michel zum 65. Geburtstag* (eds. Diesel, et al.; BZAW 241; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 227–41, explains that Qohelet uses ראה to express his experience, his examination, or the knowledge he draws from his observation, depending on the context; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 43, notes that it is "one of Qohelet's key words, and regularly applies to his observation of life. It speaks of more than casting a casual eye over things; it connotes a scientific and empirical examination of the realities of human life."

[609] Qohelet says he did not restrain himself from any pleasure that his eyes and heart desired (2:10). Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 93.

[610] The importance of active engagement in his work is obvious, expressed in emphatic *figura etymologica*: "my toil for which I have laboured" (2:11, 18, 19, 20). Qohelet uses the same phraseology in the work of others as well (1:3; 5:17 [ET 18]; 9:9). Qohelet uses עמל 35 times (8 verbs and 27 nouns) in his monologue out of 76 usages in the OT. The term עמל is never used with God in contrast to (מ)עשה which is used with both God and humans in the OT. For further discussion *vide infra*. Cf. Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 150–68, for his detailed analysis on the use of עמל and עשה in Ecclesiastes.

what he has earned but also has to leave it to whomever comes after him (2:17–19). His heart sinks and he exclaims that all his toil is futile and it is a great evil (רעה רבה, 2:20–21). He is entitled to keep his portion and profit (יתרון)[611] from his toil, but he realizes that death cancels out all the credit due him without his consent. Moreover, even when one is blessed by God with all that he desires and his soul lacks nothing, there is no guarantee that he can enjoy all the blessings. Unless God also empowers him to enjoy them, a stranger (נכרי)[612] gets the benefit and enjoys them. "This is futile and is sickly evil," declares Qohelet (6:1–2).

Blatant wickedness and evil deeds are not uncommon in his society as Qohelet looks around and observes: injustice (הרשע)[613] in the place of judgement and wickedness (הרשע) in the place of righteousness (3:16). The place of judgement is the human law court as already noted above; and the place of righteousness is likely "the place where the pious people gather," the temple.[614] Qohelet seems to preface what he is about to expose from his observation of society by saying that wickedness prevails even in the places where justice and right conduct are expected. Qohelet then proceeds to describe kinds of wickedness and injustice that he has witnessed, starting in 4:1:

> ושבתי אני ואראה[615] את־כל־העשקים[616] אשר נעשים תחת השמש והנה דמעת העשקים
> ואין להם מנחם ומיד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם: ושבח אני את־המתים שכבר מתו

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[611] יתרון, literally "that which remains" with a commercial meaning: "advantage, profit, gain." The term appears ten times only in Eccl (1:3; 2:11 [bis]; 3:9; 5:8, 15 [ET 9, 16]; 7:12; 10:10, 11), probably reflecting the socio-economic situation in which the book is written (near the 3rd century BCE, cf. Schwienhorst, 2004, 151).

[612] The term usually means "foreigner, alien" and implies non-Israelite in most cases, but it is not clear here if it means non-Israelite. Most scholars interpret the term here as a stranger, a man outside of one's family—"not a regular heir." See Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 134; and Robert B. Salters, "Notes on the Interpretation of Qoh 6:2," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 282–89 [esp. 286–89], although non-Israelite would perfectly fit in the context as well and Qohelet's disgust saying, "it is sickly evil," would also make more sense if so. The same phrase איש נכרי appears once in Deut 17:15 where it clearly indicates non-Israelite. Cf. 1Kgs 8:41. Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 130–31, points out that the term "has no obvious moral implication in itself."

[613] Schoors, "Qoheleth," 82, points out, "As the opposite of justice, רֶשַׁע, 'wickedness' can also mean injustice." רשע is tied to a place of justice (המשפט) in 3:16, thus meaning "violation of justice." The root רשע appears twelve times in Ecclesiastes: seven times as adjective רָשָׁע (3:17; 7:15; 8:10, 13, 14 [bis]; 9:2), four times as noun רֶשַׁע (3:16 [bis]; 7:25; 8:8), and once as verb רָשַׁע (7:17). In Ecclesiastes, "the root רשע refers to evil in the moral sense, be it evil acts, the persons who do evil, or the abstract evil quality of persons and their acts. This is in complete agreement with the common use in the Hebrew Bible." Schoors, *Preacher II*, 188–90.

[614] Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 108. When Qohelet talks about the wicked going in and out of the holy place in 8:10, he may be referring back to 3:16.

[615] Literally, "I turned back, and I saw"; namely, "I again saw," indicating the return to the subject matter of הרשע (wickedness/injustice) with specific examples. Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 320; contra Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 133; Avi Hurvitz, "The Language of Qoheleth and Its Historical Setting within Biblical Hebrew," in *The Language of Qohelet in Its Context: Essays in Honour of Prof. A. Schoors on*

מן־החיים אשר המה חיים עדנה: וטוב משניהם את אשר־עדן לא היה אשר לא־ראה את־המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש:

> And again I looked at all the oppression which were done under the sun; and behold the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort *them*; and from the hand of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort *them*. So I congratulated the dead who have already died more than the living who are still alive. But better than those two is the one who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil activity that is done under the sun. (4:1–3)

Qohelet returns to the subject matter (ושבתי אני ואראה) of violation and perversion of justice, to which he alluded in 3:16, after a short but important continuation of his thought on divine judgement and human fate in vv.17–22 (which shall be elaborated on in the next section).

Firstly, Qohelet has seen all (kinds of) oppression,[617] which are done under the sun, and the tears of the oppressed. But they have no one to comfort them; power is in the hand of their oppressors, and there is none to comfort the oppressed (4:1). Qohelet neither identifies the oppressors, be they foreign rulers or Israelite officials, nor does he indicate if he himself had any status or influence to intervene: his position may have been "a former ruling aristocracy displaced by foreign rule."[618] One thing is clear: the oppression is so horrendous that Qohelet dares to say that the dead are more fortunate than those who are still alive under the circumstance, and that even better off than both is the one who is never to exist (stillborn), because he does not have to see such evil (4:2–3).[619] Oppression of the poor, distortion of justice, and violation of the rights of individuals are so rampant that no one should be shocked in Qohelet's society. The absence of social justice is exacerbated by corruption in the system, in which those who are in power watch over one another at each higher level, thus leaving the situation unchecked (5:7 [ET 8]). As power is on the side of the

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the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (eds. Berlejung and Van Hecke; OLA 164; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 216; however, cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 320–21. The modal function of שוב serves well and makes good sense in the context here, although it is not a typical modal verb like יסף. Qohelet uses יסף with its meaning "to add, increase" only. See also 4:7; 9:11 for his use of שוב with a modal function; Fox, *Contradictions*, 201, and others who oppose this view, interpret שוב as a signal for turning to a new topic rather than having a modal function.

[616] Three different forms and meanings of עשק need to be recognized for interpreting the difficult text. The first העשקים "oppression, extortion" in plural is an abstract noun (see also Amos 3:9; Job 35:19); the second העשקים "ones who are oppressed" is a Qal passive ptc.; and the third עשקיהם "ones who oppress them" is a Qal ptc. *BDB*:798–99; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 321–23.

[617] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 186.

[618] Leo G. Perdue, "Cosmology and the Social Order in the Wisdom Tradition," in *Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (eds. Gammie and Perdue; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 477.

[619] This echoes Job 3:11–19 and Jer 20:14–18. See David L. Smith, "The Concept of Death in Job and Ecclesiastes," *Did* 4 (1992): 9.

oppressors, they may even have controlled the judicial procedure within the court to pervert justice for their advantage instead of doing what is right and lawful (cf. 3:16). One can understand why Qohelet bewails that the dead may be better off than the oppressed in such a society. Qohelet observes that a person exercises authority over another to hurt him in everything that is done under the sun:

> את־כל־זה ראיתי ונתון את־לבי לכל־מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש עת אשר שלט[620] האדם באדם לרע לו[621]:
>
> All this I have seen and applied my heart to every deed that has been done under the sun when a man had power over a(nother) man to his hurt. (8:9)

Basically, those who are in power to govern and administer justice do not execute justice, thus helping wickedness to prevail in Qohelet's society.

He then observes another enigma in human life: one's skill, strength, wisdom, intelligence, or ability does not guarantee anything, but sheer luck at the right moment grants success (9:11). What one deserves or what can reasonably be expected to occur does not always happen in reality: Qohelet ascribes such mishaps to time and chance (פגע), not blaming anyone but being perturbed nonetheless (Why should he mention it otherwise?). However, he also observes that things go wrong by human hands when he says, "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, indeed an error (כשגגה)[622] which is proceeding from the ruler[623]" (10:5). Such errors are: that the fool[624] is set in many high places, but the rich sit in a low place;[625] and that slaves are riding on horses, but princes walking like slaves on the land (10:5–7). Tamez correctly states:

[620] Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 618, notes: "The verb [שלט] here denotes moral power of a person over another even as far as to do him harm (לרע לו): it is more an unjustified use of power than a legal one." לו is ambiguous, and can mean either one with power or the one under the power was hurt, but the latter is more likely from Qohelet's earlier observation of the oppressed as the victim under power. See also the work cited therein. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 284, takes שלט as a legal-economic term and interprets it as economic oppression (usury/slavery).

[621] עת אשר שלט האדם באדם לרע לו: "When (עת אשר) man has power (שלט) over (another) man to his (the latter's) harm." The accusative of time and dependent clause עת אשר suggests that the context of Qohelet's observation is the period in which Qohelet, or likely the writer, and his audience have lived. An independent unspecified time is possible but unlikely, because people are always under a ruler of sort. Emendation of עת to את is unnecessary. Kautzsch ed, *GKC*, §118.i; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 215; Krüger, *Kohelet*, 282–83 [ET 157].

[622] The כ in כשגגה is an "asseverative particle," not to be taken as similarity or a lack of reality, translating it "as" or "like." It should be taken as the *kaph veritatis.* Gordis, *Man*, 319; cf. Kautzsch ed, *GKC*, §118.x; also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 314; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 716–17.

[623] Likely referring to המושל "ruler" in 10:4; cf. 9:17.

[624] Literally, "the folly" (הסכל)—an abstract noun or possibly a pointing problem in MT.

[625] A contrast between fool and rich, rather than the usual fool and wise, here is acceptable: cf. 9:11 (the wise or the discerning is expected to be rich).

> Verses 5–7 reflect the order of Qoheleth's world: the authorities are set up to do good and administer justice. What happens under the sun, which he sees as a calamity, is that inept and corrupt people are placed in important leadership positions, while those who are competent to hold those positions, people of noble origin, have been pushed aside.[626]

Qohelet seems to reiterate this in 10:16–17 by indirectly condemning their deeds, saying that woe is the land whose king is a lad[627] and whose princes feast in the morning (i.e., at an inappropriate time),[628] for they do not know how to rule, whereas the land governed by a king of noble origin and whose princes know when to feast for strength, and not for drunkenness, is blessed. The poetic expression is proverbial and general but may be a reflection of a chaotic and oppressive regime,[629] under which Israelite society may well have existed.[630] It appears a carefully-crafted indirect criticism, indicative of reality nonetheless, because Qohelet warns his audience not to curse the king even in their thought or the wealthy in their bedroom, because a bird of the air will carry the sound and make the matter known (10:20).[631] Qohelet says a lot about kings and rulers generally in a negative tone, despite the fact that he himself has been a king, without ever referring to his own kingship. It is interesting to note that terms such as "king" מלך (10x), "ruler" מושל (2x) or שליט (2x), and "high official" גבה (3x) appear seventeen times in all, excluding his own designation as king, in Qohelet's monologic discourse, perhaps reflecting frequent turnover of rulers. Qohelet relates the passages in 8:2–5 and 10:4–7, 20 as to how one should behave before a king and for his command, while he relates 2:12; 4:13–16; 5:8 [ET 9]; 7:19; 9:14–15, 17; 10:16–17 to wisdom and folly of a king or rulers. Expecting execution of justice by a foolish king and corrupt officials is a far cry in such a society, if these notions were meant at all to be a reflection of the Israelite community, in which the author lived.

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[626] Elsa Tamez, *When the Horizons Close: Rereading Ecclesiastes* (trans. Wilde; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 123.

[627] The term נער "boy, youth, or servant," is used to mean a young person for a wide ranges of age and experience in the Bible. Here with a special stress on youthfulness, probably connoting "inability" (cf. 1 Sam 1:22–24), "inexperienced" (1 Sam 3:7–8), or "ignorant" (1Kgs 3:7). The term also means a "household servant" or "personal attendant" in other instances (e.g., Gen 18:7; 2 Kgs 4:12). See *BDB*:654–55.

[628] Cf. Isa 5:11.

[629] Rampant oppression is already noted (4:1–3; 5:7 [ET 8]).

[630] Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 747.

[631] The interpretative difficulty with במדעך literally "in your thought" is noted. The verb ידע sometimes means an intimacy of sexual relation. Thus "in your bedchamber" (NASB) or "in your intimacy" (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 333–34, 341). Seow suggests a connotation "in the know." The point of current discussion relates more to the action "curse" in Qohelet's societal situation rather "where," however. Cf. Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 118–19; contra Krüger, "Ambiguities," 71.

Secondly, the problem in Qohelet's society is that not only the powerful who have the upper hand oppress and deny due justice to the poor, but also those who practise evil seem to get away with their wickedness and even to be rewarded. Qohelet has already observed that death does not play fair in human life. Now he finds the righteous perishing in his righteousness and the wicked prolonging his life in his evil doing (7:15). The implication here seems to be that the righteous die prematurely but the wicked enjoy living to an old age. The wicked, who even desecrate the temple by going in and out from the holy sanctuary, receive a decent burial when they die, and before long the wicked and their deeds are forgotten like anything else as human memories quickly fade away (8:10).[632] The death of the wicked appears exactly like that of the righteous, if there were no punishment against them before their death; if a proper burial were afforded to the wicked; or if their wicked deeds were quickly forgotten. That is exactly what Qohelet sees happening. Even if the court may undertake a proper procedure, the hearts of people are fully set to do evil, because (אשר)[633] the sentence (פתגם)[634] against an evil deed is not swiftly executed (8:11). In fact, a sinner does evil numerous times and may still lengthen his life (8:12a). Qohelet observes an untenable disparity in the life of the righteous and the wicked: on the one hand, righteous people suffer from what the wicked should face because of their evil deeds; on the other hand, wicked people benefit from what the righteous should deserve for their good deeds (8:14)—bad things are happening to good people, but bad people are bestowed with good things. Astonishingly, the righteous are being punished without cause for their good conduct, while the wicked not only escape punishment but also enjoy good things in their wrongdoing. The traditionally held view of retribution—that the righteous are blessed and live long but the wicked are punished and perish[635]—apparently is no longer at work. Qohelet's society seems to have been lop-sided towards injustice, in either punishing or rewarding those who do not deserve.

Thirdly, what troubles Qohelet most of all in such a social condition is that death not only cancels out all deeds and activities—good or bad—on the earth, but also

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[632] Cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 622–26, who notes various vocalizations and emendations of the difficult text due to text corruption. This thesis follows the MT reading as it fits in the context of 8:10–14 where "Qohelet relativizes the traditional dogma on the retribution of the wicked and the righteous," as Schoors notes in p. 626.

[633] Gordis, *Man*, 296.

[634] Cf. Esth 1:20 ("edict, decree"); a Persian loanword, see Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 286.

[635] See, e.g., Prov 3:33; 10:16.

leaves justice undone for moral and ethical human conduct. Qohelet is often falsely accused of not being concerned about ethics or moral issues, or it is said that the terms he uses such as רע/ה and טוב/ה do not connote ethical meaning. This is contestable. What happens to the righteous or the wicked mentioned above should not concern him if he had no moral or ethical concerns. Injustice he observes should not bother him. Qohelet's admonition to fear God or his warning of God's judgement especially after he talks about the deeds of wicked people (e.g., 3:16–17; 8:12–13) is a clear sign of his concern with ethical and moral issues in human life. Qohelet cannot talk about God, fear of God, or God's judgement, if he did not concern himself with the consequences of human behaviour in this world, which he actually does.[636] His warning to a youth that God will judge him according to all his deeds in 11:9 presupposes that the youth has a choice for his behaviour. In this regard, Qohelet is not an authentic determinist, because he knows that humans can make a choice for moral/ethical behaviour and exhorts his audience to shun evil (8:2–5) and do good (3:12; 4:17–5:6 [ET 5:1–7]).

In effect, Qohelet must be concerned and deeply disturbed with the death of the righteous without reward or justice, as he repeatedly brings up the subject of inequities (7:15; 8:14; 9:2–3a). One fate to all is one thing, but disallowance of compensation or justice is quite another. So Qohelet reminds himself that the deeds of the wise and the righteous are in the hand of God, but he is not even sure whether God accepts them with love or hatred (9:1) when he sees them dying just like the wicked and the fool. Death comes to all, regardless of how one conducts oneself in moral, ethical, or religious spheres of human life. The problem is that death often does not allow justice to be executed on the earth: On the one hand death comes too quickly to the wise and the righteous, before they can receive a well-deserved reward or compensation. On the other hand, justice by the court delays too long before the wicked are punished or die without just desert. Death may be an ultimate equalizer or leveller as a terminator of all life without discrimination, but it does not do justice to those who are morally upright; instead, it appears to give an unfair advantage to the powerful and the wicked. The same fate for all does not constitute equality or fairness to the righteous as well as to the wicked, because all deserve justice according to their

[636] Further discussion *vide infra*.

deeds.[637] Death is the ultimate cause of unfairness, inequities, and iniquities in human life from where Qohelet stands and observes.[638] Bickerman notes: "For Koheleth, as he says himself (9:3), the absence of retributive justice . . . was the basic evil of all that happened under the sun."[639]

As noted at the beginning of this section, justice must be served somewhere sometime, but what Qohelet observes in reality is that justice is either delayed or absent: in effect, justice is not executed in this world in the face of death; certainly, it is not swift enough to be reckoned. Amazingly, Qohelet never protests or questions God about the insufficiency of His justice in this world, despite the fact that the righteous are perishing in their righteousness. Furthermore, he maintains that God will judge both the righteous and the wicked.

What happens then after their deaths? Is there any hope for the righteous dead to receive well-deserved justice and reward according to Hebrew concept of "afterlife" in Sheol, if they died prematurely without justice? How does Qohelet view Sheol, a place of post-mortem existence in Israel? The next section aims to address these questions.

3.2.3 Qohelet's View of Sheol: All Go to Sheol?

As Qohelet declares that there is one and the same fate (מקרה אחד) for all the living, namely all die, he says in 3:20a that "all go to the same place (מקום אחד)" and asks a rhetorical question in 6:6b, "Do not all go to one place (מקום אחד)?," undoubtedly expecting "yes" for an answer. It is not clear, however, what exactly Qohelet means by the "same" or "one" place. The verse 3:20 ensues with "all came from the dust and all return to the dust," which means "all are dust and all return to its source, the earth." The term הכל "all" here designates "both" human and animal, and מקום אחד here appears to mean simply the earth. The phrase רוח הבהמה occurs nowhere else or is never associated with Sheol in the OT. In 7:2 he says that all end up in the "house of mourning" (בית־אבל);[640] and in 9:3 all go to the dead (המתים), which probably means all die and join the dead. Qohelet seems to imply that all go to the grave in those

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[637] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 294.
[638] Cf. Ibid; Daniel P. Bricker, "The Innocent Sufferer in the Book of Proverbs" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998), 22.
[639] Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah/Daniel/Koheleth/Esther* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), 150.
[640] "All" is implied in the context.

instances. However, in 9:10 he tells his audience in no uncertain terms where they are going when they die:

כל אשר תמצא ידך לעשות בכחך עשה כי אין מעשה וחשבון[641] ודעת וחכמה בשאול אשר אתה הלך שמה

> Everything that your hand finds to do, do it with your might for there is no work or reckoning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going. (9:10)

The statement follows right after Qohelet once again presses his points to the audience that one fate befalls all *without discrimination* (9:2) and that this life is the only one they have and therefore they should enjoy life before they die and go to "Sheol." It is remarkable that Qohelet mentions Sheol at all in 9:10, when one considers his perception of death as the end of life. In the context of the passage, Qohelet elaborates how precious life is, giving an example of a live dog being better than a dead lion, and how people should enjoy their lives and do whatever they do with all their might, because: (1) life is short; (2) life is a gift of God; and (3) the life given is their portion to enjoy (9:7–10a). Then he adds that there is no work—physical, mental, or otherwise—in Sheol, where people go (9:10b). Qohelet here seems to be saying that Sheol is a place void of human activity, "simply the state of death, empty of all the positive qualities which make up life."[642] This, however, does not seem to accord well with descriptions of Sheol in other biblical texts. They describe Sheol as having power to swallow the wicked alive (Num 16:30; Prov 1:12) and consume them (Ps 49:15 [ET 14]; Job 24:19); it is a place of terror and of shadowy, insubstantial, miserable, disgusting, gloomy, and naked existence. In the Israelite view Sheol is a dreadful place where no one desires to go. Qohelet's depiction does not convey any such imagery but simply describes Sheol as a place of dead inactive human state. He seems basically to be equating Sheol with the "grave" in his own distinctive view. The connotation of Sheol is preserved but only partially.

It is also interesting to note how Qohelet says to his audience concerning who goes to Sheol: "to which you are going" (אשר אתה הלך, 9:10c). Curiously, Qohelet does not say that it is the place where *all* (ה/כל) are going, as in 3:20, 6:6b, 7:2 or 9:3, despite his favourite use of כל for eighty-seven times in his monologue. It is also

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[641] The term חשבון may be better translated as "reckoning" rather than "thought" (RSV) or "planning" (NASB) relative to Qohelet's interest in the "work" מעשה, since "reckoning" can connote either "counting" (profit) or "thought, consideration" (of what is done under the sun). Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 678, translates it "accounting," a synonym of reckoning.
[642] Bream, "Life," 53.

strange that Qohelet does not identify himself with his audience when he says "to which *you* are going," as if he is not going to Sheol—maybe he expects to become just dust when he dies (see 3:20b). Sheol is probably no different from remaining as dust in the grave, because in his view it is a lifeless existence in either place. To Qohelet Sheol may be simply a place of no living activities, but to his immediate audience (ancient Israelites) Sheol is a dreadful place to fall into by premature or sudden death.

Nevertheless, what his audience hears from Qohelet's mouth is most likely that just as death meets all without exception, death unequivocally leads all to the dreaded place Sheol without discrimination. Qohelet's statement of "Sheol where *you* are going" is objectionable and an affront to his audience and their ancestors, who sparingly speak of Sheol, reserving it for the wicked or lives gone amiss. It ironically constitutes another egalitarian society, if all went to Sheol: there is no equitable justice in life or in death, a total breach of justice under the sun—*on* or *under* the earth. Why then does Qohelet still insist that "God will judge," while seeing the righteous dying without justice and also saying that all go to a place where no god resides or acts to bring justice?

Most likely in Qohelet's mind no human being can escape Sheol especially in the social conditions of his day (7:20, 29; 8:11; 9:3). All humans are destined to die and go to Sheol—a grave or otherwise.[643] Snaith's description of Sheol probably captures what Qohelet may have in mind:

> If Sheol is to be thought of as evidence of the persistence of anything, it is better to think of it as the persistence of death rather than of life. . . Sheol is the land of ghosts, without life, without thought, without desire, without everything. They are shades, weak and helpless, with no life in themselves.[644]

Qohelet with his intelligent mind and entrepreneurial spirit certainly would not desire to exist in such an inactive post-mortem state. The dead buried and lying in the grave, remaining "asleep," or merely existing in Sheol is, to him, not living. The point of his emphasis, by using such a negative term as שאול rather than קבר, may be that a mere existence without a vitally functioning body and soul for living activities amounts to nothing, meaning that שאול and קבר are basically the same. Qohelet is so adamant about what death does to one's life that he may even be implying that in his view a

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[643] Cf. Ps 89:48–49 [ET 47–48]. Interestingly, שוא—another word for "vanity"—appears in the passage.
[644] Norman H. Snaith, "Life after Death: The Biblical Doctrine of Immortality," *Int* 1 (1947): 317.

lifeless existence in Sheol may actually be worse than simply being dead and returning to dust.[645]

To Qohelet, life without work, knowledge, or wisdom, namely a mere shadowy existence in Sheol, does not count because it is not a life meant to be lived and in fact is not profitable at all.[646] It is striking and oddly inconsistent that Qohelet does not give up but holds onto his conviction that God will judge, while implying that death has the upper hand in this world and all end up in the same place.

Qohelet appears to be trying to impress upon his audience that Sheol, therefore, does not give any hope after death (regardless of how one may die). The only remedy left for the terrible situation in his society, indeed, is a hope that God will judge and right the wrongs before it is too late, so Qohelet seeks and tries to understand what God is doing in this topsy-turvy world. Where is God when justice is not served on the earth? When is the appropriate time for God to act? Qohelet thinks a great deal about God's work which affects human life. In fact, Qohelet has much to say about God, but where does it lead him? It is the subject of discussion in the next chapter.

3.3 Summary and Conclusions

Qohelet is vexed with how death causes unresolved issues of loss and injustice in this world, as if humankind lives in an ethically or morally indifferent universe.[647] The righteous suffer wrong and the wicked enjoy evil without punishment, and both die alike just as animals, in spite of clearly defined divine and human codes of law in Israelite society according to the Torah. Qohelet sees death cutting off opportunities to rectify wrongs and prematurely denying the ultimate justice due in this life, thereby making human existence as if meaningless and debasing it to the level of animals. Nothing that Qohelet describes in his monologue, however, is beyond anyone's experience or knowledge. Indeed, what Qohelet utters in Ecclesiastes is nothing new in human history. Moreover, Qohelet does not come up with or offer any new strategy to combat the inherent and fundamental issues in human life: death and injustice.

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[645] In contrast to 7:8a, "the end is *not* better than the beginning," remark Hugo McCord and Joel Elliott, "Hebrew Word Studies," in *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practices: Studies in Honor of Jack Pearl Lewis* (eds. Kearley, et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 133. Emphasis added.

[646] Cf. Ibid., 133; G. Dalman, "Hades," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* 5:109.

[647] Paul Marcus, "The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes and Its Meaning for Psychoanalysis," *PR* 87 (2000): 236.

Qohelet's description of death and his observation of affairs in the human world could easily conjure up a fatalistic life style, if not suicide. "Why does *BE* [the book of Ecclesiastes] so fundamentally radicalize death?" asks Shuster,[648] to which Heidegger may answer: because "death is that which individualizes and totalizes."[649] Qohelet looks at death and its consequences and concludes that it is literally the lethal problem to individuals and to human society.

The most serious problem with death that Qohelet observes is that this same indiscriminate fate in human life leaves justice on the earth unsatisfactory or undone. His observation notwithstanding, Qohelet appears to firmly believe in divine judgement. Many scholars argue that Qohelet expects God's judgement to take place during one's lifetime, because Qohelet does not appear to believe in an "afterlife."[650] Qohelet may acknowledge the Israelite traditional view of "afterlife"—post-mortem existence in Sheol—but he apparently does not see any difference between existence in Sheol and lying in the grave because there are no living activities in either place. Justice must be done on the earth because there is no judgement in Sheol. Qohelet resorts to a rationalization that justice is delayed *and* persists in his belief. But he also observes that the righteous are dying prematurely without seeing retribution. The reality is that God's justice is not always executed during one's life.

The problems of death, injustice and Sheol as a destiny of all are critical issues that Qohelet raises, if the book's circulation coincided with a time when the traditional view of retributive justice and Sheol perhaps began to be questioned and became issues among Israelites. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, but for now we continue looking at how Qohelet deals with the issues and struggles that he has faced. A huge gap or paradox exists between what Qohelet says and what he observes. In the next chapter we will see how Qohelet wrestles with these issues and arrives at his resolution.

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[648] Martin Shuster, "Being as Breath, Vapor as Joy: Using Martin Heidegger to Re-Read the Book of Ecclesiastes," *JSOT* 33 (2008): 224.

[649] Ibid. Shuster refers to Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to the Task of Thinking (1964)* (ed. Krell; London: Routledge, 1993), 243 (GE 263). But the citation title does not appear to be correct. The correct reference most likely is Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit* (SUNY/CCPC; trans. Stambaugh; New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

[650] E.g., M. Delcor, "Ecclesiastes," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Hellenistic Age* (eds. Finkelstein, et al.; CHJ 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 361; Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 56.

Chapter 4

QOHELET'S DILEMMA AND RESOLUTION

4.1 Qohelet's Dilemma

Being an observer, Qohelet seeks and explores by wisdom all that is done under heavens (1:13). In particular he tries to search out what God does or has done in relation to what is happening in the world. Qohelet recognizes God's sovereignty and control over His creation, but he finds God's work and activity in the human world elusive to his grasp. This section analyses factors affecting Qohelet's puzzlement and vexing dilemma with what he cannot fathom and how they may lead him to arrive at his view of everything and his resolution in the ensuing sections.

4.1.1 Remote God

Qohelet speaks about God and His activity nearly forty times in his monologic discourse. Divine intervention, or lack thereof, often seems to be in his mind when Qohelet looks around and observes what is going on in his world. Yet Qohelet is rather standoffish when he portrays God and speaks about His activities. For example, the term אלהים, rather than יהוה, is used for all forty occurrences of "God" in Ecclesiastes, and 75% of them appear with the definite article (ה). This has raised a question concerning who Qohelet's God is, and the debate continues among biblical scholars. Because of the exclusive use of אלהים, who appears silent, remote, and distant (5:1 [ET 2]) in his monologue, some scholars contend that Qohelet's God is not Yahweh (יהוה), the God of Israel, but a universal god.[651] However, closer examination of what Qohelet says about God may be warranted in order to understand his concept and knowledge of God and who Qohelet's deity really is.

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[651] Charles C. Forman, "Koheleth's Use of Genesis," *JSS* 5 (1960): 262; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 146; Antoon Schoors, "God in Qoheleth," in *Schöpfungsplan und Heilsgeschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Haag zum 70. Geburtstag* (eds. Brandscheidt and Mende; Trier: Paulinus, 2002), 269, in which Schoors admits that "we cannot be sure that Qoheleth's God is not YHWH. However, he is *very* different from the YHWH which the other biblical books depict for us" (emphasis added). His latter sentence is a *very* general sweeping statement and is not convincing or wholly true, as we shall see.

Qohelet depicts God as the Creator who controls everything in the universe whilst setting all the limits and boundaries in His creation. His frequent reference to God, first and foremost, is His work in His created world. He observes seemingly perpetual revolving movements of God's creation,[652] and generations coming and going, while being plagued with misfortunes and rampant injustice during their life time. Nothing is new and nothing seems to change under the sun in his observation (1:4–11). Qohelet asks, "What advantage does a human have in all his toil that he toils under the sun?" (1:3) and later "Who knows what is good for a human while he lives the few days of his fleeting life, which he spends them like a shadow? For who can tell a human what will happen after him under the sun?" (6:12). Humans do not have any control over what happens on the earth, but merely, and in some fortunate cases properly, respond to it as best they can.[653] Qohelet finds wisdom has limitations, wisdom that he has acquired, that is. He even cannot know how long he can hold onto what he has earned by all his efforts. Qohelet wishes to understand the activities of God which have been done under the sun (1:13; 3:10; 7:25; 8:16).[654] He apparently recognizes that God operates behind His created universe, and his view of life hinges on how the Creator God works and controls the events of the world, which affects human life.[655]

Qohelet believes that every human activity on earth is appropriated according to God's timetable, although he does not comprehend how exactly God works through space and time under the sun.[656] It is unclear whether Qohelet knows that God is not bound by time or space in all His activities, or if he thinks that God has already or necessarily pre-ordained everything. What he seems to presume is that God is

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[652] Many scholars interpret 1:4–7 as cyclical nature's phenomena, thus there is nothing new under the sun (1:9–10). See, for example, most recently Nili Samet, "Qohelet 1,4 and the Structure of the Book's Prologue," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 92–100. Weeks, *Scepticism*, 46–53, differs and offers his interpretation of 1:5–8 as "a list of activities characterized not by circularity or repetition, but by their common lack of completion and consummation" (p. 54). Interestingly, however, in some oriental cultures circularity can mean completion, e.g., Kanreki: A full circle of zodiac (the term applied to the 60th birthday celebration in Japan).

[653] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 169.

[654] Qohelet makes antithetical statements, "man cannot know/discover" (3:11; 7:14; 8:17; 9:1; 11:5), which all the more poignantly contrast Qohelet's desire to know God's work under the sun. Qohelet uses the verb ידע "to know" 36 times, but says "I know" only 5 times (1:17; 2:14; 3:12, 14; 8:12) and the noun דעת "knowledge" appears 7 times in the book, of which just twice is specifically referred to his knowledge (1:16; 12:9).

[655] Walther Eichrodt, "Faith in Providence and Theodicy in the Old Testament," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. Crenshaw; IRT 4; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 37.

[656] Jean-Jacques Lavoie, "Puissance divine et finitude humaine selon Qohélet 3,10–15," *SR* 31 (2002): 291.

somehow involved in every event on the earth. Qohelet perceives and describes God's actions on the earth with such active verbs as: עשה "do, make,"[657] נתן "give, set," שפט "judge, rule, govern,"[658] השליט "empower" (5:18 [ET 19]; 6:2), בקש "seek" (3:15), ברם "make clear" (3:18), חבל "destroy" (5:5 [ET 6]), ענה "keeps one occupied" (5:19 [ET 20]), עות "bend/make crooked" (7:13), and רצה "approve" (9:7).

Qohelet especially emphasizes God's action with the verb נתן. In twenty-five occurrences of the verb in Ecclesiastes, God is the subject of נתן twelve times: that is, "it is God who gives or sets."[659] Four times Qohelet characterizes human life as "that God has given" (5:17 [ET 18]; 8:15; 9:9; also 12:7). He recognizes that life is a gift of God, probably alluding to the creation account of humankind (האדם) in Genesis.[660] Life given to humans, however, is הבל (transient, fleeting, or futile) in his view. God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to some, while He gives (נתן) grievous tasks to others to be busy with for no gain (1:13; 3:10) or for someone else's benefit (2:26). God has also put "eternity" (העלם) in human hearts (3:11).[661] Humans cannot enjoy or rejoice in any activity, in which they engage, unless God also empowers them to do so (5:18 [ET 19]; 6:2). Qohelet iterates, therefore, that *enjoyment* in one's labour is "the gift of God," (מתת אלהים) or one's "portion" (חלק), if one eats, drinks, and finds

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[657] Qohelet's numerous use of the terms עשה and עמל "toil" (*vide supra*) shows his extreme interest in all the work either by God or by humans: (מ)עשה occurs 64 times (43 verbs and 21 nouns) in Ecclesiastes. The most distinctive use of the verb appears 14 times in Niphal form נעשה "be done/made," thus "happen" or "occur." God is specifically associated 12 times in total with עשה "do, make" (3:11 [bis], 14 [bis]; 7:14, 29; 11:5) and מעשה "work, deed, activity, what happens" (3:11; 7:13; 8:17 [bis]; 11:5). Fox, *Contradictions*, 152, notes with God as subject it almost always means "make happen"; and Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 82, adds "even when עשׂה ni., as well as היה, in some instances means 'to happen', it is always something that happens to human beings." Isaksson, *Language*, 74, states that "the forms of עשׂה Nifal refer to activities, or an activity [*sic*], that goes on in the present of the author, 'under the sun'." The Niphal form is unique to Qohelet, who uses it often with מעשה and "under the sun" (1:14; 2:17; 4:3; 8:9, 17; 9:3, 6), "under the heavens" (1:13), or "on the earth" (8:14, 16) but this form sometimes obscures who the subject of the work is: God or human.

[658] Always in imperfect tense, indicating future action (3:17; 11:9; 12:14).

[659] 1:13; 2:26 [bis]; 3:10, 11; 5:17, 18 [ET 18, 19]; 6:2; 8:15; 9:9; 12:7, 11 (Niphal, by one Shepherd). Walther Zimmerli, "Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *SJT* 17 (1964): 157.

[660] Allusion to Gen 2:7; 3:19 is apparent in 3:20; 12:7. Cf. Katharine Dell, "Exploring Intertextual Links between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–11," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (eds. Dell and Kynes; LHBOTS 587; London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3–14 [esp. 9].

[661] James L. Crenshaw, "The Eternal Gospel (Eccl 3:11)," in *Essays in Old Testament Ethics* (New York: Ktav, 1974), 40, notes that "it is significant that Qoheleth uses *'olam* in its usual Old Testament sense in 1:4, 10; 2:16; 3:14; 9:6." Although excluding 3:11 from the list, he still believes 3:11 must be temporal in meaning

enjoyment in his toil during his brief life on this earth.[662] Schoors concludes in his summary of Qohelet's use of the verb נתן with God as its subject that

> all its objects refer to fundamental human situations or tasks: the days of life or life span (5:17; 8:15; 9:9), wealth (5:18), a (bad) business (1:13; 2:26), wisdom (2:26), enjoyment (3:13; 5:18), life spirit (12:7; רוח). That implies that the verb has a factitive force in the sense of "procure for, permit, commit, make." It gets a determinative meaning: God determines the human being, he (pre)ordains human life. Therefore the translation "gift/to give" in the sense of "grant, bestow on" is not very felicitous.[663]

God has also made everything appropriate in its specified time, and what He does will remain forever. God and His works are unfathomable by human logic or rationale, even though humans may laboriously seek to find them out (8:17).[664] Humankind is not fashioned or endowed to discover what is beyond their earth-bound frame of the created being,[665] while God operates on all His creation from heaven without boundaries. Qohelet recognizes that God has made humankind upright but humans have sought many devices (7:29),[666] because of their insatiable desire to seek, explore, and understand the activity of God and because of their perpetual propensity to deviate (חטא)[667] either from righteousness or wickedness in excess (7:16–17, 20). God has surely made clear to humankind so that they see themselves being just as animals (3:18). In all his observations—good or bad—Qohelet perceives God's hidden hand that directs or frustrates human activities, which is apparent from his statement about God every time when he makes comments about human affairs.[668]

Therefore, Qohelet warns his listeners to guard their steps, especially when they involve God such as by going to the temple to seek His favour (4:17–5:5 [ET 5:1–6]). He exhorts them to listen rather than foolishly offer sacrifices, not to speak hastily or impulsively such as making a vow and then not fulfilling the oath that they have made before God. Such conduct offends God, even if He is invisible and seems to be very remote as "God is in heaven and you are on the earth" (5:1 [ET 2]), says Qohelet. He also cautions his audience to keep the king's command because of an oath of

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[662] חלק (*vide supra*) appears in 5:17 [ET 18]; 9:9 with נתן and in 5:18 [ET 19] with מתת; cf. 2:24 (מיד האלהים): all in the context of eating, drinking, and enjoyment in one's toil.
[663] Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 21; Schoors, *Preacher II*, 93–98.
[664] Also 1:13; 7:24–25.
[665] See the parallel passages to 3:11: 7:13–14; 8:7–8, 17; 9:12; 10:14; 11:5.
[666] Possible allusion to Gen 6:1–7 or 11:1–9; cf. Prov 16:9.
[667] The verb means "to miss a mark, to fall short of the standard," from which is derived the theological meaning, "to sin." The participle seems to designate the sinner in Prov 13:22; Isa 65:20 and all instances in Eccl. See G. Herbert Livingston, "חָטָא," *TWOT*:277–79.
[668] See 1:13; 2:24–26; 3:10–18; 5:5–6 [ET 6–7], 17–19 [ET 18–20]; 6:2; 7:13–14, 16–18, 26; 8:2, 12–13; 9:1, 7; 11:5, 9.

allegiance that was made before God (8:2). Qohelet warns the seriousness of offence by oath probably because he knows that "God never suffers fools gladly."[669] Consciously or unconsciously, Qohelet seems to be reminded of God's law whenever and whatever subject he brings up. Torah and other biblical teachings[670] echo in many of his sayings against corruptions that Qohelet has seen in his community.

For example, his admonition against improper entry and a fool's offering of sacrifices in the temple (4:17–5:1a [ET 5:1–2a]) may perhaps be a reminder from Lev 10:1–3[671] that God expects to be treated as holy and to receive honour. God's dwelling place in heaven is a familiar theme elsewhere, as in Deut 4:39.[672] His admonition about making a vow and fulfilling it in a timely manner (5:3–4 [ET 4–5]) may allude to the teaching in Deut 23:21–23 and Num 30:2. In addition, his audience may hear an echo from Deut 4:2 and 12:32 when Qohelet says that nothing can be added to or taken away from whatever God says or does (3:14a). An allusion to the Genesis creation account of human beings has already been noted.[673] Qohelet's cautious encouragement to a youth to enjoy his life but also his reminding him of God and His judgement (11:9–12:1) perhaps reflects a warning against carnal desires in Num 15:39. When he talks about human life as הבל, which one spends like a shadow (6:12), it resonates with King David's psalm: "Man is like a mere breath (הבל), his days are like a passing shadow" (Ps 144:4). When Qohelet sternly cautions about the difference between the two realms where God and humans reside, he may be reminded of, or alluding to, Ps 115:16: "The heavens are the heavens of Yahweh, but the earth He has given to humankind," where they belong.

The above examples show that teachings from Torah, Genesis and Deuteronomy in particular, may be embedded in Qohelet's monologic discourse.[674] The God, of

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[669] "This expression comes from the New Testament (II Corinthians 11:19), where Paul sarcastically says, 'For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.' [c.1600]." Christine Ammer, *AHDI*:142. Note that the word כסיל "fool" appears three times in the passage: 4:17 [ET 5:1]; 5:2–3 [ET 3–4].
[670] Lucas, *Exploring*, 165–66; Ginsberg, "Koheleth," 147.
[671] Also cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Prov 15:8; 21:3, 27; Hos 6:6.
[672] Also Deut 3:24; Josh 2:11; 1 Kgs 8:23; Job 22:12; Ps 11:4; 115:3.
[673] Also cf. Gen 18:27; Job 10:9; 17:16; 34:15; Ps 90:3; 103:14; 104:29.
[674] Krüger, *Kohelet*, 47–48 [ET 24–25]; Philip P. Chia, "Wisdom, Yahwism, Creation: In Quest of Qohelet's Theological Thought," *Jian Dao* 3 (1995): 1–32; David M. Clemens, "The Law of Sin and Death: Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–3," *Them* 19 (1994): 5–8; Forman, "Koheleth's Use," 256–63; William H. U. Anderson, "The Curse of Work in Qoheleth: An Exposé of Genesis 3:17–19 in Ecclesiastes," *EQ* 70 (1998): 99–113; Eichrodt, "Faith," 37–38; Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg and Hans Bardtke, *Der Prediger/Das Buch Esther* (KAT 17/4–5; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 227–30. Hertzberg remarks: „Es ist kein Zweifel: das Buch Qoh *ist geschrieben mit Gn 1–4 vor den Augen seines*

whom Qohelet speaks, is not an "unknown god" but *the* god that he knows, and he is familiar with Torah teaching. This in turn clarifies that Qohelet's God is not a general, universal god, but the God of Israel.[675] Nonetheless, He never utters יהוה but uses the term (ה)אלהים whenever he mentions God, and uses the latter both with and without the definite article interchangeably[676] in the same sentence or in similar contexts.[677] Why has Qohelet, or the author of Ecclesiastes for that matter, chosen to use exclusively the term אלהים, when addressing God? On a personal level, Qohelet may simply not have felt a personal closeness to address God as יהוה, when Yahweh apparently has become silent and remote in heaven during the tumultuous upheaval of an evil society in which he lived.[678] Maybe he has deliberately avoided the sacred Tetragrammaton יהוה, because of his observation of the reality in his society, which is filled with corruption and perversion of justice. As much as he perceives his God as the ultimate Judge who appears more to punish than reward, perhaps Qohelet did not wish to utter His personal name,[679] especially when the sufferers were his own people and when their suffering could look like God's punishment as in 7:15 and 8:14.

Nevertheless, Qohelet's advice to a youth to remember *his* Creator (12:1),[680] for God will judge *him* according to *his* deeds (11:9), seems intended to remind the youth of his relationship and responsibility to the God whom he is likely taught to worship, especially if the youth were Israelite. Qohelet also repeatedly reminds his audience of the importance of fearing God, which echoes the familiar theme of "the fear of Yahweh" in Wisdom literature.[681] *Sifre* Deuteronomy makes a following generalized observation about the difference in use between אלהים and יהוה:

Verfassers; die Lebensanschauung Qoh's ist an der Schöpfungsgeschichte gebildet" (There is no doubt: the book of Ecclesiastes *is written with Genesis 1–4 in front of its author, and Qohelet's view of life is built on the Creation story*). Author's emphasis.

[675] Stephan de Jong, "God in the Book of Qohelet: A Reappraisal of Qohelet's Place in Old Testament Theology," *VT* 47 (1997): 154–67; Helmer Ringgren and Walther Zimmerli, *Sprüche/Prediger* (ATD 16/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 133; contra Lauha, *Kohelet*, 17.

[676] Schoors notes there seems to be no difference in meaning in the less frequent use of Elohim without the definite article, which he explains as Qohelet's erratic use of the article, in Schoors, "God," 270, although his notion in the relative clause may not be correct; also Schoors, *Preacher I*, 164–69; cf. Jean L'Hour, "Yahweh Elohim," *RB* 81 (1974): 551, notes that אלהים, often without the article, is a proper name designating Yahweh, the only/unique God, at a later period.

[677] See 2:24 vs. 5:18 [ET 19]; 3:10–14; 3:14 vs. 7:18; 4:17–5:6 [ET 5:1–7]; 8:12–13. In verse 5:18 [ET 19] both האלהים and אלהים appear.

[678] Carey Walsh, "Theological Trace in Qoheleth," *BTB* 42 (2012): 14.

[679] Exod 3:13–15.

[680] For detailed analysis of בוראיך, *vide infra* in Chapter 5.

[681] Although Qohelet does not use the phrase יראת אלהים "the fear of God" corresponding to יראת יהוה. See more on Qohelet's "fear God" in Chapter 5.

> Whenever Scripture says *the Lord* (יהוה), it refers to His quality of mercy, as in the verse, *The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious* (Exod. 34:6). Whenever it says *God* (אלהים), it refers to His quality of justice, as in the verses, *The cause of both parties shall come before God* (אלהים) (Exod. 22:8), and *Thou shalt not revile God* (אלהים) (*nor curse a ruler*) (Exod. 22:27)[682]

It is not certain if the author of Ecclesiastes recognized this particular distinctive use of the two terms, but some such distinction may perhaps be present in his non-use of the Tetragrammaton.

Qohelet begins and ends his monologic discourse with descriptions of God's created universe (1:3–11; 12:1–7). He focuses much on God as the Creator who has created humankind and God who will judge. Perhaps the author of Ecclesiastes has desired to bring out the character of יהוה particularly as the Creator of the universe by using the term אלהים, a deity who has authority and control over all His creation and their activities.[683] Thus the author lets Qohelet speak about Israel's God as the Creator God who will judge the righteous and the wicked, which may include both Jews and pagans in his society.

A notion that God in Ecclesiastes is an impersonal, distant *deus absconditus* or a very different God from Yahweh in the rest of Scripture seems a modern Western perception.[684] A silent God is not a proof of an absent God. Frydych makes a perceptive remark:

> Qoheleth's systematic reference to God as אֱלֹהִים, yet, [*sic*] accompanied by a strictly monotheistic perspective, suggests that Qoheleth is writing at a time when Yahweh is no more seen as a tribal deity, but as the only God, i.e., in a time when what initially appeared to be the perspective reserved to the wisdom sages became widespread.[685]

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[682] Reuven Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (24; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 49, with translator's emphasis; based on Louis Finkelstein, *Sifre on Deuteronomy* = ספרי על ספר דברים (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969), 41.

[683] Bartholomew, *Reading*, 258. This emphasis that Yahweh is the Creator of the universe is shown by the combined name יהוה אלהים (20 times out of 24 occurences of Elohim) in the creation reccount in Gen 2:4–3:24. Interesting to note is that the four occurences of Elohim alone in the passage is within the dialogue between the serpent (3 times) and the woman (once), not in the narrative. See L'Hour, "Yahweh," 525–56, for his excellent analysis on the unique combined name designation. L'Hour notes that the intensive use of the name Yahweh Elohim suggests that the Yahwist believes that the creator Elohim in Gen 1:1–2:3 is Yahweh of Israel (p. 555). Clearest examples of this emphasis appear in Exod 9:29–30, where Moses tries to impress upon Pharaoh that Yahweh is the Creator, because of Pharaoh's earlier retort (Exod 5:2): "Who is Yahweh . . . ? I do not know Yahweh." Another example is in Jonah 4:6, where the passage shows that Yahweh is the God of creation who also cares about the Ninevites (v. 11) to impress upon Jonah that Yahweh is the God of the Gentiles as well as of Jews. Gen 24:3 and Num 27:16 are passages where יהוה and אלהים appear in the same sentence and indicate Yahweh is Elohim, the God of heavens and earth and of all flesh. Therefore, Qohelet may have used אלהים without an article as God's proper name, as L'Hour proposes.

[684] Schoors, "God," 269.

[685] Tomáš. Frydrych, *Living under the Sun: Examination of Proverbs and Qoheleth* (VTSup 90; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 210.

In conclusion it is the God of Israel about whom Qohelet speaks. This God is transcendent; nonetheless, Qohelet affirms that God is at work under the sun.

Why then does God (האלהים) seem so remote from Qohelet's world in spite of his utterance of God nearly forty times? Qohelet says, "God is *in heaven*," but he never looks up or directly beseeches God when he tries to search out answers for life's mystery and contradictions. Qohelet's eyes are fixed on everything *under the sun*, and he tries to find answers by his "s*elf-realized* wisdom" (1:17; 7:23),[686] rather than wisdom *from above*.[687] God indeed becomes remote, or rather Qohelet seems to keep his distance from God, albeit perhaps unintentionally, as he seeks to understand everything with his own wisdom. The next section will discuss the outcome of his search by his self-realized wisdom.

4.1.2 The Unknowable

Qohelet has a voracious appetite for wisdom and knowledge.[688] He boasts about his own wisdom and knowledge as saying, "I grew and increased wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart enjoyed much wisdom and knowledge" (1:16). Qohelet has sought to understand and find answers to life's perplexities by wisdom[689] as he faced an unfulfilling prospect through his toil to find meaning in his transient life. The more he seeks, the less confident and more puzzled he becomes in his quest for understanding the activity of God in human affairs under the sun (1:17–18; 8:17). Qohelet claims that he has tested everything by wisdom and said to himself, "I will be wise," but he has found that he himself is far from being truly wise. Qohelet finds that there are things which humans cannot know, however laboriously he may seek and explore what happens in this world. What he really desires to know and apprehend is elusive and beyond his grasp. This he finds even

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[686] J. Edward Owens, "'Come, Let Us Be Wise': Qoheleth and Ben Sira on True Wisdom, with an Ear to Pharaoh's Folly," in *Intertextual Studies in Ben Sira and Tobit* (eds. Corley and Skemp; CBQMS 38; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2005), 228, 234, notes that the Hithpael conjugation of חכם "be wise" in Exod 1:10; Eccl 7:16; and Sir 6:32; 10:26; 32:4; 38:24, 25 (the identified leaves in Hebrew) is essentially reflexive and refers to self-realization of wisdom. Qohelet's wisdom is self-realized, couched in terms of being realized by and for himself (cf. 2:9). Emphasis added; see also H.-P. Müller and M. Krause, "חָכַם," *TDOT* 4:370–71.

[687] Cf. 1 Kgs 4:29; 5:12a which state: "God/Yahweh gave wisdom to Solomon"; interestingly, the writer uses the term for the divine giver אלהים in the first verse and יהוה in the second.

[688] The term חכם and its cognates appear 53 times, and ידע and its cognate 36 times in Ecclesiastes (*vide supra*), and all but three are uttered by Qohelet.

[689] Qohelet expresses his effort as saying, "I set my mind to know (by) wisdom . . .," e.g., in 1:13, 17; 7:25; 8:16.

truer when it comes to comprehending when and how God operates to bring about His righteous judgement.

4.1.2.1 Time

Whatever exists under the sun is bound by time, and life on earth is linear and restricted by time. Time or timing in human affairs is important to Qohelet because he realizes that duration of human life is short and limited. In fact, life seems so short that Qohelet phrases it as ימי־חיים (מספר) "the few years of life" and describes it as הבל "fleeting," as already discussed. Moreover, people neither know what evil may befall the earth, nor when it strikes them during their life time (11:2). Qohelet, therefore, encourages people to prepare for their rainy days, be diligent in their work without being idle or waiting for the right time to begin their work, which they cannot know anyway (11:1–6). Time and chance erode a human plan because humans cannot set or control an appropriate or right time to achieve a desired goal (9:11). What is worse, humans do not know the time of their death, and the evil time can suddenly fall on them (cf. 9:12). Next to death, *time* is another issue that occupies Qohelet's mind and with which he also grapples, when he looks around in his world.

Qohelet opens chapter 3, saying that there is an appointed time for everything and an appropriate time for every matter under heaven (3:1). He lists pairs of events—perhaps *merismus* or perhaps opposite[690]—which occur in human life in fourteen categories:[691]

A time to give birth, and a time to die;	עת ללדת ועת למות
A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.	עת לטעת ועת לעקור נטוע:
A time to kill, and a time to heal;	עת להרוג ועת לרפוא
A time to tear down, and a time to build up.	עת לפרוץ ועת לבנות:
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;	עת לבכות ועת לשחוק
A time to mourn, and a time to dance.	עת ספוד ועת רקוד:
A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones;	עת להשליך אבנים ועת כנוס אבנים
A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing.	עת לחבוק ועת לרחק מחבק:
A time to search, and a time to give up as lost;	עת לבקש ועת לאבד
A time to keep, and a time to throw away.	עת לשמור ועת להשליך:
A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together;	עת לקרוע ועת לתפור
A time to be silent, and a time to speak.	עת לחשות ועת לדבר:
A time to love, and a time to hate;	עת לאהב ועת לשנא

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[690] Hartmut Gese, "Die Krisis der Weisheit bei Koheleth," in *Les sagesses du Proche-Orient ancien: Colloque de Strasbourg, 17–19 mai, 1962* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 149; ET Hartmut Gese, "The Crisis of Wisdom in Koheleth," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (ed. Crenshaw; IRT 4; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 148.

[691] Probably meant to encompass every event in human life, "typical not specific," i.e., כל־חפץ in 3:1. Fox, *Contradictions*, 192.

A time for war, and a time for peace. (3:2–8, NASB) עת מלחמה ועת שלום׃

In 3:11 he then says:

> את־הכל עשה יפה[692] בעתו גם את־העלם[693] נתן בלבם מבלי אשר[694] לא־ימצא האדם את־המעשה אשר־עשה האלהים מראש ועד־סוף׃

The phrase את־הכל עשה יפה בעתו in 3:11a is usually translated as "He has made everything appropriate [or beautiful] in its time." Within the context of the well-known "time" passage, it is unlikely that Qohelet here in v. 11 means God's creative act when he says את־הכל עשה. Qohelet mentions various events which have their time in vv. 2–8. They are probably examples of כל־חפץ "every matter" under heaven, pointing back to v. 1. It is unlikely that הכל in 3:11a is everything that God has created or made, but again most likely referring back to כל־חפץ in v. 1. Fox points out: "*'aśh*—when God is the subject—almost always means 'make happen'; and *ma'ăśeh* usually means 'event' or, as a collective, 'events'."[695] Fox categorises both עשה in v.11 as "make happen" and מעשה as "event" in his distribution list of the senses of עשה,[696] and they fit well within the context of 3:1–15. In other words, v.11 may be interpreted as:

> He makes every event happen (את־הכל עשה) appropriately in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, except that humans will not find out [every] event which God makes happen (את־המעשה אשר־עשה האלהים)[697] from the beginning even to the end.

Qohelet apparently does not see those events, good or bad, merely as happenstances. Rather he seems to view them occurring under a divinely ordained time,[698] although humans may not necessarily recognize it. Even if one may plan an event, ultimately, the right (appropriate) moment for it to happen exactly is not within human power which sets or controls it. In His scheme of things, God may have already worked out

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692 "Beautiful, fair, appropriate, right (=טוב, see 5:17 [ET 18])." *CHALOT*:139.

693 The term here is variously interpreted, "the world" (KJV), "mystery of the world" (Fisch, 1988), "a sense of duration" (Murphy, 1992), "ignorance" (NET), "passage of time" (NJB), or even "work" (McDonald, D. B., 1899, and 90 years later Fox, emends העלם to העמל, but all the versions support MT), and the context here supports the meaning "eternity" (ESV, NASB, NKJ, RSV, and others). See Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 166–67; Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 310.

694 "Excep that." Kautzsch ed, *GKC*, §152y, notes concerning מבלי אשר לא: "Two negatives in the same sentence do not neutralize each other . . . , but makes the negative the more emphatic . . . This especially applies to the compounds formed by the union of . . . בְּלִי with מִן־."

695 See Fox, *Contradictions*, 152; however, Fox later changes his mind in Fox, *Time*, 209–10.

696 Fox, *Contradictions*, 153; Isaksson, *Language*, 81, notes that עשה in v. 11a has "a stative force depicting an attribute of God."

697 I.e., את־הכל עשה = את־המעשה

698 The phrase בעתו can mean either "in its time" or "in his time"; if the latter, it may be paraphrased as "in God's ordained time," i.e., a proper time from God's perspective. Every "thing" or "event" by itself does not set time but God does it for everything. Cf. Schoors, *Preacher II*, 114–15.

everything from His eternal perspective which transcends "time under the sun" (3:11a), and everything occurs within God's time frame of eternity (cf. 3:14). In other words, humans may recognize that there is indefinite time beyond the human life span, but they cannot know the entire work of God for every event which extends far beyond their life.

Humans can only see what is happening *now* and within their immediate sphere, not like God who sees everything that happens in the "eternal" time frame so as to connect the dots and see the whole picture. Humans live within the time allotted, and thus live in tension within the *measured* time. Colson writes:

> Living in time is one of life's great tensions. We are nostalgic for the past, which lives only in our memory, in the midst of a disappearing present, while our hopes for the future can never be assured. Time measured from one end point to another is painfully elusive.[699]

In contrast, the eternity in which God operates is "*beyond* measured time."[700] Even though Qohelet believes that there is an appropriate time which God has set for everything, he has no way of knowing whether it lies within or without one's life span. He cannot know what is beyond the time frame within which he lives. Qohelet never clearly states that the appropriate time must be within one's life, certainly never specifically relating to God's judgement.[701] He simply affirms that there is an appropriate time for every deed and every event under heaven. All he can say is, therefore, "there is a time for everything," everything including divine judgement, but without knowing when that time is or will be.

It is as though Qohelet assumes that God's work is accomplished *within* measured time when he desires to know and understand what God does under the sun. Since justice is not served, as it should be, or is delayed in his society, it seems inevitable that Qohelet wants to know what God is doing in such a world. What Qohelet finds, or does not find, regarding God's activities under heaven will be the next topic to follow.

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[699] Colson, *Faith*, 108.

[700] Scott C. Jones, "Qohelet and the Economy of Time" (paper presented at The Society of Biblical Literature 2012 Annual Meeting. Chicago, IL, November 16–20, 2012), 3. Author's emphasis.

[701] "A time to judge" is not listed in the category of time in 3:2–8. Two occurrences specifically mentioning God's judgement (11:9; 12:14) set it in the future tense.

4.1.2.2 What God Does

Qohelet says: "I know that everything which God does will last forever (הוא יהיה לעולם)[702]. There is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it" (3:14). No one can straighten what is crooked or reckon what is lacking, if it is the work of God (1:15; 7:13). God makes happen the day of prosperity (יום טובה) as well as the day of adversity (יום רעה) in human life (7:14). Qohelet believes that the sphere of divine control in the universe is not limited to the natural world but also in the realm of human life and activities. The verb עשה "do, make" or "make happen" is one of the most frequently used active verbs next to נתן "give, set," and both are often associated with God's activities in Qohelet's monologic discourse. There seems no question in Qohelet's mind that God has been involved in human affairs on the earth, but his description of divine activities conveys no discernible presence of God but seems to assume His remote operation from heaven, God's dwelling place (5:1 [ET 2]).

God's activities puzzle Qohelet a great deal, because nothing changes and nothing is new under the sun regardless of what happens on the earth, or more specifically even in the human world, in his observation (1:9–11). From the beginning Qohelet has set his heart to seek and search out by wisdom what is done under the sun but he has concluded at three different times that no one can discover the work of God (1:13; 3:10–11; 8:16–17). The threefold statement of inability to discern God's activity may indicate Qohelet's dilemma and bafflement at not knowing what God does, especially when evil deeds are rampant in this world. Qohelet observes that the absence or delay of justice is only encouraging those in power to become even fully evil (8:9–12a). Qohelet admits that no one, even the wise like himself, can grasp the work that God does under the sun:

> וראיתי את־כל־מעשה האלהים כי לא יוכל האדם למצוא[703] את־המעשה אשר נעשה תחת־השמש בשל אשר[704] יעמל האדם לבקש ולא ימצא וגם אם־יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא:[705]

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[702] Literally, "it will be for ever." Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 164: "That is, not bound by time and invariably coming to pass (cf. lĕʻôlām in 1:4)."

[703] Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 645–46, notes: "The most striking conclusion about מצא in Qoh. is, that in a number of contexts, it refers to intelletual activity in the sense of 'to discover, to conclude, to understand'."

[704] בשל אשר: a complex conjunction and variously translated. See ibid., 645.

[705] A complicated text, the apodosis of 8:16 (conditional clause). Some scholars equate כל־מעשה האלהים with המעשה אשר נעשה תחת־השמש, but others disagree; the former probably is correct: "every work of God = *the work* that is done under the sun," namely, "every work of God that is done under the sun." Not "all that is done (or happen) under the sun is God's work" (note the location of כל in v. 17). Qohelet is saying here that every work that God does under the sun is unfathomable, however much

> Then I saw every work of God, that humans cannot find the work that is done under the sun. However much humans toil to seek, they will not find; and even though the wise says to know, he cannot find. (8:17)

He cannot fathom what God may, or most likely may not, be doing in the midst of all the evil that is taking place. Yet he does not question, probe, or protest the injustice that he has seen but only insists that it will be well for those who openly fear God even under such circumstances (8:12). He instead contends that the righteous, the wise, and their works are in the hand of God:

> כי[706] את־כל־זה נתתי אל־לבי ולבור[707] את־כל־זה אשר הצדיקים והחכמים ועבדיהם[708] ביד האלהים גם־אהבה גם־שנאה[709] אין יודע האדם הכל לפניהם[710]:
>
> Indeed I have given all this to my heart and to explain all this that the righteous and the wise, and their services are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hatred, humans do not know; all are before them. (9:1)

But the problem is that humans often do not know whether their deeds are favourable or unacceptable to God. Qohelet has already observed that there is no guarantee that the righteous and the wise are rewarded for their deeds in this world, but now he says that they cannot know if God will love or hate[711] their services, once they are in God's hand.[712] In other words, they are not certain if their present suffering is God's testing

humans toil to discover. The unique term ענין in v. 16 as seven other occurrences in Ecclesiastes is the *human* task/occupation, probably alluding back to 1:13; 2:23; 3:10–11; 4:8 which are all endless but futile task. Qohelet notes that God has given ענין to humankind in1:13; 2:26; 3:10. Therefore, "the task (הענין) that is done on the earth, even if neither day nor night one's eyes see sleep" in 8:16 (cf. LXX) cannot be "the work (המעשה) that is done under the sun, which humans cannot find out however laboriously they may seek" in 8:17. Cf. Gordis, *Man*, 186; contra Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 642–47.

[706] Possibly causal, adversative, or asseverative according to how one relates 9:1 to the preceding passage. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 297.

[707] *Lectio difficilior,* taken as *waw explicativum* (Seow ibid., 297), or maybe inf. consecutive; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 652.

[708] From עבד: "work, service." Often the word is translated as "their deeds." The righteous and the wise are often expected to serve God, so it may also be translated "their services."

[709] גם־אהבה גם־שנאה: "whether love or hate."

[710] הכל לפניהם: literally, "all (or both, i.e., love and hate) are before them"; it can be temporal or spatial in meaning. Many connect the phrase with the first word (הכל) in v. 2, following LXX, to emend it to הבל and interpret it as "everything before them is *hebel*." This thesis follows MT reading with temporal in meaning without emendation. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 298–99; contra Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 656. Schoors also emends כאשר in v. 2 to באשר, which is possible and even looks attractive but may be influenced too much by Qohelet's ubiquitous judgement, "everything is *hebel*," on pure instincts, as Seow points out in his commentary.

[711] Contra Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 298, who connects love/hate in 9:1 with those in 9:6 and interprets as human love/hate. If it is human love/hate, a question is why "the human does not know"; cf. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 296, 300. Most scholars interpret it as divine love/hate in 9:1.

[712] One wonders if Qohelet has in mind the offerings by Cain and Abel—God hated the former and loved the latter (Gen. 4:3–7)—when he mentions offering a sacrifice in 9:2, although here he talks about one who offers and one who does not. Ironically Abel's name is spelt the same as *hebel* (הבל) in Hebrew, although Donald A. Seybold, "הֶבֶל," *TDOT* 3:314, cautions: "It cannot be demonstrated with

(from love) or His punishment (from hatred—perhaps anger) for their services.[713] They cannot know what lies ahead in their life (הכל לפניהם) and they will die without knowing what God has given or done in their life—reward or punishment. It does not seem to matter if God favours one over the other because death awaits them all. In Qohelet's view, again the same fate befalls all humans irrespective of their deeds: all die and go to the same place (3:20). Qohelet clearly sees this as evil among all that is done under the sun: that is, one fate for all and all must die as if all deserve the same fate regardless (9:3). Qohelet maintains his conviction on God's judgement but he cannot even discern what God is doing in the midst of misfortunes that the righteous suffer, which the wicked deserve to face, or of rampant iniquities that the wicked commit and get away with. Wickedness has prevailed, and there seems to be no divine intervention or justice in the foreseeable future in his society.

After all searches, there is no justification to legitimize what Qohelet has seen, and his dilemma remains. He is a man of enquiry but his effort does not provide what he really looks for (7:23–25). What he has found is that there is not a righteous person on the earth who does good and never sins, but humans have sought out many devices despite the fact that God made them upright (7:20, 29).[714] There is therefore hardly any hope for justice in this world. Qohelet does not quite say that this is also injustice, but comes close to it, because there may still be a hope only if death did not cut off all human endeavours (9:4). Death is a certainty in life nonetheless, and Qohelet has to come to some conclusion and resolution with this reality.

4.2 Qohelet's Conclusion and Resolution

Facing the tyranny of death and with insufficient wisdom for insight, Qohelet contemplates what life really entails but seems to resort to a pragmatic solution for living the life that God allotted to humankind. The ensuing sections explore what conclusion and resolution Qohelet has drawn on life.

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complete certainty that there is a connection between this root and the name 'Abel,' which appears only in Gen. 4." Abel's story is also a reminder of the brevity of human life: "Abel's brief life is the life of Everyman," says Duncan B. MacDonald, *The Hebrew Literary Genius: An Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1933), 111; see also E. J. van Wolde, "The Story of Cain and Abel: A Narrative Study," *JSOT* 52 (1991): 29; Radiša Antic, "Cain, Abel, Seth, and the Meaning of Human Life as Portrayed in the Books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes," *AUSS* 44 (2006): 203–11; Melvin Tinker, "Evil, Evangelism and Ecclesiastes," *Them* 28 (2003): 10.

[713] Marcus Adriaen, "S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Commentarius in Ecclesiasten," in *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera I,1* (CCSL 72; Turnhout: Brepols, 1959), 321; ET Richard J. Goodrich and David J. D. Miller eds, *St. Jerome: Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (ACW 66; New York: Newman, 2012), 100.

[714] The verse 7:20 perhaps echoes Solomon's word in 1 Kgs 8:46a or David's in Ps 143:2b.

4.2.1 Everything Is “Hebel”

Qohelet seems to cast himself as an unconventional thinker against conventional wisdom tradition from the outset when he commences his monologic discourse with his superlative motto: “*Hebel*, utterly *hebel*! Everything is *hebel*” (1:2). Not only does he start with an unusually distressful tone and mood for what he is about to deliver in his speech, but he also concludes his monologue with the same motto (12:8). His *hebel* maxim apparently governs his discourse.

What does Qohelet mean? What is *hebel* and what does he mean by “everything”? Qohelet’s signature word הבל appears thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes, more than a half of its total occurrences in the OT, and is used metaphorically with almost always negative connotations. Its literal meaning is “vapour, breath.”[715] LXX translates it ματαιότης and Vulgate *vanitas*, from which the traditional English translation “vanity” is derived. However, the change in the meaning of “vanity” in the modern world may jeopardize the true sense of הבל.[716] The term obviously has a wide semantic range of connotations for meaning, according to the context in which Qohelet uses it, especially as a rhetorical device. He seems to have taken advantage of this aspect of the apparently “onomatopoeic” lexeme.[717] Numerous translations: futility, smoke, emptiness, enigma, irony, transitoriness, for example, indicate no single English word encompasses the broad semantic range of הבל with its nuances.[718] Sometimes the noun is also translated like an adjective: fleeting, transient, ephemeral, pointless, meaningless, senseless, or absurd, for example, to convey the meaning for some passages. This list of translations suggests that there may be no one word in English or modern Western languages that can embody the range and scope of the Hebrew term הבל.[719] Therefore, no single word translation suffices in every case as

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[715] See Isa 57:13; Prov 21:6; the term is also used to mean “idol” often in pl. (e.g., Deut 32:21; 1 Kgs 16:13; Ps 31:7 [ET 6]; Jer 8:19; 10:8).

[716] The term now refers to “shortcomings like pride, pretension, complacency, conceit, etc.; realities that seem rather foreign to Qohelet,” rather than evoking “emptiness or void” as in Latin, notes Jean-Jacques Lavoie, “*Habēl habālīm hakol hābel*: Histoire de l’interprétation d’une formule célèbre et enjeux culturels,” *ScEs* 58 (2006): 227; cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 41.

[717] Seybold, *TDOT* 3:313–20.

[718] Charles F. Melchert, *Wise Teaching: Biblical Wisdom and Educational Ministry* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 116–17; Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 90–129 [esp. 92–105].

[719] Michael V. Fox, “The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 409; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 102. Interestingly, it may be worth noting that a Japanese Bible translation (Kogoyaku) uses a term *kū* (空) for הבל. 空 has a range of meanings in Japanese: empty, space, sky, vacancy, hollowness, vacuity, zero, or vain, from which one also derives cognates 空しさ (vanity, emptiness), 空しい (empty, vacant, futile, vain), and 空しく (in vain). 空 is “air” in Chinese, and in Japanese it forms a part of the word “air” (空気), the substance that we breathe; or “karate” (空手), empty hand(s), i.e., “hand(s)

Qohelet uses *hebel* in Hebrew.[720] This means that the context in which הבל is used and what Qohelet is inferring by הכל, "all" or "everything," become significant in determining what he tries to convey by הבל.

The word הבל appears in every chapter of the book except in chapter 10. Qohelet declares six times הכל הבל,[721] and precedes it with the superlative, הבל הבלים, in 1:2 and 12:8:

הבל הבלים אמר קהלת הבל הבלים הכל הבל (1:2)
הבל הבלים אמר הקוהלת הכל הבל (12:8)

The frame-narrator presents this as Qohelet's guiding maxim or summary statement of his monologic discourse. As Schoors notes, however, the scope of הכל "all" is "not absolute totality," as we have already seen it being qualified probably as "both" in some examples.[722] Qohelet says in 1:14, for example, that he has seen all *the works* (כל־המעשים) which have been done under the sun and then follows with "all is *hebel* (הכל הבל) and chasing after wind": here הכל parallels כל־המעשים. In a similar vein in 2:11, he says, "I considered *all my work* (כל־מעשי) that my hands had done and *the toil* (בעמל) that I had laboured," which he detailed in 2:4–9, and concludes that all was *hebel* and chasing after wind and that there was no profit under the sun. Here again "all" points to "the work" that he has laboured by his own hand. In 2:17 Qohelet comments that *the work* which has been done under the sun is evil or grievous (רע)[723] to him, and he repeats that everything is *hebel* and chasing after wind. In these three passages what Qohelet implies by הכל "all" is the works which have been done on this earth—the toils laboured in the human realm. These are the toils that he himself has laboured or the works that he has seen someone else toiled (2:21–23).

Qohelet gives several reasons why all works end in *hebel*. Whatever one may toil and labour for is a futile effort. His descendant may not be wise to keep his legacy (2:18–19). A stranger may inherit what he has accumulated if he did not have any

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without a weapon," therefore, a defensive marshal art [the last example is just to show how widely the term is applicable, although pronounced differently]. The Japanese translation *kū* (空) appears better to convey the Hebrew term הבל than an English translation or even, perhaps, similar modern Western language translations.

[720] Eugene H. Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* ([S.l.]: John Knox, 1980), 153; Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther* (NSBT 10; Leicester: Apollos, 2000), 90.

[721] 1:2; 1:14; 2:11, 17; 3:19; 12:8.

[722] Schoors, *Preacher II*, 3.

[723] "Events (Eccl 2:17; Eccl 9:3) or the times (days) (Gen 47:9; Prov 15:15; Eccl 4:8) may go awry and be filled with distress." G. Herbert Livingston, "רָעַע," *TWOT*:855.

descendant (2:21). However one guards what he earned, invested, or accumulated, the end is the same: he loses them all certainly by death, if not by any other way. All the while, what one gets from his toil are often pain, grief, and his restless mind at night (2:23). "This also is *hebel* and a great evil," exclaims Qohelet (2:21–23). Moreover, Qohelet finds God assigning the sinner the task of gathering and collecting so that He may give the fruit of such labour to whomever He favours, but not to the one who has carried the task (2:26). Qohelet later reiterates: Even if God grants all that one's soul desires, God does not necessarily empower him to eat from them; instead, a foreigner may enjoy them (6:2).

Qohelet also realizes that every labour and skill for work is due to one's jealousy of his neighbour (4:4). For example, even a man who does not have any descendant, a child or a sibling, toils endlessly and is never satisfied with his riches or asks himself for whom he is labouring and depriving himself of pleasure (4:8). In another case, a man hoards riches and then loses all his riches in a bad investment, thus leaving nothing in hand for his son (5:12–13 [ET 13–14]). Qohelet calls all these instances *hebel* and chasing after wind (2:26; 4:4), a distressing occupation (4:8), or a sore affliction (6:2). He concludes that all the efforts one exerts and what one accumulates in this life are *hebel* when one cannot keep and enjoy the fruit of all that he has laboriously toiled even with wisdom and skill, but has to leave it to someone else.[724]

It is the same in the realm of mental work: an effort to increase knowledge and wisdom is also chasing after wind (1:17). Being exceedingly wise does not preclude one from dying just like a fool (2:15). In fact, either extreme of being too wise or too foolish can be hazardous. The same goes with ethical conduct of being too righteous or too wicked, because such extremes lead to self-destruction or premature death (7:16–17). Being wise or foolish, both die alike and will be forgotten, because there is no lasting remembrance of the dead among the living (2:16; 8:10).[725] The effort of being different or making of distinction—being richer, wiser, or more powerful than others—is *hebel* because all die alike; in fact, there is no difference even between human and animal in death: all turn to the dust of the earth, from which they came. Indeed, every effort of striving for "more" seems to end up in *hebel*.

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[724] Cf. Ps 39:6–7 [ET 5–6].
[725] Cf. 9:15; contra Prov 10:7.

The pursuit of pleasure or enjoyment of good things (2:1, 10; 6:9), of power or glory (4:16), or of money and wealth (5:9 [ET 10]), cannot satisfy (perchance even if they might temporarily), either, and there is no end to such quest. It is *hebel*, and life itself becomes *hebel* according to Qohelet (6:12; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10).

From this brief survey of Qohelet's view of activities in one's life or in this world, clearly Qohelet does not use the term הבל indiscriminately, but there emerges some distinctive usage in his utterances. Qohelet does not say that work or the fruit of labour, such as money, wealth, riches, pleasure, or enjoyment of good things, *per se*, is הבל. What vexes Qohelet is that all the toil, labour, effort, or pursuit—whether it be physical or mental—does not reward or give the rightful owner what they deserve for their endeavour, but rather someone else who has not toiled gets to enjoy the fruit of another's labour. Death or God strips away the rightful ownership of everything from the person who has toiled and earned. Qohelet describes his effort in work as עמל "toil"[726] along with עשה "work" and often uses an emphatic *figura etymologica* such as כל־העמל שעמל תחת השמש "all the toil that one has toiled under the sun" (7 times) or המעשה ש(נ)עשה "the work that is done" (8 times). The encompassing כל also appears often as כל־עמל' "all (one's) toil" (12 times) or כל־המעשה "all the work" (5 times). Qohelet then asks, "What advantage is there for all the toil that one labours under the sun?"[727] The advantage, gain, or profit (i.e., surplus)[728] that one gathers from all activities is very important to Qohelet. But there is no advantage for all the work that one labours, if one cannot keep the fruit of labour after all.

What Qohelet means by הכל in the context where his main concern resides is then the toil and labour, one's effort or endeavour for life's fulfilment in this world. This in turn guides the interpretation of the term הבל to an appropriate translation in such context. Although we have already recognized that one English word cannot capture all the nuances or connotations of הבל, an interpretation as "futile" or "futility" may be appropriate in the context of the above analysis.[729] All the toil and efforts in which

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[726] Cf. Job 5:6–7 says, "For affliction does not come from the dust, neither does trouble sprout from the ground; for a man is born for trouble (עמל)." It appears that עמל is human's doing.

[727] What advantage/profit/gain appears as: מה־יתרון (1:3; 3:9; 5:15), מה־כשרון (5:10), or מה־יותר (6:8, 11).

[728] Qohelet mentions "advantage, profit, or surplus" for 17 times using four different terms: יתרון (10 times), מותר (3:19) or יותר (2:15; 6:8, 11; 7:11, 16), and כשרון (5:10). All appear only in Ecclesiastes except מותר (see Prov 14:23; 21:5).

[729] This translation is preferred by HCS, NET, JB/NJB, NJPS, and REB; Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Koheles*; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*. It does not mean, however, that this translation fit all the uses by Qohelet; cf. Weeks, *Scepticism*, 104–31 for his analysis of הבל; opposing views: R. N. Whybray, "Qoheleth as a Theologian," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom* (ed. Schoors; BETL 136; Leuven:

one labours for life's fulfilment and one's future is utterly *futile* if one is not empowered to enjoy them or cannot keep what one has earned.

In addition, Qohelet often emphasizes his הבל statement with a phrase רעות רוח or רעיון רוח "chasing after wind" in his utterances.[730] In 8:8 he says, "No man has power to restrain the wind (הרוח) with the wind (ברוח), or power over the day of death." The wind is air in motion which no one can see, touch, reach, grasp, or hold onto. One can only see its effect on his surroundings or feels it on his body when the wind blows. No one knows whence the wind comes or whither it goes. All the toil, effort, or striving to have control over one's life and possession is like chasing after wind—it is futile—because no one can hold on to what he has gained through his endeavour in the face of death, just as no one has power to restrain the wind. When one faces death, indeed everything becomes futile. The added phrase רעות רוח or רעיון רוח underscores the futility of an "attempt to achieve the impossible."[731] Qohelet then sums it up: "Futile, utterly futile, everything is futile" in the opening and at the closing of his discourse (1:2; 12:8). Edwin Good aptly notes that

> perhaps we discover only here that *hakkōl*, "everything," is not an inclusive "everything" but refers to everything within some boundary. What boundary? The only one we see is that around *ʾādām*, his toil, his generations, the way *ʾādām* occupies life and the time of life so occupied.[732]

University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 251, 264; Lindsay Wilson, "Artful Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes 1,1–11: A Wisdom Technique?," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom* (ed. Schoors; BETL 136; Leuven: University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 362.

[730] The term רעות and its variant רעיון likely stem from the root רעה "to pasture, tend, graze" (Ps 37:3; Prov 15:14; Hos 12:2 [ET 1], although they were connected with an Aramaic root רעע (Heb. רצץ) "break, shatter" with an exclusion of its noun form in the ancient exegesis; see Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 85–86; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 116–17. The verb appears once in 12:11 in a participial form: מרעה "one who pastures/tends," i.e., "shepherd" (*vide infra*). For discussion on the root and possible Aramaism, see Schoors, Schoors, *Preacher II*, 439–42; however cf. Pierre van Hecke, "Polysemy or Homonymy in the Root(s) *rʿh* in Biblical Hebrew. A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach," *ZAH* 14 (2001): 50–66. The phrase רעות/רעיון רוח appears nine times in total, seven of which are combined with Qohelet's *hebel* statement in early chapters of Ecclesiastes: הבל ורעות רוח (1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4; 6:9), הבל ורעיון רוח (4:16), רעות רוח (4:6), and רעיון רוח (1:7); 1:17 and 4:6 are connected with עמל, thus the meaning of the phrase aligns with Qohelet's use of הבל. The similar expression לרוח (שיעמל) in 5:15 [ET 16] and (לבו) ברעיון in 2:22 may also be added to the list. Cf. Douglas B. Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: The Place of Hebel in Qohelet's Work* (SBLABib 2; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 92, 94; Douglas B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of הבל," *JBL* 117 (1998): 447. The phrase is often translated as "striving after wind" "chasing after the wind," "pursuit of wind," or "vexation of spirit": NASB, NIV, TNK (JPS) and KJV, respectively, and many other translations. Scholars also translate the phrase "shepherding or desiring wind," "wishing for the wind or possibly a wishing of the spirit," or even unlikely "senseless thoughts," even though רעיון is found to mean "thought" in Biblical Aramic: Perdue, *Sword*, 251; Weeks, *Scepticism*, 111; Fox, *Time*, 42–45.

[731] Miller, *Symbol*, 94.

[732] Edwin M. Good, "The Unfilled Sea: Style and Meaning in Ecclesiastes 1:2–11," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien* (ed. Gammie; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 64; see also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 113.

Qohelet has come to grips with a futile (הבל) effort to gain what one cannot keep in all work (הכל מעשה/עמל), be it mental or physical, because death ends it all.

4.2.2 *Carpe Diem*: Misquoting Qohelet?

After declaring that everything is *hebel* because death ends it all, what else is still left for Qohelet to say to his audience or even to himself? Qohelet cannot help but see death as an intruder, leveller, and negator of every endeavour and its fruit. His brazen and repeated reminder that death is the ultimate killer and nullifier of every human effort to make sense of human existence, can easily lead one to despair or give up any hope of making life meaningful or fulfilling. One can easily ask, "Why then live?" or "Why then toil?" Living only for the present without purpose is nothing more than what animals do; it reduces human dignity to nullity. A natural recourse in the absence of purpose in life or hope for the future could easily lead to suicide or a reckless life style without mind or will to take care of one's well-being or prepare for the future, because everything one does either lacks or loses its meaning. Qohelet, however, does not endorse either option. No one can prepare for capricious death because no one can predict, foresee, or know when it will come; neither can anyone escape the assault of death which he will encounter sooner or later. Nonetheless, Qohelet never suggests a choice to give up on living in the face of unforeseeable death's invasion. There is no hint of suicidal thought echoing even in the despairing tone of his assessment of death's triumph over human life. Qohelet seeks to find the best of one's situation in life which is allotted by God, although it appears that humans simply live to die, just like every other living being does, no matter what they do to survive. What option is there still to live in the seemingly pointless and unchangeable situation in which humankind is placed?

Five times Qohelet commends an option to "eat, drink, and enjoy yourself (in all your labour)" (2:24–25; 5:17 [ET 18]; 8:15; 9:7, 9). There is hardly any more practical guiding principle for living under the harsh reality of death than this to anyone whose hope hangs on this life only and who sees life being doomed by death. On the surface it looks as though Qohelet is suggesting a *carpe diem*, "seize the day," motto[733] or even hedonism.[734] His sayings echo almost *verbatim*: "Eat, drink, and be

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[733] Originally from Horace ("Odes" I.xi.8): "Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero" (Seize the day, trusting as little as possible in tomorrow).

merry, for tomorrow we may die." Qohelet is often compared with Greek philosophers, Epicurus in particular, and some Babylonian and Egyptian literature, although a similar sentiment was not totally unknown among Israelites (see e.g., Isa 22:13; 56:12). Qohelet's premise for life-assessment, however, is very different from Epicurus and in fact is the opposite of a Western adaptation of Epicurean philosophy, both of which are characterized by an absence of divine principle for pursuit of happiness or pleasure.[735] Qohelet emphasizes that the source of pleasure comes from God: no one can enjoy even eating and drinking, unless God also empowers (ישליטנו) him to enjoy what God has given him (6:2). Qohelet lives in the God-ordained world, and denying God is unthinkable to him. He believes that humans can live and enjoy only within the allotment that God has assigned them. Epicurus insists that god has no business in human life and the fear of god deprives humans of pleasure, whereas Qohelet advises to fear God. In any event, Greek influence on Ecclesiastes is highly contested because there is no clear sign of Greek language or culture detectable in the book.[736]

To Qohelet it seems there is no other option but to live under God's rule.[737] The question is to know how one should live during the time span that God has set. Qohelet apparently comes to a conclusion that the best humans can do is enjoy whatever one does while one is living. In particular, he advocates eating, drinking, and enjoying oneself in one's labour because: (1) it is from the hand of God, and without Him no one can eat and have enjoyment (2:24–25). (2) It is also good and fitting (5:17 [ET 18]), and (3) God empowers one to enjoy His gift to him (5:18 [ET

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[734] Cf. 6:3, which implies that a stillborn is better off if a man's soul (נפשו) is not satisfied with good things of life. Some interpret נפשו as "his appetite" and translate, "if his appetite is not satiated with good things of life." See Schoors, *Preacher II*, 218–20 for Qohelet's use of נפש.

[735] For Epicurus gods exist but they have no concern for humans. He denies immortality of the soul, because to him death is the end of existence, based on the two propositions: "Nothing comes from nothing" and "nothing returns to nothing." According to Epicurus, the life's goal is to have pleasure, ἡδονή; and the ultimate pleasure is achieved by ἀλυπία (freedom from pain in the body) and ἀταραξία (freedom from trouble in the mind, especially freedom from fear of divine wrath and fear of death). See R. W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996); Poortman, "Death," 197–220; Segal, *Life*, 221–23; A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (2nd ed.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 14–74; F. W. Beare, "Epicureans," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia; Identifying and Explaining All Proper Names and Significant Terms and Subjects in the Holy Scriptures, Including the Apocrypha* 2:122–23, for Epucurus and Epicureanism.

[736] Azize, "Considering," 184; Harrison, *Qoheleth*, v, 343; Weeks, *Scepticism*, 161.

[737] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 305.

19]).[738] Besides, (4) there is nothing better for a person than to do otherwise (8:15); and (5) God has approved one's work (9:7).[739] Qohelet then adds:

> ראה חיים עם־אשה[740] אשר־אהבת כל־ימי חיי הבלך אשר נתן־לך תחת השמש כל ימי הבלך[741] כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך[742] אשר־אתה עמל תחת השמש:
>
> Enjoy life with a woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun, for it is your portion in life; and with your toil in which you have toiled under the sun. (9:9)

This seems to reflect something like God's original plan of placing the first couple in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. God placed Adam (and Eve) to work (עבד) in the Garden (Gen 2:15); but later He tells Adam that he will toil (בעצבון)[743] all his life after being expelled from the Garden, as we discussed earlier. Qohelet emphasizes that work is one's portion, in which one should find enjoyment; it is God's allotment (חלק)[744] to humankind.

By saying this, Qohelet probably means: stop toiling for what one cannot keep (4:8) or for that which only brings pain, grief, and restless night (2:23); not necessarily stop striving for what is good and profitable. In fact, he encourages his audience to enjoy oneself *in all one's toil*, and even exhorts them to do everything that their hand finds to do with their might, because there is no work to be done after death (9:10). Above all, Qohelet affirms that there is nothing better for a human being than to rejoice and do good during his lifetime (3:12). He repeatedly commends being joyful in one's work (3:22; 5:18 [ET 19]) and in one's life (3:12; 8:15; 11:8, 9). Work is meant for sustenance to enjoy life (6:7; 9:7; 10:19), neither for envy or rivalry (4:4), nor for greed or surplus (4:8; 5:9–12 [ET 10–13]), nor for strife towards power and glory (4:1; 8:9), all of which result from excesses but will soon be lost and forgotten after one's death (1:11; 9:5–6). Qohelet almost seems to say that surplus does nothing but becomes hazardous when one no longer can enjoy one's labour. Enjoyment in

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738 In fact, this saying is reinforced by 6:2: No one can enjoy even just eating without God's empowerment.
739 It appears referring to Gen 2:15; 3:17–19.
740 Literally, "see life with a woman," which is generally understood as "enjoy life with a woman." אשה without an article is debated whether it means one's wife or any woman. The single noun is modified with אשר־אהבת "whom you love," thus אשה probably is a wife.
741 For this second appearance of כל ימי הבלך, *vide supra*.
742 "And with your toil," probably another modifier of ראה חיים as ובעמלך אשר־אתה עמל seems to be in parallel with עם־אשה אשר־אהבת.
743 "In toil or pain." The term is used for both the childbirth pain that Eve will experience and Adam's toil for tilting the ground in Gen 3:16, 17.
744 Qohelet may have deliberately used this term to encompass and connote all the ranges of its meaning with עמל: work is God's given *portion,* human's *share* and *reward* (2:22 and passim).

whatever one does seems to be the only advantage or profit (יתרון) that one can gain from the portion that God has allotted to humans.[745]

In such a context, Qohelet's utterance of "eat, drink, and be merry" especially with one's toil (8:15) is far from the *carpe diem* motto, which promotes self-indulgence, while denying or rejecting God's involvement in human life.[746] Qohelet repeatedly refers to God's interference and activity in human affairs and reminds his audience to watch their lips and their conduct before God (4:17–5:6 [ET 5:1–7]) as well as before the king and rulers (8:2–5;[747] 10:4, 20) because they are also under God's authority (cf. 5:7 [ET 8]). He admonishes them not to be fools (4:5; 5:3 [ET 4]; 7:6, 9, 17; 10:3, 15) but to fear God (5:6 [ET 7]; 8:12–13) because God's judgement will come (3:17; 8:6; 11:9). Qohelet's utterance is not a reckless advice to "have pleasure now, for we will die anyway," but rather to accept and live sensibly with God's allotment, because God is the ultimate giver and judge of everything. Many of Qohelet's "better than" sayings[748] also reflect recognition of God being "behind the scenes." Qohelet speaks his commendation in this context.[749] It is not a thoughtless, haphazard statement, but is rather a sober resolution to make the best of one's fleeting life. To Qohelet, God and death define what humans can, or cannot, do to make sense of their existence. His resolution probably stems from his acute sense of the tyranny of death on the earth and perhaps because he is unable to find out what and how God works in the puzzling and indefensible events in human life under the sun. Qohelet is constrained by his own belief in the absolutism of God and death. He analyses everything by his knowledge, wisdom, and experiences, but what really happens after death is a great unknown. "Afterlife" in the Israelite Sheol, or in the netherworld of the surrounding nations, is totally unsatisfactory to Qohelet. He shows little interest in what happens after death, but wishes to find out what God is doing in the human

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[745] This seems to be Qohelet's answer to the question in 1:3 and perhaps an antithesis or irony of Gen 3:17–19, where Adam was told: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (v.17). Cf. Anderson, "Curse," 99–113.

[746] Iain W. Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 212.

[747] Possible allusion to Prov 16:10.

[748] See 2:24; 3:12–13; 3:22; 4:6, 13; 5:4 [ET 5]; 6:3, 9; 7:1, 2, 3, 5, 8; 9:4–5; 9:16, 17, 18.

[749] Therefore, Qohelet's שמח "enjoy" statement is not a simple "optimism," as some suggest, opposing arguments for Qohelet's pessimism: e.g., Hans Debel, "Life-and-Death Advice from a Conservative Sage: Qohelet's Perspective on Life after Death," in *Text, Theology, and Trowel: New Investigations in the Biblical World* (eds. Matassa and Silverman; Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 52; Whybray, "Preacher of Joy," 87–98; Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *"Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück" (Koh 2,24): Kohelet im Spannungsfeld jüdischer Weisheit und hellenistischer Philosophie* (HBS 2; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 331.

world which is plagued with the problem of death. With lingering uncertainty, he has focused on this side of life, which one must live as ordained by God. Qohelet's self-realized wisdom leads him to commend enjoyment in life (responsibly), and especially in one's labour, because he can find no better alternative to offer from where he stands.

It is mistaken, therefore, if anyone draws a conclusion that Qohelet is promoting a *carpe diem* motto in his monologic discourse. Chia notes that

> it would be an affront to Qoheleth's wisdom if one thought of him as a hedonist. Qoheleth's encouragement to enjoy life is conditioned by responsibility in one's action to seek enjoyment because God will judge (Qoh 2:26b; 11:9; 12:14).[750]

What Qohelet has proposed, however, does not address or answer the serious issue of misplaced justice in the face of the greatest of all evil: one and the same fate for all. Death haunts and consumes his heart and mind. Moreover, Qohelet often makes ambiguous and contradictory statements. For example, Qohelet says, "the day of death is better than the day of birth" (7:1). He congratulates the dead more than the living and says better off than both is a stillborn (4:2-3), or a stillborn is better than a man who lives many years with many children (6:3), despite his abhorrence and grievance over death. Qohelet has seen the righteous encountering what should happen to the wicked and perishing in their righteousness, and still insists that God will judge or continually advise his listeners to fear God, and so forth—still more contradictory remarks. It is hardly surprising that readers are hard-pressed to make sense of Qohelet's inconsistences and understand what the book intends to communicate: the subject that needs to, and will, be addressed in the next chapter.

4.3 Summary and Conclusions

One's outlook on God and death often influences and shapes how one determines to live. Just like Job, Qohelet realizes that true wisdom does not reside in the land of the living, and wisdom also dies with him when he dies.[751] His self-realized wisdom based on his experience and observation cannot find a way out of death and leads him to resort to a tangible solution of eating, drinking, and enjoying one's life while it lasts, which may temporarily ignore or skirt the issue but does not solve the problem of death and inequities in this world.

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[750] Chia, "Wisdom," 29.
[751] Cf. Job 12:2.

Qohelet's attitude seems to be one of not expecting anything to change. His *hebel* statement attests to this fact. He particularly relates the term הבל to the two aspects of human existence: (1) the brevity of life as "fleeting" or "ephemeral" (6:12; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10; cf. Ps 144:4) and (2) the "futility" of all activities in human life, in particular work with toil. Qohelet expresses with utter abhorrence what death does to all one's efforts by the term הבל thirty times.

Strangely, Qohelet maintains his belief that God will judge, despite his observation of iniquities prevailing in his society. He admonishes people to fear God and commends God-fearers, while he sees the righteous, the ones who indeed practise their piety in the fear of God, perishing in the absence of justice *on the earth*. He affirms that God will judge, but without any immediate or credible sign. Evidence counters his insistence. Schoors characterizes Qohelet as non-conformist, a sceptic or "an agnostic in the etymological sense of the word . . . not a freethinker or an atheist. He is at the edge of faith but remains a searching believer, he asks many questions but gives few answers."[752] Rather Qohelet does not have answers. Those who died in Qohelet's society, either the righteous or the wicked, certainly did not receive their just deserts if God judged only in this life. Qohelet never accuses God concerning death,[753] even that of the righteous, and affirms that there is a time for God to judge, but never specifies when. Such conviction is simply a matter of faith in what he does not know. It is ambiguous where his true conviction stands when Qohelet says, "God will judge," but does not actively pursue God's intervention in corrupt society, while maintaining that God's justice must be done in this life. Where is God and what kind of God is He who delays justice against all the grievous evil that is at work, while Qohelet keeps saying that God will judge? This defies logic. His statements do not cohere.

The next chapter will seek how inconsistencies found in Qohelet's monologue may perhaps be explicated from the frame-narrator's perspectives. An attempt to bridge Qohelet's monologic discourse and the epilogue will be centred around the last chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes.

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[752] Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 20.

[753] It is significant that Qohelet never assigns or blames God as the cause or source of death. He never calls death one's portion (חלק) but labels it מקרה for his own use with an uncommon connotation: "fate." Qohelet never says that God set aside or gave (נתן) death to humankind, as Siduri does in the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (*vide supra*). Qohelet implies that human sin brings death (7:16–17, 20, 29).

Chapter 5

FINDING COHERENCE BETWEEN QOHELET'S MONOLOGUE AND THE EPILOGUE

Apparent conflicts and contradictions pervade the whole book of Ecclesiastes—within Qohelet's monologue, as well as between it and the epilogue. Close examination of Qohelet's statements against his observed realities reveals unresolved conflicts in what Qohelet says.

Challenges to make sense of Qohelet's monologue are often plagued with his language. Qohelet not only uses words and phrases which contain more than one meaning but he also seems to use familiar words with a distinctive meaning or innuendo. Qohelet's utterances often appear inconsistent or even contradictory to the reader. Pragmatism and individualism also characterize the content of his message. No faith and community consciousness can be detected in his monologue. Qohelet's ambiguous and conflicting discourse simply does not make sense or accord well with the rest of Scripture, even if the epilogue were meant to be a corrective. There almost appear to be two contradictory messages competing one against the other: Qohelet's resolution and the epilogue. The problem is how best to make sense of all this.

In the final chapter of Ecclesiastes both Qohelet and the frame-narrator conclude their discourses in what appears to be a form of instruction characteristic of a sage: Qohelet delivering his to a youth, and the frame-narrator to his son. If there is any connection or disparity between the two, one may reasonably expect to see it most clearly in their final conclusive statements as Qohelet and the frame-narrator seem to be in the same professional circle. What are the implication and purpose of the frame-narrative after all?

5.1 Qohelet the Sage: His Final Instruction to a Youth

In his reflection on life, Qohelet finds that nothing lasts but evil abounds. The evil inflicted on the dead while he was alive can no longer be rectified; neither is there a reward to the dead for all the work that he has done if death is *the* end. Death deprives

people of a chance to be vindicated or of a good life to last. This is the greatest evil of all (9:3a). The dreadful oppression upon the powerless is so great that Qohelet congratulates those who are already dead, and says that better-off than both the living and the dead is a stillborn who is never to live. This is absurd because the option of not having existed or never having lived is not an alternative that one who is already born and alive can choose to have.[754] According to such logic, the only alternative left to choose for the living is suicide, which never seems to cross Qohelet's mind, as already noted. A cynic may conjecture that Qohelet has probably weighed gain and loss in suicide: to keep living incurs a cost of pain and toil, suicide prevents such expenditure but at the cost of losing pleasure in life; namely, pleasure outweighs pain and toil. However, Qohelet makes clear that the situation under oppression does not offer any comfort but tears, when he mentions that the already dead are better off in 4:1–2. No pleasure is expected in such circumstances.[755] He also says that a stillborn is better off than a man whose soul is not satisfied with life's good things and who does not have pleasure. Yet he says that pleasure (שמחה) is *hebel* in one place (2:1–2) but commends it in another place (8:15). Qohelet continues that the day of death is better than the day of one's birth, mourning than feasting, and anger than laughter (7:1b–3a) on the one hand. But he says that even a live dog is better than a dead lion on the other hand, because there is hope for the living. What hope is there if one still dies, which he repeatedly emphasizes? He adds a strange anecdotal remark that the living know that they will die (9:4–5a).

With such an outlook, what best advice can Qohelet give to a youth?

> שמח בחור בילדותיך[756] ויטיבך[757] לבך בימי בחורותך והלך בדרכי לבך ובמראי עיניך ודע כי על־כל־אלה יביאך האלהים במשפט: והסר כעס מלבך והעבר רעה מבשרך כי־הילדות והשחרות[758] הבל:
>
> Rejoice, young man, during your youth, and let your heart be glad during the days of your youth; and walk in the ways of your heart and what your eyes see.[759] But know that God will bring you into judgement concerning all these things. So, remove

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[754] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 187.
[755] In fact, Qohelet says that it is the mind of fools which is in the house of pleasure (7:4).
[756] A period of youth, a growing-up period, likely young adulthood or "adolescence." Buzy, "L'Ecclésiaste," 270.
[757] Hiphil, jussive in meaning: "do good/well, make glad, rejoice" *BDB*:405.
[758] השחרות from שחר "dawn" or שחור "black." The blackness of hair, in contrast to grey hair, symbolizes youth. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 793–94; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 350–51. הילדות והשחרות: Literally, "the youth and the dawn." The phrase may perhaps be a hendiadys. Lauha, *Kohelet*, 205, 209.
[759] מראי עיניך, literally "the sightings of your eyes." Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 346, 350.

> vexation from your heart and put away harm[760] from your flesh, because youth and dawning are fleeting. (11:9-10)

Qohelet exhorts a youth to enjoy whatever his heart desires and whatever captures his eyes during his adolescent period. But he also warns him that God will judge according to all his activities. He tells the youth to avoid emotional and physical detriment by anger or harm because the adolescent period is fleeting. Qohelet may be encouraging the youth to enjoy life in its prime. He then seems to reinforce his warning about divine judgement in a form of poem with a larger picture as his final instruction.

5.1.1 Eschatological Poem (12:1–7)?

The final poem 12:1–7, as some call it, is a continuation of Qohelet's instructions to a youth. It is generally understood as a warning about old age and death. Qohelet advises the youth to enjoy the prime of his life, because life is fleeting, old age will soon approach, and death surely awaits him. The whole tone of advice is far from a *carpe diem* motto or "*carte-blanche* to run amok with one's passion"[761] that a youth might expect. Death seems to be one thing (מקרה אחד) that even a youth needs to heed. The poem is most often interpreted as an analogy of the ageing process. It is a strange and unusual closing instruction to a youth. Why should the youth worry about the pain and discomfort of old age? Is this indeed the message of the passage? How does it relate to the rest of Qohelet's message? These questions may lead one to wonder if the poem may contain more than the "old age" theme, although it has evidently contented most scholars to date. However, it may deserve a closer attention for a possible alternative interpretation or its intent and purpose, which may yet need to be unravelled.

Qohelet exhorts a youth to "remember *your* Creator" while still young, after warning him that God will bring him into judgement according to all his actions (11:9). He then proceeds to add to his exhortation: "before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (12:1). But his description of what lies ahead seems to make an unexpected turn. A sudden change in

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[760] רעה here is interpreted as non-ethical and often translated "pain", which seems to be anticipating the old age theme in chapter 12. This thesis prefers "harm" as in the OT narratives (e.g., Gen 26:29; Josh 24:20), better relating to youths.

[761] Zlotowitz and Scherman, *Koheles*, 190, elaborates: "It is clearly to be understood as words of warning to those rebellious youths who wallow in sin [and who would not accept his words if they were said in such negative terms as: 'Do not rejoice . . . do not follow your heart']."

the tone and the content of what is depicted in 12:2–7 from 11:9–12:1 has intrigued many scholars. They have exerted much effort to reconcile the disparity between them, but without considering the relevance of 12:1–7, if any, to the rest of Qohelet's monologue. The passage reads:

> (1) וזכר את־בוראיך[762] בימי בחורתיך עד אשר לא־יבאו ימי הרעה והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר אין־לי בהם חפץ: (2) עד אשר לא־תחשך[763] השמש והאור והירח והכוכבים ושבו העבים אחר הגשם: (3) ביום שיזעו[764] שמרי הבית והתעותו[765] אנשי החיל ובטלו הטחנות כי מעטו וחשכו הראות בארבות: (4) וסגרו דלתים בשוק בשפל קול הטחנה ויקום לקול הצפור וישחו כל־בנות השיר[766]: (5) גם מגבה יראו[767] וחתחתים בדרך וינאץ השקד ויסתבל החגב[768] ותפר האביונה כי־הלך האדם אל־בית עולמו[769] וסבבו בשוק הספדים[770] : (6) עד אשר לא־ירחק[771] חבל הכסף ותרץ גלת הזהב ותשבר כד על־המבוע

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[762] Hebrew text is pl. בוראיך, literally "your creators." Other versions (LXX, Syr., Vulg.) support the singular reading "your Creator": The plural in MT may be considered *lectio difficilior*; however, the plural form agrees with Qohelet's use of the plural אלהים for God. Cf. Isa 54:5; Ps 149:2; Job 35:10. Even though various emendations have been suggested for בוראיך, Fox endorses Gilbert who deems no emendation needed because "in this context to think on one's creator is to think of death, for . . . the life-spirit must return to the one who gave it." Michael V. Fox, "Aging and Death in Qohelet 12," *JSOT* 13 (1988): 72 (n. 2); Maurice Gilbert, "La description de la vieillesse en Qohelet 12:1–7 est-elle allégorique?," in *Congress Volume: Vienna, 1980* (ed. Emerton; VTSup 32; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 100–102; cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 351–52; Goldman, "Qoheleth," 109*–10*; Gordis, *Man*, 335, 340; Kautzsch ed, *GKC*, §93ss, §124k. There is a passage where the singular בראך occurs (Isa 43:1), which addresses Yahweh "your Creator" and "One who formed you" and reminds Israelites of their personal relationship to Him, saying "Fear not, I have redeemed you and called you by name." This is the only place in Ecclesiastes, where a personal relationship to God is specified. Adri J. O. van der Wal, "Qohelet 12:1a: A Relatively Unique Statement in Israel's Wisdom Tradition," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom* (ed. Schoors; BETL 136; Leuven: University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 413–18; cf. on Isa 43:1, see Mark W. Elliott, *Isaiah 40–66* (ACCS:OT 11; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 46; A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 49; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. Stalker; London: SCM, 1969), 116–17.

[763] עד אשר לא, literally "until when not." Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 352.

[764] C. L. Seow, "Qohelet's Eschatological Poem," *JBL* 118 (1999): 214, notes that "the verb זוע in Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic is used only for trembling in fear or excitement, never in weakness (Hab 2:7; Esth 5:9; Dan 5:19; 6:27; Sir 37:29–30; 48:12). By the same token, the related noun זעוה/זועה always implies sheer terror or horror, but never physical weakness (Deut 28:25; Isa 28:19; Jer 15:4; 24:9; 29:18; 34:17; Ezek 23:46; 2 Chr 29:8)."

[765] Ibid., 216. Cf. Isa 21:3b.

[766] "Daughters of song"–possibly birds. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 359. Cf. בנות יענה (ostriches in e.g., Mic 1:8; Isa 13:21; Job 30:29).

[767] Cf. Seow, "Eschatological," 221, interprets יראו as ראה "to see" rather than ירא "to fear."

[768] An insect or a plant. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 362.

[769] Jenni states that בית עולם is das Grab schlechthin "simply the grave": it denotes an irrevocable end, and it has nothing to do with a hope of eternal life. Ernst Jenni, "Das Wort 'ōlām im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 65 (1953): 1–35 [esp. 27–29]. Avi Hurvitz, "בית קברות and בית עולם: Two Funerary Terms in Biblical Literature and Their Linguistic Background," *Maarav* 8 (1992): 59–68, notes that both phrases are "directly related to a funerary terminology current during and after the Second Temple period among Israel's neighbors—particularly in territories where Aramaic was a dominant linguistic factor" (p. 59). However, the two phrases each appear only once in the Old Testament and possibly in an earlier period (e.g., Persian) than Hurvitz suggests.

[770] Note that השוק "the street," in which the mourners go around, parallels with בית עולם in a chiastic form.

[771] MT Qere: ירתק; cf. Goldman, "Qoheleth," 52, 111*.

ונרץ הגלגל אל־הבור׃ (7) וישב העפר על־הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל־האלהים אשר נתנה׃[772]

(1) Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; (2) before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain; (3) on the day, when the house guards tremble in fear, and the mighty men stoop with terror, and the mill maids stop grinding because they become few and the women looking through the lattice-windows grow dim; (4) and the double doors to the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mills diminishes and the cacophonic sound of birds rises, while all the daughters of song are brought low.[773] (5) Moreover, they are afraid of what is from high and of terrors on the way; and the almond tree blooms and the locust grows sluggish, and the caper berry is without effect, for humans go to their eternal home while the mourners go around the street; (6) before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed; the jar is shattered at the spring, and the wheel is crushed into the cistern; (7) and the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it.[774] (12:1–7)

By and large, scholars interpret the passage in an allegorical, literal, or eschatological sense. Traditionally, the allegorical interpretation has dominated among scholars and many still favour it: they understand the passage as an allegory of old age, more specifically "an aging process," nearing death.[775] Although this approach has merit in unpacking the seemingly non-cohesive poetic passage into a more coherent content, it has drawn criticism and has drawbacks.[776] Allegorical manoeuvring has allowed assigning any human body part to the words and phrases in the passage and almost any image association due to its "procrustean" character.[777] Cosmic chaos and terrors expressed (vv. 2, 3, 5) are forced into association with an old age. In a literal surface meaning, however, the entire poem depicts terrors associated with a certain doom, death, mourning, and finality of the total chaos rather than the aging process. Thus, one may well question: (1) if Qohelet is interested at all in addressing the old age problem; (2) why he has chosen to describe it by allegory or symbolism, if he is; and most importantly, (3) if the old-age allegory is appropriate and satisfactory as an interpretation and is relevant to the immediate context and to the rest of Qohelet's message.

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[772] Numbers in parentheses here and in the translation are verse numbers.
[773] See Seow, "Eschatological," 219, for interpretation of this verse.
[774] Bream, "Life," 56, notes: "Here he poetically describes man's death in terms of the separation into dust, and spirit, the divine vital force."
[775] Fox, "Aging," 56, notes: "The allegorical interpretation of this poem, first found in *Qohelet Rabbah* and *b. Shabbat* 131b–132a, is still the dominant one. . . . [but] . . . It is mainly out of exegetical habit."
[776] Some of the representatives are: C. Taylor, *The Dirge of Coheleth in Ecclesiastes XII: Discussed and Literally Interpreted* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1874); John F. A. Sawyer, "The Ruined House in Ecclesiastes 12: A Reconstruction of the Original Parable," *JBL* 94 (1975): 519–31; Fox, "Aging," 55–77; Seow, "Eschatological," 209–34. Fox and Seow provide a comprehensive discussion of various approaches that have been explored.
[777] Fox, "Aging," 56.

Firstly, old age or aging is not a subject that Qohelet discusses or refers to elsewhere in his entire discourse.[778] The process of aging is natural and something to be expected, not “the unpredictability of human affairs”[779] about which Qohelet is much more troubled. Qohelet repeatedly expresses that life is *hebel* (fleeing) as in 6:12 (ימי־חיי הבלו); 7:15 (בימי הבלי); 9:9 (כל ימי הבלך, כל־ימי חיי הבלך); 11:10 (כי־הילדות והשחרות הבל), as already seen. He is not at all preoccupied with a concern about old age, much less with its process. Rather, he dwells on his awareness of how fleeting human life is, and on his obsession with death above all.[780] He grapples with the ultimate fate of human beings, i.e., death, not with an aging process leading to it. His advice to a youth to enjoy and do all that he desires while he is young is based on the brevity of life (11:10b) and death’s reality (12:7).[781] Moreover, the topic of aging is certainly not a subject that would entice any youth to listen for advice, especially right after being told to enjoy whatever captures his eyes and heart while young.

Secondly, Qohelet speaks with words and phrases that contain a wide semantic range of meanings for his rhetoric, which may add innuendos and create certain imageries in the mind of his audience, but he never uses allegory elsewhere. An allegorical approach is uncharacteristic of Qohelet’s blunt style in speech and in content.[782] Multivalent words and phrases that Qohelet employs sufficiently conjure more imagery than what he himself may even intend to convey. Carefully crafted wording and phrasing in the poem already expresses vivid imagery by the surface meaning of the symbolic terms and phrases that the author has put in Qohelet’s mouth. Fox is surely correct, saying, “The allegorical interpretation has invariably failed to recognize that the imagery, the surface of the poem, is what the author chooses to show us first and most clearly.”[783]

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[778] Sawyer, “Ruined,” 531.
[779] Ibid.
[780] Fox, “Aging,” 61; Michael Leahy, “The Meaning of Ecclesiastes 12:1–5,” in *Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Essays on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (ed. Zuck; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 378.
[781] Although the immediate context may mean before one becomes too old to enjoy anything (12:1; cf. 2 Sam 19:35), the entire context of Qohelet’s instruction to a youth (11:9–12:7) implicates the ultimate death sooner or later in mind (12:7). Cf. Beal, “C(ha)osmopolis,” 294–95; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 795.
[782] Seow mentions: “At one level Qoh 12:1–7 does remind one of various litanies of geriatric complaints that are found throughout the ancient Near East,” and points to such literature as *The Instruction of Ptahhotep, The Tale of Sinuhe,* and *Papyrus Insinger*, none of which, however, are allegorized. Obviously, these authors did not see a need for allegorization. See Seow, “Eschatological,” 211.
[783] Fox, “Aging,” 57.

Thirdly, there is no good reason or necessity to allegorize the aging process in Qohelet's instruction as a final warning to a youth, who may less likely discern that it is an allegory of old age, a topic hardly imaginable to the young anyway. It is unlikely to produce any effect on a youth, even if he may perchance discern the allegory. Those who are approaching old age and imminent death may associate with and imagine an allegory of old age and aging problems to heed the warning, but they are probably not the primary audience when Qohelet addresses his audience, saying, "Rejoice, *young* man, in your *youth*" (11:9a). People in an oppressive regime such as in Qohelet's society where justice is not upheld often face death unexpectedly. Qohelet observes even the righteous encountering what the wicked should face: sudden, premature death. The youth is no exception to the same predicament. That is one of the reasons why Qohelet says that the already dead or the stillborn may be better off under such a circumstance, because the righteous and the oppressed may not live to old age for a full-life span and miss life's enjoyment that they deserve. There is no reason why the youth or the audience should worry about ailments in old age. They may never live to see their old age. It is irrelevant to their present calamity in Qohelet's society.

A counter approach to the poem is a literal interpretation. This approach takes the images in the text to be: (1) strictly literal; or (2) possibly with metaphorical, symbolical or figurative function.[784] An early example of strictly literal interpretation is Taylor's "Dirge" of Qohelet, which clearly limits the scope of wider implication of the text.[785] Others have depicted the poem as "the actual conditions and experiences of old age," "a house or estate in disrepair," "a gloomy winter day," "the approach and experience of a thunderstorm," or "a funeral," and so forth.[786] Many scholars have explored a literal rendering of the text but not without continual influence by the allegorical theme of "old age," and none seem to be cogent or satisfactory for encompassing the entire spectrum of the passage. They fail to reach any consensus as with an allegorical interpretation. A strictly literal interpretation fails because it limits or ignores the scope and syntax of the passage, not realizing a deeper or wider meaning in the text, which may be conveyed through its metaphoric, symbolic or

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[784] Seow, "Eschatological," 210; Fox, "Aging," 59–61.
[785] Taylor, *Dirge*, 1–50; see Fox, "Aging," 60–61, for good analysis and critique of Taylor.
[786] For relevant literature on this list of descriptions, see Seow, "Eschatological," 210; see also Fox, "Aging," 59–63 for detailed analysis and criticism of a literal approach.

figurative intent. This occurs because of an interpreter's preference to communicate the visible surface level of meaning, to which the text's secondary function is "strictly subordinated" and serves only as an aid to communicate the first level of literal meaning.[787]

The third approach is to interpret the text in an eschatological sense, which apparently enjoyed reception during early Christian and medieval periods but has received little support from modern critics, being virtually forgotten or overlooked.[788] Those who perceive eschatological foreboding in the text nonetheless are reluctant to entertain a possibility that the passage is pointing to the eschatological end to come.[789] Fox, for example, hesitantly concedes that "the eschatological symbolism is manifest but restrained."[790] Both Fox and Mazzinghi interpret the cosmic chaos that Qohelet describes as a powerful symbol of one's personal death and of the cosmic chaos which is meant to apply to one's own world, as Fox cleverly describes: "when you die, a world *is* ending—*yours*."[791] Mazzinghi goes so far as to say that "the poem on old age and death must be understood also as an ironical and polemical attack against the eschatological view of apocalyptic . . . and of the early Enochic tradition."[792] It makes no sense that the theme of an old age can be an attack against eschatology. Mazzinghi is not alone, however, when he argues for Qohelet's polemic against apocalyptists[793] and/or the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul,[794] while

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[787] Fox, "Aging," 60.

[788] Seow, "Eschatological," 210; John Jarick, "An 'Allegory of Age' as Apocalypse (Ecclesiastes 12:1–7)," *Colloq* 22 (1990): 19. Gregory Thaumaturgos in the 3rd century is the first Christian who interpreted the passage eschatologically, which is echoed in the commentaries of Didymus the Blind and Jerome in the 4th century, followed by Olympiodorus in the 6th century, Rupert of Deutz and Richard of St. Victor in the 12th century, Hugh of St-Cher and Bonaventure in the 13th century, and Nicholas of Lyra in the 15th century according to Sandro Leanza, "Eccl 12, 1–7: L'interpretazione eschatologica dei Patti e degli esegeti medievali," *Aug* 18 (1978): 191–207, also cited in Jarick.

[789] E.g., L. Mazzinghi, "Qohelet and Enochism: A Critical Relationship," *Hen* 24 (2002): 157–67; Fox, "Aging," 55–77; Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 76.

[790] Fox, "Aging," 67.

[791] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 76. Author's emphasis.

[792] Mazzinghi, "Qohelet," 165–66.

[793] Adams, *Wisdom*, 6, 133–34, 141; Otto Kaiser and Eduard Lohse, *Tod und Leben* (Stüttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977), 66; ET Otto Kaiser and Eduard Lohse, *Death and Life* (BE; trans. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 75; Segal, *Life*, 249–54; Gordis, *Man*, 34–36; Frank Crüsemann, "The Unchangeable World: The 'Crisis of Wisdom' in Koheleth," in *God of the Lowly: Socio-Historical Interpretations of the Bible* (eds. Schottroff and Stegemann; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 67; Oliver S. Rankin, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: Its Bearing on Theology and the History of Religion* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 138; Krüger, *Kohelet*, 56 [ET 30]; cf. Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 1–31 for term definitions relating to apocalypticism.

[794] Norman H. Snaith, "Justice and Immortality," *SJT* 17 (1964): 319, sees the Greek concept of immortal soul influenced the Wisdom of Solomon in the first, not in the third, century BCE, and "definitely outside the orthodox Palestinian sphere"; however, R. J. Taylor, "The Eschatological

placing the composition of Ecclesiastes in the third century BCE. Reasons for such a view are apparently based on two premises. Firstly, Qohelet's stubbornly earthbound disposition—his emphasis on enjoyment in this life, his obsession with death, and his agnosticism concerning anything beyond death—can predispose interpreters to assume that Qohelet is not interested in or does not believe in an afterlife and, therefore, he cannot refer to the demise of human existence in eschatological terms.[795] Secondly, the allegory of "aging and death" has become a deeply rooted guidepost and fixation—consciously or unconsciously—in the mind of most biblical scholars when faced with this enigmatic and difficult passage. Beal laments:

> Without denying the presence of that theme in this text, I will argue that the exclusive preoccupation among biblical scholars with this theme has resulted in neglect of another highly significant dynamic within the text, namely, the strange inbreaking of elements of proto-apocalyptic discourse in these last words, and the vision of chaosmopolis that this inbreaking presents.[796]

In recent years Krüger, Seow, and Beal have attempted to capture and foreground the eschatological rhetoric in their interpretation of this poetic passage.[797] It seems prudent then to examine whether eschatological imagery is present at all in the passage, in view of the relationship between Qohelet and the frame-narrator, as proposed in this thesis, to determine if the eschatological message is in the background or even may be foregrounded by the author, and to find if the message has relevance to the audience according to such an assessment.

To begin with, Qohelet tells a youth to remember his Creator before (עד אשר לא) the "catastrophic" events take place in a threefold manner in 12:2–7. First in v. 1b, Qohelet says that the youth should remember his Creator before the evil days come

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Meaning of Life and Death in the Book of Wisdom I–V," *ETL* 42 (1966): 94, disagrees, saying, "The Wisdom author's concept of soul is not at all that of Plato, for none of the essential considerations of Plato are used by him despite the evidence of Platonic linguistic usage."

[795] E.g., Diethelm Michel, *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qohelet* (BZAW 183; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 116–125; Alexander A. Fischer, "Kohelet und die frühe Apokalyptik: eine Auslegung von Koh 3,16-21," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom* (ed. Schoors; BETL 136; Leuven: University Press and Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 339–56. See, e.g., Adams, *Wisdom*, 133; Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes* (THOTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 152; cf. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC 14; Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 304.

[796] Beal, "C(ha)osmopolis," 292, who further clarifies in the footnote, saying, "I do not intend to argue that Qoh 12:1–8 is apocalyptic according to any generic definition . . . Rather, I intend to draw attention to elements in this text that are strikingly similar to other prophetic texts commonly believed to be the predecessors to the fully developed apocalypses that begin to appear in the third century BCE."

[797] Thomas Krüger, "Dekonstruktion und Rekonstruktion prophetischer Eschatologie im Qohelet-Buch," in *"Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit …": Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit. Diethelm Michel zum 65. Geburtstag* (eds. Diesel, et al.; BZAW 241; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 107–29; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 351–82; Beal, "C(ha)osmopolis," 290–304; Seow, "Eschatological," 209–34.

when he reaches forlorn old age and nothing delights him anymore. This admonition obviously leads (and understandably confuses) many scholars to interpret Qohelet's opening line as introducing an aging process in the subsequent verses.

However, an abrupt change of subject matter occurs after the second עד אשר לא in vv. 2–5. Qohelet tells the youth to remember his Creator "before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened" in v. 2. This does not seem to be a scene of simple twilight after the sunset, since Qohelet states all the luminaries in heaven are being darkened. The sun is a central and crucial cosmic object in the ancient world. It is also one of the key references in Qohelet's entire monologic discourse. He commences his discourse with a description of revolving routine movement of the sun, the wind, the water, and even the dust of the earth as generations of people come and go (because humankind is made from dust and return to dust, in a way forming a cyclic pattern).[798] Nature's regularity gives stability and continuity to human existence as part of it. Qohelet says that the light is sweet and one is alive, when he sees the sun (7:11; 11:7),[799] and that all human activities are carried out under the sun (1:3). The sun rises, sets, and rises again: it keeps its routine and it never loses its own light. One expects the sun to come out eventually after the rain, breaking the clouds in normal circumstances. Here in 12:2 Qohelet says that the sun and all other luminaries are darkened and more clouds are returning after rain, suggesting that more rain will come, and the darkness continues. Eerie, pitch darkness sets in, likely portending a sign of impending disaster. Qohelet may perhaps be insinuating a presentiment of a cataclysmic event. The expression resembles Israelite prophetic descriptions of the day of Yahweh, "the disastrous day of judgment,"[800] which is depicted as:

> A day of darkness and gloominess,
> A day of clouds and thick darkness.
> The sun and the moon grow dark,
> And the stars lose their brightness.
> The sun will be turned into darkness,
> And the moon into blood,
> Before the great and awesome day of Yahweh comes.
> (Joel 2:2a, 10b, 3:4 [ET 2:31])

or

> A day of wrath is that day,
> A day of distress and affliction,
> A day of devastation and desolation,

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[798] Samet, "Qohelet," 92–100.
[799] Cf. 6:5, where it says a stillborn never sees the sun. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 212.
[800] Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 77.

> A day of darkness and gloominess,
> A day of clouds and thick darkness. (Zeph 1:15)

or

> Behold, the day of Yahweh is coming,
> Cruel, with fury and burning anger,
> To make the land a desolation;
> And He will exterminate its sinners from it.
> For the stars of heaven and their constellations
> Will not flash forth their light;
> The sun will be dark when it rises,
> And the moon will not shed its light. (Isa 13:9–10)

Qohelet then describes what happens specifically "in/on the day" (ביום) in 12:3–5. The interpretation of vv. 4–5 is particularly difficult, but the gist of the passage appears to convey a "terror" all around human habitation. Something terrible, something unforeseen and drastic, is happening on the earth when even valiant men are stricken with terror.

Thirdly, Qohelet says that the youth should remember his Creator "before the silver cord is broken and the golden basin is crushed; the jar is shattered at the spring, and the wheel is crushed into the cistern" (12:6). This verse describes a scene of destruction of household tools and utensils at the sites where they once must have been used but now all domestic activities will have ceased. The imagery evokes the scene of a desolated human habitat, which is confirmed by v. 7: "and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

The abrupt change of subject matter in what follows after the second עד אשר לא in vv. 2–5 and the third in vv. 6–7 is mysteriously foreboding, which has led to various allegorical or figurative interpretations to continue in the "old age" theme. However, a presentiment of the future through the eerie scene suggests that Qohelet may be pointing to something else, something beyond a normal aging process, that is, a horrendous catastrophic event. The whole scene described in 12:2–7 resembles and is more likely a graphic catastrophe on a cosmic and universal dimension than just an individual's death and funeral scene, although that may be a part of the whole disaster.[801] The poem ostensively parallels an eschatological scene much more than old age imagery.

When Qohelet says, "Remember your Creator before the evil days come," the evil days may be an old age when one can no longer find any pleasure in life, if one stops at 12:1. However, the passage continues, and one needs to consider closely the kind of

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[801] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 376; Fox, *Contradictions*, 289–94.

people depicted and how they are reacting to the surroundings in vv. 3–5. The people who appear in these verses are the house guards (שמרי הבית), the mighty men (אנשי החיל), the mill maids (הטחנות), and the women looking through the lattice-windows (הראות בארבות). Who are these people? First of all, they may well be real people and none of them are linked with old age, about whom Qohelet speaks. Secondly, they encompass both men and women. Thirdly, they seem to be professional people, except the women, or perhaps "four classes of people."[802] The house guards may not be just lowly servants but probably guards with authority over the house, namely, the watchmen of the house.[803] The men of חיל may be mighty, valiant, strong, powerful, or wealthy, literally men of power,[804] as the term חיל signifies. The word טחנות means those who grind,[805] probably female servants or slaves who work at the mill. The women looking through the lattice-windows are not at work; they may be "women of leisure."[806] The scene depicts people serving, working, or residing in a big household or perhaps a palace of a powerful man.[807]

The entire household reacts to what is happening to their surroundings in that day. The house guards are those who protect the house, supposedly being strong and brave, but they tremble in fear. The mighty men of valour in their guarded house are crouched in fear. Mill maids stop grinding with fear probably because their number became so few. The women who look through the lattice-windows may be looking at the alarming phenomena and become distressed. The most striking in the scene is that the powerful men along with their entire households are gripped with fear on the day. Qohelet perhaps implies by ביום (12:3) on the day *of God's wrath*, which may also be the day *when God will judge*, although he does not quite spell it out in that way.[808]

Earlier Qohelet indicated that his society was controlled by men with perilous power. What might it mean to oppressed and ill-treated people when they hear that the powerful tremble in fear on the doomsday? They could surely detect a glimpse of hope that the evil doers would perish on that day. Qohelet is speaking to a

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[802] Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 269–70, characterizes the guards and the mill maids being lower-class servants, and the mighty men and the women who look through the lattice-windows belonging to upper class.
[803] LXX: φύλακες τῆς οἰκίας. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 354.
[804] LXX: ἄνδρες τῆς δυνάμεως.
[805] Feminine noun of טחן. Cf. Judg 16:21; Num 11:8. Probably female servants or slaves who worked with mill-stones (cf. Exod 11:5), thus translation: "mill maids."
[806] Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 270.
[807] Ibid., 269.
[808] Whether or not Qohelet implies eschatological judgement is uncertain.

youth, but the frame-narrator is communicating Qohelet's utterance to the audience. The evil days (ימי הרעה) that Qohelet warns to the youth in 12:1 may be a day of calamity, of death's threat, or of one's death—already a reality to his audience. But then comes the day (12:3) when even the powerful tremble—the day of wrath (or judgement) with cosmic catastrophe, which no one can escape. Whichever comes first, it is the day when the work and toil will cease, and human life on earth comes to an end. Qohelet's poem is similar to a pictorial description of the day of Yahweh, as already comparison with prophetic writings suggests, but it does not convey the full-blown eschatological sense. What seems to be emphasized is the judgement that even the powerful will fear. It seems to describe the ultimate cosmic end, but nothing about what may happen particularly to the righteous. His description of "the day" seems to be of a limited eschatological character, because he does not speak anything of an afterlife or eschatological hope. Qohelet is firm about divine judgement without its ultimate outcome of reward or punishment. If anything, that day is the day of cosmic end. He thus concludes in v. 8, "Futile, utterly futile. Everything is futile" because death (or the cosmic chaos) has the final grip to stop all human activities.

Be that as it may, the frame-narrator may attempt to present Qohelet's speech to the youth in such a way as if it is meant to his audience, eventually foregrounding the eschatological character of the coming judgement in view of 3:17 where Qohelet already said in his heart, "God will judge both the righteous and the wicked." Qohelet may not have been aware of the full extent of what he himself is saying, as he cannot fathom anything beyond death. The frame-narrator will apparently reinforce its eschatological sense by adding his final message to what might appear missing in Qohelet's poem in a form of sapiential instruction to his "son." The epilogue seems to be serving such a purpose as we shall see.

That the best way of reading Qohelet's mysterious poem is to see it as depicting eschatological events may be supported from another angle when one compares his opening poem 1:2–11 with 12:1–8: Qohelet uses the same words in both passage, as if the latter echoes the former.[809] His signature phrase, "Futile, utterly futile; everything is futile" in 1:2 is a refrain in 12:8. The lexemes which appear in both poems are: השמש "the sun" (1:3, 5 [bis], 9 vs. 12:2); בוא "come, go" (1:4, 5 vs. 12:1); שוב "return" (1:6, 7 vs. 12:2, 7 [bis]); הארץ "the earth" (1:4 vs. 12:7); עולם "eternity, long duration"

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[809] Seow, "Eschatological," 234.

(1:4, 10 vs. 12:7); סבב "go round" (1:6 [tris, plus a noun סביב] vs. 12:5); and זכרון "remembrance" (noun, 1:11 [bis]) vs. זכר "remember" (verb, 12:1).[810] Qohelet starts with recurrent routine movements of natural phenomena at the beginning of his discourse. The sun comes and goes day in and day out never to change its course (1:5), but the day will come when the sun and the light are darkened in 12:2. Generations come and go—the aging process and death of humanity routinely occur and repeat since the beginning on the earth in 1:4,[811] but each entity of human beings (dust and spirit) returns to its ultimate origin in 12:7. The wind (הרוח) goes around and returns to its courses in 1:6, but the mourners go around in the streets and take the dead to his grave, his eternal house (12:5). Things in this world seem to repeat themselves and therefore nothing is new: earlier things are forgotten and the later things which occur will be forgotten by still later generations in the beginning passage (1:9–11). But Qohelet starts the last poetic passage with "Remember your Creator *before* the evil days come" and follows with the day when everything which had routine activities in both cosmic and human worlds stops and comes to end. It is also interesting to note in this juncture that Qohelet tells the youth: "Remember *your* Creator." He does not say, "Remember the Creator," or simply "Remember God," but implies "the One who created *you*." Qohelet has given an impression to his audience that God is remote, but here he apparently reminds the youth of whose God he is talking about: *his*. When the frame-narrator transmits Qohelet's words: "Remember your Creator," his audience probably think of their Creator, the God of Israel. Qohelet believes in God's judgement and seems to be familiar with prophetic descriptions of the day of Yahweh, but without the apocalyptic eschatological hope for the righteous.

It is now time to discuss how the frame-narrator brings Qohelet's final words into focus and wraps up the whole discourse.

5.2 The Epilogue: Recasting Qohelet

No sooner does Qohelet conclude his monologue with the infamous *hebel* motto after his last poem, than the frame-narrator raises his voice to wrap up the whole discourse.

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[810] See Appendix for the parallel passage comparison. Hee Suk Kim, "Ruah as an Interpretive Marker in the Book of Ecclesiastes: A Comparative Study on Eccl. 1:2–11 and 12:1–7" (paper presented at the 64th Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting. Milwaukee, WI, 2012); cf. Seow, "Eschatological," 226.

[811] Seow and Fox interpret הארץ here as "the world" rather than "the earth" and translates the phrase "the world remains always as it was" or "the world remains unchanged/the same." Michael V. Fox, "Qohelet 1:4," *JSOT* 13 (1988): 109; Seow, "Eschatological," 226.

The epilogue consisting of a mere six verses is often considered as not only being added later, but also not necessarily by one but maybe two or more different voices,[812] probably because of its comprehensive content in such a short conclusive statement as we shall see. In the frame-narrative reading the epilogue is the frame-narrator's concluding statement. I will argue that the epilogue is not only the frame-narrator's conclusion, but it also may well redirect the audience to reconsider Qohelet's sayings which they have heard (or read). The epilogue appears to be a terse but definitive instruction of the frame-narrator to his "son" (or his "pupil"), which may actually be projected for the audience who have been listening to the framed story of Qohelet's monologic discourse. The epilogue may be the author's decisive tool for recasting Qohelet.

5.2.1 The Frame-Narrator Has Spoken

(9) ויתר שהיה[813] קהלת חכם עוד למד־דעת את־העם ואזן וחקר תקן[814] משלים הרבה:
(10)בקש קהלת למצא דברי־חפץ וכתוב ישר[815] דברי אמת: (11) דברי חכמים כדרבנות
וכמשמרות נטועים בעלי אספות[816] נתנו מרעה אחד:[817] (12) ויתר מהמה בני הזהר עשות
ספרים הרבה אין קץ ולהג[818] הרבה יגעת בשר:(13) סוף דבר[819] הכל נשמע[820] את־

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[812] E.g., Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste*, 151–70, 472; Galling, "Prediger," 124–25; and Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 142–44, discern two different hands (vv. 9–11, 12–14); also cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 394, divides the epilogue differently as vv. 9-13a, 13b-14; while Hertzberg and Bardtke, *Prediger*, 217–21, see three hands (vv. 9–11, 12, 13–14).

[813] יתר ש: "besides the fact that," יתר functioning as an adverb with a meaning close to "more than." Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 829.

[814] ואזן וחקר תקן. All verbs in Piel: אזן, only here, "weigh"; חקר, only here, "search out, explore"; תקן, also in 1:14 (Qal inf.) and 7:13 (Piel inf.), "make straight" or "arrange" here. But the meaning of these verbs is debated. Cf. Ibid., 830–33.

[815] וכתוב ישר: MT reads כתוב as a passive participle, but it may be an inf. abs. (either as an inf. consec. or as the object of בקש) with ישר as an adverb "uprightly, faithfully, correctly," but MT and LXX attest a *textus difficilior.* Cf. Gordis, *Man*, 342–43; Goldman, "Qoheleth," 112*; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 835–36.

[816] בעלי אספות: a difficult phrase, scholars have suggested various interpretations; אספות may mean "collections" or "assemblies," Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 836–41; *BDB*:127, gives meaning: "members of assemblies; or well-grouped sayings; or collectors (of wise sentences)." The phrase literally means "masters of collections," but here is interpreted as chief/master collections, rather than as owners/collectors of collected sayings because what is likened as nails are most likely "sayings" rather than "collectors."

[817] מרעה אחד "one Shepherd," whose identity is debated among the scholars, but to Israelites it is an epithet of God (Ps. 23:1 80:2 [ET 1], cf. Ezek 34:12–16). Opinions are basically divided between: it is either God or Qohelet. Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 198; contra Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 102; see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 840–41 for summary of various interpretations.

[818] The noun להג "devotion to books" is highly disputed. LXX μελέτη, Vulg. *meditatio*, Pesh. *mmll'* "speech, eloquence." Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 844. It may be an infinitive of הגה with a haplography of ה, thus to "groan, speak, utter." Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 389–90, translates להג הרבה "excessive talking," which is actually interesting and plausible, and fits for characterizing Qohelet.

[819] It is also possible to translate דבר as "speech" or "report" or even maybe "discourse" from its literal meaning of "word." סוף דבר "seems to refer to the end or result of the whole preceding discourse" (cf. Dan 7:28 סופא די־מלת), thus "the end of the matter" is probably not "what is about to be said in vv. 13b–14 bur rather what has been said thus far," namely, here it probably signifies the end of Qohelet's

האלהים ירא ואת־מצותיו שמור כי־זה כל־האדם: (14) כי את־כל־מעשה האלהים יבא במשפט על כל־נעלם אם־טוב ואם־רע:

(9) Besides being wise, Qohelet also taught the people knowledge; and he weighed, and searched out and arranged many proverbs. (10) Qohelet sought to find pleasing words and faithfully wrote words of truth. (11) Words of the wise are like goads, and like well-driven nails are master collections; they are given by one Shepherd. (12) But beyond these, my son, be warned: To working on many books[821] there is no end, and much talking is wearying to the flesh. (13) The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is [of][822] every human; (14) for God will bring every work into judgement, upon every hidden thing, whether good or evil. (12:9-14)[823]

Finishing the delivery of Qohelet's monologic discourse, the frame-narrator characterizes Qohelet as a wise man who also teaches people. He briefly describes Qohelet's job as a prolific and careful collector of proverbs and a writer of words of truth, affirming that Qohelet is a sage (vv. 9–10). He then explains that the sayings of the sages are like goads and nails which may plod and direct one toward a straight path or perhaps may prick and hurt him.[824] The words of sages are given by one Shepherd (v. 11). Some scholars interpret the "shepherd" here as any shepherd and Qohelet as the one shepherd,[825] but others as God. Reflecting Qohelet's unique and emphatic use of the term אחד, the frame-narrator may be emulating the use and probably meaning one particular shepherd. This shepherd is most likely God who gives sages the words of wisdom, rather than Qohelet who is described as one of the wise and the people's teacher here. In his monologue Qohelet says that he searched by (1:13), increased (1:16), set his mind to know (1:17), or considered wisdom (2:12). He never claimed giving the words of wisdom to others, much less to sages, and he still could not find the answer he wanted to find out (7:23–24; 8:17). Also Qohelet

discourse. Cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 847–48; Fox, *Time*, 359–60; contra Krüger, *Kohelet*, 371–72 [ET 212].

820 הכל נשמע "all has been hard." הכל is most likely all that Qohelet has said, connecting with דבר.

821 P. A. H. de Boer, "A Note on Ecclesiastes 12:12a," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus. Studies in Early Christian Literature and Its Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East* (ed. Fischer; Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1977), 85–88.

822 Interpret כל־האדם as genitive. Delitzsch, *Koheleth*, 421–22 [ET 439–40]; cf. D. Martin Luthers, *Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift: Des Alten u. Neuen Testaments* (trans. Luthers; Stüttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1930), 654: „Denn das gehört allen Menschen zu" (for that belongs to all men); NASB makes it even clearer: "because this applies to every person; also Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 847.

823 Cf. interpretations by Fox, Childs and Sheppard discussed in Chapter 2.

824 Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 83; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 837.

825 E.g., C. L. Seow, "'Beyond Them, My Son, Be Warned': The Epilogue of Qoheleth Revisited," in *Wisdom, You Are My Sister: Studies in Honor of Roland E Murphy, O Carm, on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (ed. Barré; CBQMS 29; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Assoc of America, 1997), 134–35.

himself acknowledges that God gives wisdom, while Qohelet's task seems to be gathering and collecting wisdom and knowledge (cf. 2:26).[826]

The frame-narrator then turns to his listener, calling him "my son," which is a common term of endearment among the sages to address their children or pupils when they instruct them in much of the ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. The frame-narrator thus identifies himself as a wisdom teacher, revealing a reason for his familiarity with Qohelet's profession. His tone of voice seems to turn stern, however, when he tells his son/pupil: "But beyond these (namely, other than those master collections of proverbs and sayings), be warned."

The frame-narrator's conclusion in 12:13 is a powerful statement. Until now he explains what a sage, particularly Qohelet, does, as if to praise him, but here he warns his son that there is no end to working on many books and that much talking (להג) is exhausting to the body (12:9–12). The frame-narrator does not find fault with the sage's normal activities such as teaching, searching and arranging proverbs, or writing correctly the words of truth which are given by God; but he says going beyond them with excessive work for book production[827] and much talk leads to no fruitful end but exhaustion. This seems to be a subtle, but profound, criticism of Qohelet—granted he is an adept sage[828]—who probably has done excessive searching and certainly much talking (his monologue occupies 98% of the frame-narrator's presentation). It is reinforced by v. 13 where the frame-narrator wraps up, saying, "The end of the matter; all has been heard." or it may even be rephrased as "Whatever you have heard, it boils down to this . . . ." In effect the frame-narrator may even be saying: "Enough of Qohelet, let's get on with what is really important."[829] By saying so, the frame-narrator seems to be downplaying Qohelet's monologue that he has transmitted, except Qohelet's notion of "fear God" and "God will judge." These are what the frame-narrator himself reiterates in his final instruction: "Fear God and keep His commandments." What Qohelet describes in his poem in 12:1–7 is a picture of a limited eschatological sense of God's judgement to come, and apparently it is not an

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[826] It is interesting to contrast here with 2:26 where Qohelet says God assigns the sinner for gathering and collecting so that He may give wisdom, knowledge and joy to one He favours (literally, one who is good in God's sight).

[827] By דברי חכמים "words of the wise" in v. 11 and ספרים הרבה "excess books" in v. 12, many scholars think that an existence of canon-consciously selected or limited books is implied. Both phrases seem to mean sayings by sages or books in general terms, however, and do not specify they are canonical books such as Proverbs, although such possibility may exist. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 394; Fox, *Time*, 376.

[828] Contra Fox, *Contradictions*, 311, who thinks the frame-narrator is praising Qohelet in the epilogue.

[829] Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 282.

encompassing view that the frame-narrator may wish to convey. Qohelet's poem therefore may be serving as a bridge to link to a fuller dimension of God's judgement when the frame-narrator gives reasons for his instruction: (1) The fear of God and obedience to His laws apply to everyone, and (2) because God will judge every work, every secret thing, whether good or evil (12:13b–14).

The frame-narrator's instruction and the reasons for it are plain and can be understood fully as an orthodox wisdom teaching. Every Israelite should fear God and keep His commandments, because God will judge. But here the frame-narrator specifies exactly what or perhaps how God will judge. Firstly, the frame-narrator speaks about God's judgement in the future, which Qohelet also believes. Concerning their use of the term (מ)שפט "judge/ment" Fox notes:

> Verses 12:14, 3:17, and 11:9b use ŠPṬ as a forensic concept and refer to God's judgment as *a future event*. God's judging is not something that goes on at all times, but an event in the future within an individual's life. In this judgment God distinguishes between good and bad deeds, between righteous and wicked people, and calls everyone to account.[830]

Secondly, the frame-narrator declares that God will judge every deed, both "good and evil," implying individual's moral/ethical behaviour. God will execute justice both for the righteous and against the wicked. Thirdly, God will also bring into judgement everything "hidden," which He detects and reveals. This seems to go beyond one's life time. There is no time constraint or limitation for God to seek out all hidden things because He is not bound by time. Here Fox may be open to question, saying, "*within* an individual's life," at least regarding the frame-narrator's words. Fourthly, "every" implies each one of individual deeds, thus the judgement seems to be individualized. Delitzsch notes that

> the object[s] of the final judgment are nations, kingdoms, cities, and conditions of men. But here, with Koheleth, a beginning is made in the direction of regarding the final judgment as the final judgment of men, and as lying in the future, beyond the present time.[831]

What the frame-narrator describes appears to be a comprehensive, universal eschatological judgement of both the righteous and the wicked.[832] It not only covers

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[830] Fox, *Contradictions*, 123. Emphasis added.
[831] Delitzsch, *Koheleth*, 423–24 [ET 441].
[832] Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 478; Lauha, *Kohelet*, 223; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 283; Seow, "Beyond Them, My Son," 139; not all scholars are persuaded by this view. See e.g., Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste*, 484–85; R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 174; Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 552.

Qohelet's limited view of eschatological judgement, but also encompasses the whole spectrum of God's judgement in that day.

The problem with 12:14 that scholars find in their viewpoint is that the verse runs counter to views expressed by Qohelet in his monologue.[833] However, it is not Qohelet who says this, but the frame-narrator who wishes to give instruction to his son, based on what they both heard from Qohelet's monologue. The frame-narrator as a wisdom teacher surely has assessed and already knows whether or not what Qohelet says in a framed story, perhaps presenting as a teaching tool or example, is good to follow for his son. He thus instructs his son accordingly either with a positive or negative evaluation of what Qohelet expressed. The connection now appears to be made in the final section where the frame-narrator speaks.

In sum, the frame-narrator's address, starting with "But beyond these, my son" in v. 12 and onwards, seems to be a great foil for what may actually be an intense criticism of Qohelet as a father giving advice to his son: The frame-narrator is basically telling his son to ignore all that a "sage" Qohelet has said except what he has already been taught by his father, the "orthodox" wisdom teacher. However, it is not simply a father's personal advice to his son, but a definitive conclusion of the frame-narrative discourse with an orthodox wisdom teaching which is targeted for the audience. As a wisdom teacher the author may have employed a framed story of Qohelet as a means to spell out what is happening in his society before his final verdict in 12:13–14.

Chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes may be pivotal in understanding where the author stood in his ancient context. Maybe he was a man ahead of his time. He might not have perceived or received any revelation as such that the apocalyptists claimed and endorsed in their literature. However, seeing all wickedness in his society, the author perhaps by faith envisaged the coming day of God's judgement and therefore could conclude the book with his firm conviction, which would display an eschatological character. This then leads to analyse further how Qohelet's monologic discourse may be tied together with the epilogue in light of Qohelet's conclusion.

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[833] The main reason scholars assign the epilogue to later editor(s).

5.3 Finding Coherence between Qohelet's Monologue and the Epilogue

5.3.1 Recasting Qohelet

That Qohelet's monologic discourse has essentially been preserved with all the ambiguities and apparent contradictions seems to suggest that the accumulative effect of Qohelet's inconsistencies may be intended for a purpose, especially through the unique language that the author put in Qohelet's mouth. If such were the case, then it would warrant further scrutiny to probe what the author of Ecclesiastes tries to convey to his audience through Qohelet. This section will explore plausible reasons and a possible explanation for conflicts in Qohelet's monologic discourse in terms of a frame-narrative structure and how the frame-narrator and the character play each role for the author's purpose to make the book a coherent whole.

From the context of the poetic passage in Chapter 12 elucidated above, Qohelet's contradiction between his existential realism and his insistence on God's judgement and particularly his notion of "fear God" may be re-examined.

5.3.1.1 Why Fear God?

Scholars have often been divided concerning Qohelet's utterance, "fear God," which stems from his usage of the term אלהים rather than יהוה for "God" and his apparent view of God. Many suggest that Qohelet's God is remote and impersonal—*deus absconditus*[834] or *deus otiosus*[835]—and that "fear" of such God can only be described as "terror of the incomprehensible numinous."[836] However, such a designation is generally ascribed to unknown god(s), whereas Qohelet's God is the One that he knows from the Torah and wisdom teaching, the God of Israel. Qohelet may be perturbed with how God works under the sun especially in the context of unfairness and rampant injustice that he has observed, but he hardly implies "Be terrified" by saying "Fear God." When Qohelet expresses "fear God," the implication in all contexts appears to be: (1) "revere, awe, or acknowledge his sovereignty" as the Creator God who controls everything (3:14; 11:5–6); (2) "approach or treat God with proper respect" because He cannot be mocked (5:3–6 [ET 4–7]; 8:2); or (3) stay away from evil and do good in the fear of God because God will judge (3:12, 17; 5:7 [ET

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[834] Literally, "hidden god," i.e., an absent god. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 22.

[835] Literally, "idle god," i.e., a distant and unconcerned god. See Segal, *Life*, 106.

[836] Curt Kuhl, *The Old Testament: Its Origins and Composition* (trans. Herriott; Edingburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 265; Crenshaw, "Eternal," 44; H. F. Fuhs, "יָרֵא," *TDOT* 6:312–13; Schoors, "Theodicy," 392; see also other scholars listed in these references.

8]; 8:12–13). These contents of “fear God” convey a cultic, moral, or ethical sense, which accords well with the frame-narrator’s admonition at the end, standing in the Israelite sapiential tradition.[837] Those who interpret Qohelet’s phrase “fear God” as “terror of God” often focus on 3:14 and treat other passages as glosses or as additions by later hands to fit the phrase to their “terror” interpretation. Whybray surely correctly observes that

> the idea that Qoheleth’s concept of the “fear of God” is essentially different from its usual meaning in the Old Testament (devotion to God, worship of God, or willing obedience to his commandments) is an idea derived from a particular interpretation of Qoheleth’s thought in general rather than from his actual use of the phrase.[838]

Moreover, Qohelet could choose specific lexemes such as אימה, פחד, גור, חול, חרד, and their cognates to express dread, terror, trembling, etc., as other biblical writers often did, although ירא could also imply “dread” or “terror,” depending on the situation.[839]

The term ירא “fear” appears nine times in Ecclesiastes, of which seven occurrences relate to God, and all but one come out of Qohelet’s mouth.[840] In three instances Qohelet iterates that it will go well with those who fear God but not with one who does not fear God and does evil (7:18; 8:12, 13). Two times he admonishes his audience to fear God because: (1) God has made everything appropriate in its time and what He has arranged for “eternity” remains unchangeable, therefore humans can change nothing but should fear Him (3:11, 14); and (2) God’s domain and the human realm are distinctively different so humans should not sin or anger God by foolish utterances such as unfulfilled vows in the temple, His dwelling place (4:17–5:6 [ET 5:1–7]). In all these scenarios Qohelet appears to promote acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty, power, and authority with a proper worship in the temple and good deeds even in a corrupt society in the fear of God so that it may go well with God-fearers (8:12).[841] This seems no different from the traditional sapiential teaching and the usual meaning of “fear God” or “fear of God” elsewhere in the Scripture. Be that as it

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[837] Otto Kaiser, “Qoheleth,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (eds. Day, et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 90.

[838] Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 75. Interpreting Qohelet’s concept of “fear God” in this light appears a more recent trend. See Weeks, *Scepticism*, 90; Schoors, “Theodicy,” 392–99.

[839] Robert L. Cate, “The Fear of the Lord in the Old Testament,” *TTE* 35 (1987): 41–55; Vernon H. Kooy, “The Fear and Love of God in Deuteronomy,” in *Grace Upon Grace* (ed. Cook; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 106–16; Bernard J. Bamberger, “Fear and Love of God in the Old Testament,” *HUCA* 6 (1929): 39–53.

[840] “Fear God” uttered by Qohelet appears six times in verb (3:14; 5:6 [ET 7]; 8:12) and adjective (7:18; 8:12, 13) forms; and once as a verb by the frame-narrator in 12:13. No noun form, “fear of God,” appears in Ecclesiastes in contrast to Job or Proverbs.

[841] Cf. Joseph narrative in Gen 37–52 typifies this motto.

may, our main concern here, however, is not what exactly Qohelet means by "fear God," but why he concerns himself with God or to fear Him, if he is truly convinced that all he has is this life which will be robbed by death, from which God does not appear to rescue him.

When death becomes an imminent reality, one's concern for life manifests itself in two questions: (1) How much longer can I live? and (2) How should I spend the limited time left? Qohelet expressly indicates those are his major concerns for life: he describes life as fleeting, and exhorts people to find enjoyment before death abruptly terminates everything. What Qohelet seems to mean in all these instances is *not to anger God* who can destroy their work or shorten their lives (5:5 [ET 6]). It is interesting to note that Qohelet warns not to anger God by their lips and by thoughts which appear in dreams, in particular (5:1–2, 6 [ET 2–3, 7]). God's revelation often comes through dreams in the OT, and Qohelet almost seems to deny such occurrences.

In the same vein, another concern of Qohelet appears to be to do with how one should live under an oppressive or corrupt regime. He has spoken about rulers who have protected themselves and used their power to hurt others, while oppressing the poor and denying the right of individuals. Under such a regime, it is possible that righteous people may have resisted the evil demands of the authorities and even may have lost their lives. Qohelet has seen the righteous dying in their righteousness. His admonition for not being overly righteous or too wise may stem from such an observation, and he implies that one who fears God would grasp and heed his warning, and thus avoid self-destruction or premature death (7:16–18). Qohelet also admonishes people to keep the king's command and avoid offences against him so as *not to anger the king*, because the king has power and can do whatever he pleases regardless of the legitimacy of his order (8:2–4). He is likely saying not to risk their lives by the king's anger.[842] As far as Qohelet is concerned, it is better not to anger whoever is higher or stronger than they, because they cannot dispute with him (6:10): it is better to fear him—either God or a king.[843] As long as they live, they may still have a chance to enjoy life—a live dog is better than the dead lion, indeed.

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[842] Cf. Weeks, *Scepticism*, 88.
[843] Perdue, "Cosmology," 478.

Qohelet's last poem seems to say that the powerful oppressors in his society eventually face God's wrath, even though they may not now. Thus, fearing God may be a good thing after all, even though he seems somewhat reluctant to accept a conventional wisdom[844] when he sees a sinner prolonging life while doing evil a hundred times:

> (11)אשר[845] אין־נעשה[846] פתגם מעשה הרעה מהרה על־כן מלא לב בני־האדם בהם לעשות רע: (12) אשר[a] חטא עשה רע מאת[847] ומאריך לו כי גם־יודע אני[848] אשר[b] יהיה־טוב ליראי האלהים אשר[849c] ייראו מלפניו: (13) וטוב לא־יהיה לרשע ולא־יאריך ימים כצל[850] אשר[d] איננו ירא מלפני אלהים:
>
> (11) Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the heart of the sons of men within them is full to do evil, (12) for a sinner is doing evil a hundred times and is prolonging his life—although I know that it will be well for the fearer of God, because they fear before Him, (13) but it will not be well for the wicked and he will not prolong [his] days, like a shadow, because he does not fear before God. (8:11–13)

This difficult passage may be better understood when it is analysed from the bottom up. In vv. 12b–13, Qohelet says he is well aware of the traditional doctrine of retribution that the God-fearers fare well because they fear Him, but the wicked will neither fare well nor prolong their life, which is like a shadow, because they do not fear God. In reality, however, a sinner may commit evil a hundred times and still may live long. The reason is that the sentence against an evil deed is not executed swiftly, thus the heart of humankind within them is fully to do evil (11–12a).

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[844] In 8:12b–13. Gordis, *Man*, 293.

[845] אשר . . . על־כן: the causal function of אשר, which is reinforced by על־כן introducing the apodosis, is the most common interpretation, according to Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 626, although some connects the אשר clauses of v. 11 and 12 to גם־זה הבל of v. 10; e.g., Fox, *Time*, 284–85.

[846] "Be not done/executed." נעשה should be Niphal ptc. m./sg. (נַעֲשֶׂה) rather than pf. (נַעֲשָׂה) because of the negator אין.

[847] מאת: "hundred" numeral cardinal f./sg. const. (without a noun, e.g., possibly פעם is missing), used as a round number for "a great many" rather than literally; "the adverbial use of the feminine form of the cardinal number with the meaning 'X-times' is not infrequent": Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 630. Another possibility is to read as מֵאֹת, f./pl. abs. (see Gen 5:4, 30; 23:15), which can imply "great many." Cf. Krüger, *Kohelet*, 284–85 [ET 158].

[848] כי גם: also in 4:14; 8:16, "for even, although," concessive particle: *BDB*:168; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 288; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 632; contra Fox, *Time*, 286. יודע אני: When speaking of his knowledge through experience or observation, Qohelet uses the Qal pf. form (ידעתי). Qal ptc. m./sg. here is probably referring to his awareness of common knowledge or belief (i.e., the traditional doctrine of retribution in vv. 12b–13), rather than his personally acquired knowledge. Thus "I am aware," "I acknowledge," or "I recognise," may be closer in meaning. See Isaksson, *Language*, 67.

[849] Each of the three appearances of אשר functions as: (a) causal, not concessive; (b) relative; and (c) causal clause, which has parallel (d) in v. 13.

[850] כצל: "like a shadow" may be a figure of: (1) fleeting life (cf. 6:12); (2) transitoriness of the sinner's life; or (3) prolonging life like lengthening shadows before dusk. Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 154; contra Ps 109:23: a shadow disappears at evening. The gist of the message: the life of the wicked does not last long.

5.3.1.2 Keep God's Commandment?

Qohelet also says, "He who keeps a commandment (שומר מצוה) will know no evil thing" (8:5). Scholars are divided regarding whose מצוה Qohelet may be referring to: a royal or divine commandment. In the context of 8:2–5 with "king's command" (פי־מלך) in v. 2 and "the word of the king (דבר־מלך) is authoritative" in v. 3, a logical interpretation seems to point to a royal command. However, it may also point to the divine commandment. Lange observes:

> Because the phrase שמר מצוה designates in Hellenistic times only the observance of God's laws (e.g. Sir 15:15; 32:22 [35:27]; 37:12; 44:20a; lQH[a] 16:13, 17; lQSb 1:1; CD 2:18; 3:2; 19:2; lQpHab 5:5) and because even in earlier times the phrase was seldom used to describe obedience to something other than God's laws (to my knowledge only in Prov 4:4; 7:1f., 19:16; 1 Kgs 2:43), Eccl 8:5 must also be understood as an admonition to live according to the Torah.[851]

Lange treats 8:5–6 as a secondary insertion because it agrees with the epilogue but not with Qohelet's view of fearing God in his interpretation. However, the passage logically belongs to Qohelet's sayings in the context as already discussed in Chapter 3. Qohelet has already advised his audience to keep the king's command because of their word of oath of God. In its immediate context Qohelet probably means it is a royal command. But the author may also wish to convey through the frame-narrator's transmission of Qohelet's words that it is the divine commandment which keeps them from trouble. When Israelites hear the frame-narrator transmitting Qohelet's " שומר מצוה", what most likely and immediately may come to the Israelites' mind could be God's command to keep the Torah. Qohelet says simply "he who keeps *a* commandment," not *king's* or *his* command (מצותו); the latter can be easily said in the context. The ambiguity seems to be cleverly devised so that the frame-narrator perhaps can convey it in such a way that he later confirms in his conclusion (12:13) that the audience heard it right.

It is now time to tie together Qohelet's discourse and the frame-narrator's conclusion in a coherent whole.

5.3.1.3 God Will Judge, but When?

Qohelet says God will judge (3:17; 11:9) because there is a time for everything. In this he has not erred. What Qohelet has missed is that God transcends time just as He

[851] Armin Lange, "Eschatological Wisdom in the Book of Qohelet and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after Their Discovery* (eds. Schiffman, et al.; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 819.

does space. Humans are bound by time and limited in space, and perhaps Qohelet may have assumed that God must also be bound by time and space in human affairs that He gets involved. Qohelet's focus on everything under the sun and the reality of death seems to have blocked Qohelet's view of anything beyond human boundaries, including God's work. Qohelet apparently focussed on what he cannot grasp, unless he can see. To him all that one can see also seems to end with death. He observes that humans cannot overcome death and it seems as though God cannot, either, in his view. Qohelet views God as an anthropological entity according to his self-realized wisdom. Thus, Qohelet cannot envision God's judgement in a fully eschatological scale. Qohelet's vision is only partially correct, which the frame-narrator brings into a wider spectrum.

In sum, what Qohelet says in his monologue concerning the traditional wisdom with his view, which is constrained by death's reality, appears to be integrated in the frame-narrator's epilogue to make it whole.

5.3.2 Ambiguities in Qohelet's Language and His Inconsistencies

I have argued that Qohelet uses certain words and phrases uniquely and distinctively in his own way to convey his views, and what Qohelet says may carry more than one meaning or connotation.[852] The author may have carefully chosen those words to put into Qohelet's mouth for his purpose. Qohelet's language may deliberately be shaped so that certain meaning or innuendoes could come through according to how Qohelet's monologue is transmitted and received, as I have discussed above. The effects may be greater, particularly if the book is read aloud or even performed, as already pointed out earlier in Chapter 2.

In the use of certain terms and phrases may arise several possible scenarios: first of all, the author may have deliberately chosen a certain term to mean different things in different contexts, rather than a single meaning for all instances. Qohelet's favourite words such as הבל, מקרה, רוח, and even הכל may be good examples of conveying varied meanings in his rhetorical use, as we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4. Secondly, Qohelet may use a word or a phrase to mean one thing, but the author may wish to convey another or added meaning by the same word or phrase such as משפט and מצוה. Thirdly, Qohelet's monologue is a reported speech by the frame-narrator who can control and add nuances to the tone, innuendo, and inference of Qohelet's

[852] Cf. Miller, "Qohelet's," 437–54; Miller, "Rhetoric," 215–35; Miller, *Symbol*, 15, and passim.

utterances. The frame-narrator may even contrive and shape Qohelet's speech with words and phrases because of their complexity. Transmission of the reported speech may enable the frame-narrator to signal to his audience that what Qohelet says in a literal sense may not be what the author tries to communicate to them: in other words, Qohelet's words are not final; another or final message may be in store underneath them or at the end. Qohelet is simply describing his observations and expressing his frustrations, which may sound very familiar to his audience's life experiences and with which they may identify themselves. At the same time, Qohelet's statements when transmitted by the frame-narrator may trigger an impression in the audience's mind that the author may be withholding or suspending the upshot of Qohelet's monologue, the actual "aha moment" until later, maybe to the end. After all, Qohelet's monologue is a reported speech by the frame-narrator who navigates the entire discourse to the ultimate denouement. It is a clever device if indeed the author has put into Qohelet's mouth often ambiguous or complex words and phrases to embed his messages in what Qohelet utters. Qohelet may mean one thing but a perceptive audience may sense or detect added meaning that the author wishes to communicate through the frame-narrator's presentation. Such a device is certainly not out of bounds to the literary invention. It is not the speech of the main character, in which the author may have implanted some hints, but its delivery by the frame-narrator, which may be a clue towards unravelling the puzzle of his book.

In such a scenario, if not unreasonable, Qohelet's monologue may be serving two purposes. On the one hand it is a sympathetic voice to the author's audience. What Qohelet expresses, especially his observations of what is happening in his society, may be a reflection of the reality in which the author perhaps lived when he wrote the book. He does not deny or correct what Qohelet describes, which may have been what his audience was likely experiencing in his society. The audience can probably identify themselves with Qohelet. They may have been as confused and puzzled as Qohelet is when it comes to God's activities in their world. Qohelet's ambivalence between his belief in traditional wisdom teaching and the reality he sees may also be a reflection of his audience's attitude. The author is sympathetic with his audience in their predicament.

On the other hand Qohelet's voice may be meant to be provocative. Qohelet sees death as final, with results which are unrelated to whatever life one may lead. His relentless stress on the indiscriminate levelling effect of death and the same dreary

destination of Sheol for both the righteous and the wicked may well have purported to provoke the audience.

Moreover, Qohelet apparently refuses to entertain speculations about anything beyond death. He often and deliberately seems to ask rhetorical questions: “Who knows?” or “Who can tell?” concerning certain mysteries in life that he does not understand or that he presumes no one knows (7:24). In fact, Qohelet often asks questions starting with interrogatives: מי “who” (15 times), מה “what” (19 times) or למה “why” (4 times), of which he asks “What *gain*?” 10 times out of 19 usages of מה, and “Who *knows/finds*?” 4 times out of 15 usages of מי,[853] relating to the future, more specifically after one’s death. In retrospect one may see that these questions reflect serious concerns being raised regarding the significance of an individual’s survival in life, and perhaps even in death, in people’s minds, if not all in Qohelet’s. At the same time, his repeated rhetorical questions to which no one has an answer may be designed to provoke deeper reflections on the fate of the pious and the righteous in particular.

Seeing all the wickedness, strangely Qohelet never protested or sought God’s intervention; instead, he exhorted his audience to enjoy their life while they could. If his attitude were any indication of people’s sentiments in his society, then it seems unlikely that apocalyptic eschatology was yet on the rise at the time of Ecclesiastes’ writing. No one seemed to be seeking God’s revelation in Qohelet’s society as the apocalyptists did.

Such was the situation under which the author might have written Ecclesiastes in order to bring Israelites back to the basic tenets of Israelite wisdom teaching. The author does not criticize or deny what Qohelet utters because it probably was the

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[853] There is an interesting pattern in Qohelet’s questions. Verses 8:7 and 10:14 are virtually *verbatim* and there is a clear pattern among verses 3:22b, 6:12b, and 10:14b, as shown below:

(8:7b) איננו ידע מה־שיהיה כי כאשר יהיה מי יגיד לו:
(10:14bc) לא־ידע האדם מה־שיהיה ואשר יהיה מאחריו מי יגיד לו:
(6:12b) מי־יגיד
לאדם מה־יהיה אחריו תחת השמש
(3:22b) מי יביאנו
לראות במה שיהיה אחריו:

While Qohelet insists that death terminates everything and is aware that no one knows what happens in the future and no one can tell what happens after death, it is striking that he cannot help asking these rhetorical questions, which manifests his deep frustration and struggle with unjustifiable death, and his unwillingness to quite give up insisting on serious detrimental effect of death upon human life, even though he knows that no one has an answer to the problem. Cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 494–95.

reflection of his society. However, he probably intended more than just to sympathize with his people under the predicament, but in fact to provoke them so that they might react against Qohelet's resignation and turn to God. Such provocation and the reality of injustice in the society could trigger a reassessment of Israelite traditional beliefs in theodicy and Sheol. In sum, Qohelet's monologue is probably meant to agitate and solicit response.

Qohelet's monologic discourse and the epilogue appear mutually exclusive on the surface, when one compares Qohelet's two extreme—*hebel* and pseudo-*carpe diem*—mottos with the epilogue's final conclusion (12:13b–14). The current analysis suggests that the two discourses, the one by Qohelet and the other by the frame-narrator, seem to be intricately intertwined through the use of a literary device, the frame-narrative. The frame-narrative structure gives an impression that the character and the frame-narrator are segregated as if polar opposites, but both are integral parts of the whole. The author seems to have designed a plot with a definite purpose in mind. The two sapiential episodes in chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes seem to be closely linked if the proposed interpretation of Qohelet's poem in an eschatological sense is correct. It may then help reorient the reader to reassess Qohelet's monologue in light of such an understanding. The poem seems to serve as a bridge between Qohelet's monologue and the epilogue. In such a scheme, one may envisage what the author tries to communicate to the audience through Qohelet. Qohelet's words are probably not meant to be merely received, but to be reacted to, or perhaps even to be rejected. It is not Qohelet's many words but the frame-narrator's conclusion which stands as the final definitive word. The frame-narrator recapitulates what the author has desired to convey all along. Fisch's depiction of the epilogue reverberates in this context:

> the view that would assign these closing verses of Ecclesiastes to another editor or author should be resisted. This sceptical rejection of scepticism is the final twist of Qoheleth's super-irony.[854]

5.4 Summary and Conclusions

According to the premise discussed and established in Chapter 2 that the frame-narrator plays a key role to communicate Qohelet's monologic discourse, this chapter has examined how Qohelet's utterances may be heard. The ambiguities and multiple implications in Qohelet's language seem to suggest that the accumulative effect of

[854] Fisch, *Poetry*, 175.

Qohelet's apparent conflicts and inconsistencies may be designed for a purpose. This chapter has focussed on the final chapter of Ecclesiastes, and discovered a possible link between Qohelet's strange poem and the epilogue, if the poem is read in an eschatological sense rather than as a conventional "allegory of old age" theme. Bridging the poem and the epilogue led us to reanalyse Qohelet's key traditional wisdom sayings and to propose a possible role of ambiguities and conflicts in Qohelet's monologue that the author may have envisioned in order to communicate his message in the book as a whole.

The book's frame-narrative structure is a well-crafted literary invention, in which the main character's voice is probably meant to be inconsistent, contradictory, and thus provocative. Qohelet and Israelite society were likely pulled between their old traditional belief and the new reality under foreign rulers, should the composition of Ecclesiastes during the Persian-Hellenistic transition period be probable. The author probably needed to find a way to secure receptive ears among his people, before they would be willing to hear his orthodox wisdom instruction, if Qohelet's monologue may be a reflection of their precarious life circumstance and the societal existential attitude.

If such were the case of Ecclesiastes, questions should be raised whether the author's purpose and goal in his book were realized and how its influence may have unfolded during the mid-Second Temple period when the book might have become widely known.

The next chapter will explore how the timing of the book's appearance may have played a role for the reception of Ecclesiastes and how it might have influenced the ensuing period in Israelite history toward the emergence of a uniquely Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. In other words, the answer to "Why fear God?" may lie in the question of when God will judge, which will be addressed in the final chapter.

Chapter 6

A POSSIBLE ROLE OF ECCLESIASTES IN THE EMERGENCE OF JEWISH APOCALYPTIC ESCHATOLOGY

What impact might one expect from the appearance of Ecclesiastes with Qohelet's view in Israelite society at a time when traditional ideas of death, Sheol, and divine retribution were becoming an issue? Qohelet appears in a context where retributive justice no longer seems to be at work. What is the book of Ecclesiastes doing in such a context? One key issue which is sometimes overlooked and needs to be addressed is how the audience might have reacted to Qohelet's view of death and divine judgement, and how the book of Ecclesiastes with Qohelet's inconsistent and conflicting message was hoped to be received in the social climate of the Persian–Hellenistic transition period. Death in the absence (or delay) of both divine and human justice was becoming a problem not only to Qohelet, but perhaps also to Israelite society in general in the changing world dominated by foreign powers. Would one expect Israelites to accept death and Sheol as Qohelet understood them? Or would they be incited to search for an answer for the unjustifiable death and unsatisfactory divine judgement that Qohelet described? How did other literature, which appeared during the Second Temple period, receive or react to Ecclesiastes? Answers to these questions may shed light on whether Ecclesiastes has had any bearing at all on the emergence of apocalyptic eschatology.

Scholars often argue that the concept of dualism was already arising in Qohelet's society and his sayings in 3:19–21 were polemical, because he did not believe in an afterlife. The argument for Qohelet's polemic is premised on the book's dating in the Hellenistic period and is primarily based on his rhetorical question in 3:21:

מי יודע רוח בני האדם העלה היא[855] למעלה ורוח הבהמה הירדת היא למטה לארץ[856]:

[855] The two personal pronouns היא were probably added for emphasis to distinguish the human and animal רוח. Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, 147, n. 36.

> Who knows whether the *rûaḥ* of humankind ascends (העלה) upward and the *rûaḥ* of animal descends (הירדת) downward to the earth? (3:21)

Qohelet states that there is no difference between human and animal: they share the same fate of death and have "the same breath" (רוח אחד) in v.19. רוח here as well as in v. 19 is interpreted as "life-giving breath" per 12:7, but it seems more aligned to interpret רוח in v. 21 as נפש "soul."[857] If רוח is the life-giving breath as in v. 19 and 12:7 in particular, then it should go back to the source or the giver (God), as 12:7b says, regardless of the receivers—human or animal. The question of different destiny is valid only if each רוח were different, otherwise the question does not make sense. Ploeg remarks:

> Gen 2,7 teaches us that man has received his vital breath (*nišmat ḥajjîm*) in a special manner, by which it indicates the special nobility and nature of the human spirit. Koheleth, no doubt, has known this biblical passage and he has given it his mind. . . . Hence it is clear that in his view the *rûaḥ* of man and beast cannot be equal in every respect.[858]

Following LXX and the logic of v. 19, most translators interpret the ה in העלה and הירדת (both Qal ptc. f./sg.) as interrogative. MT's vowel pointing is considered a theological correction: "Who knows the *rûaḥ* of humankind that ascends (העלה) upward and the *rûaḥ* of animal that descends (הירדת) downward to the earth?"[859] However, in some cases both הָ (Num 16:22; Deut 20:19d) and הַ (Lev 10:19) appear as an interrogative especially before gutturals in the MT.[860] According to how one

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[856] למטה לארץ: "downwards to the earth." Some treat לארץ as gloss, but it may be functioning as appositional to למטה, i.e., "to downward, namely, to the earth." contra Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 309, who overstates that animals go to Sheol.

[857] So in Talmud, cf. Weber, F. *Jüdische Theologie*, 1897, 338ff. cited in Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 110; Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 319; cf. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon eds, *Ecclesiastes* (2nd ed., Rab. 8; London: Soncino, 1951), 108–9; Krüger, *Kohelet*, 184 [ET 94]. LXX: πνεῦμα in both v. 19 and v. 21. Qohelet mentions נפש seven times in his discourse, but none means "breath." However, he may actually have נפש in mind when he compares human and animal רוח in 3:19–21. Thomson, "OT Ideas," 50, notes that "the author entertains the thought of a possible difference between human and animal fate not quite consonant with the thought that the ruah is simply taken back by God"; also cf. Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1944), 147, who says regarding 3:18–21: "In this last case the spirit is regarded as being the life-centre of the body, closely allied to the 'soul' in the sense, in which those who believe in the immortality of the soul use the word"; for semantic ranges of נפש and רוח, see Tengström and Fabry, *TDOT* 13:365–402; Horst Seebass, "נֶפֶשׁ," *TDOT* 9:497–519.

[858] J. P. M. van der Ploeg, *Prediker* (BOT 8/2; Roermond en Masseik: Romen & Zonen, 1953), 33; English translation from Dutch by Antoon Schoors, "Koheleth: A Perspective of Life after Death?," *ETL* 61 (1985): 300–301.

[859] Goldman, "Qoheleth," 79*; Kautzsch ed, *GKC*, §100m; McNeile, *Ecclesiastes*, 65, and most Bible translations; those who follow the MT are: e.g., Heidel, *Gilgamesh*, 147; Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 88–89; N/KJV; NASB.

[860] Cf. Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 112–13; Gordis, *Man*, 238.

interprets *hē* (ה) on העלה and הירדת in v. 21,[861] an implication of his question can be: "*no one knows* that the *rûaḥ* of humans and animals are different; or "*no one knows* that they are the same." Either way, the answer is: "No one knows if they go to the same place or separate ways." In any case, Jastrow remarks on 3:21 that

> the question which he poses . . . is an indication that the author lived in an age which had passed beyond the primitive conception and had advanced to an attempt to differentiate between the fate in store for the dead. The thought of a heavenly abode for at least some human souls must have been current, or the question would be an idle one.[862]

A question whether or not a belief in apocalyptic eschatology was emerging at the time of Ecclesiastes' composition needs to be explored.[863] Before addressing this issue, however, a closer examination of the content of Qohelet's monologic discourse in two aspects may help verify the plausibility of Qohelet's possible polemical stance: (1) evidence of Qohelet's polemical tendency and (2) a reason for Qohelet's opposition to belief in apocalyptic eschatology.

As for his polemical tendency, it is difficult to assess Qohelet's political significance without any description of his rule or kingship (as שפט) in his claim that he has been a king. Qohelet simply boasts about what he has done or accomplished *for himself* while he was a king in his monologic discourse. His self-portrayal seems to indicate that Qohelet was more absorbed with his own personal interests and satisfaction than a politically motivated ambition.[864] Qohelet sees tremendous oppressions against powerless people in his society and laments that the dead may be more fortunate than they. He observes judicial and political corruptions but takes no initiative to set things right, which is uncharacteristic of a man with any leadership ability, who once was a king, or so claimed. Although Qohelet is indignant with wickedness which seems to be permeating every corner of his society, he is silent and immovable with regard to any corrective or political action. Qohelet simply seems to watch, as if he is either helpless or detached, and pities the wronged and the

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[861] Either interpretation does not make a difference in the discussion here.
[862] Jastrow, *Cynic*, 130.
[863] Jean-Jacques Lavoie, "Vie, mort et finitude humaine en Qo 9,1–6," *ScEs* 47 (1995): 80, does not see any influence of Jewish apocalyptic, Egyptian wisdom or Greek philosophy on Qohelet; contra Krüger, *Kohelet*, 56 [ET 30].
[864] Norman Gottwald, "How Do Extrabiblical Sociopolitical Data Illuminate Obscure Biblical Texts? The Case of Ecclesiastes 5:8–9 (Heb. 5:7–8)," in *Focusing Biblical Studies: The Crucial Nature of the Persian and Hellenistic Periods: Essays in Honor of Douglas A. Knight* (eds. Berquist and Hunt; LHBOTS 544; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 192–201 [esp. 198].

oppressed.[865] "For all his gentle compassion, he will not lift a finger to help the oppressed in their desperate plight," criticizes Watson.[866] Qohelet hardly exhibits any political clout or prowess that a king should have, but simply tells people to obey the rulers, reasoning that each authority has yet a higher one above him for protection.

In any event Qohelet's status as a king is essentially a fictive/imaginable role and his sayings do not reflect a real king's stature. He seems to be more philosophical and pragmatic than political in his disposition. He certainly does not express any ambition to hold power. All that Qohelet displays in his monologue is simply to express his own resolution and practical instructions from what he has observed or experienced. In this sense Qohelet is more a sage than a king. If the Hellenistic dating of the book is correct, his individualistic outlook on life and reclusive attitude while observing turmoil in his society would not support his polemical tendency against any societal issues, be they political, religious, or otherwise.[867] He does not express a polemical view or instigate any social action against the corrupt regime or its rulers, nor is there any evidence that he ever had any opposition to the religious order or the power under which he lived.

In the second place, one may question why Qohelet should oppose emerging apocalyptic eschatology if it was indeed a religious undercurrent arising in his society. One may examine how Qohelet deals with issues that he has raised concerning what "one fate to all" brings to human society. No character has ever raised such a sharply indignant voice against death on the one hand, while clinging to life in flesh and blood in this world on the other hand, as Qohelet does. He is reminded again and again how death brings everything that one does to naught. As discussed in previous chapters, Qohelet almost mercilessly articulates how death levels, nullifies, and negates what makes humans human as if they live in an amoral animal world (cf. 3:18; 9:4). Qohelet expresses his serious concern over death especially because it appears that those who do not deserve it—the oppressed, the powerless, and the righteous—are facing this predicament far more often than the wicked in his society. Evil seems only to prevail when death occasions injustice and denies justice in this world.

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[865] Hengel, *Judentum*, 216 [ET 117].
[866] Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 284.
[867] Contra Duane A. Garrett, "Qoheleth on the Use and Abuse of Political Power," *TJ* 8 NS (1987): 159–77.

If there arose a voice proclaiming post-mortem divine judgement in the hope that injustice would be retributed and the righteous did not die in vain after all, it would not contradict Qohelet's view on divine judgement or its postponement. In fact, an apocalyptic eschatology explains better why God's justice is delayed, and supports Qohelet's insistence that God will judge in the face of absent justice in his society. There is no reason Qohelet must oppose apocalyptic eschatology on the whole, or a belief in resurrection which emerged as one of the most prominent emphases in apocalyptic eschatology.[868]

The best resolution to Qohelet's dilemma is a post-mortem divine judgement against the wicked and a reward or restitution of justice due for the righteous, if he insists that God will judge and if human life holds any meaning at all. God's justice needs to transcend physical death for Qohelet's God to execute His righteous judgement. As Snaith notes: "Justice must be done, and it shall be done beyond the grave if it has not already been done this side the grave."[869] Apocalyptic eschatology meets the logic (see, e.g., 1 En. 22; 103:3–8; Pss. Sol. 3:11–12), fulfils his claim, and provides an answer that Qohelet desperately searches for but has not found. Somehow Qohelet does not entertain or speculate about such a possibility, but stays with what he knows, observes, and experiences.[870] Qohelet remains sceptical when it comes to what might happen after death. Be that as it may, there appears no good excuse for him to oppose a belief in apocalyptic eschatology, had it emerged in his society. It is hard to imagine from his grief over the oppressed that Qohelet would not at least commiserate with them if they seized upon the belief, even if he himself might not entertain such a thought. Why does he have to deny them a glimpse of hope while dying? He who believes in life and loathes death even says that the dead are better off than the living under the oppression that he saw (4:2). Why then does he have to oppose a belief in post-mortem judgement if people die with such hope? An eschatological hope can give comfort to the dying, especially when dying unjustly. His opposition to the belief would serve no good purpose but add an unnecessary insult to injury. He cannot blame oppressed people for holding such hope, simply because he does not know what happens after death. Qohelet himself holds onto his

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[868] John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Ancient World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (ed. Walls; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47.
[869] Snaith, "Justice," 319.
[870] Scott C. Jones, "Qohelet's Courtly Wisdom: Ecclesiastes 8:1–9," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 228.

belief in God's judgement against the reality he sees. Despite his observation of indiscriminate death's tyranny and its finality in this world, the repeated notion "God *will* judge" must come from a genuine conviction in God's righteousness. In this sense he is as illogical as those who hold onto their hope and belief in the post-mortem divine judgement of apocalyptic eschatology.

From his final statement the frame-narrator probably held a view of eschatological judgement which could take place *post mortem*. Beyond it, what view he has held concerning reward and punishment of the ultimate judgement cannot be spelled out.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to ask whether there was not yet a sign of apocalyptic eschatology emerging at the likely time of Ecclesiastes' composition during the Persian–Hellenistic transition period. According to 2 Maccabees, a belief in Jewish apocalyptic eschatology is most notably manifested during the religious persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BCE). Chapter 6 of 2 Maccabees describes the beginning of the religious persecution by the Seleucid king, and Chapter 7 famously depicts the martyrdom of a mother and her seven sons, who willingly and gladly suffer cruel torture and death by the hand of Antiochus IV. They astonish the king and his subjects by their bravery and willingness to die with their belief in resurrection. It indicates that at least some Israelites held a belief in post-mortem divine judgment and reward by then. They have embraced the concept of apocalyptic eschatology before the time of Maccabean revolt (167–160 BCE). Qohelet does not mention any religious persecution or rebellion against rulers due to religious practices among his people. A question may be raised when and how such a belief emerged among Israelites. The current consensus suggests that the answer may lie in the third century BCE, sometime after Ecclesiastes' circulation within the Jewish community. This consensus may be used in an attempt to answer the questions raised at the outset in this chapter.

Admittedly, much of the ensuing discussion must be conjectural, but this thesis will tentatively offer a possible historical significance for Ecclesiastes if it had indeed appeared in the mid-Second Temple period. It is hoped that the circumstantial evidence that will be discussed here will support the proposal in this chapter as a plausible and feasible thesis perhaps with potential for further research.

6.1 Ecclesiastes and Apocalypticism

Scholars usually identify the earliest manifestation of discrete belief in a beatific afterlife (resurrection) for the righteous and eternal punishment of the wicked by the post-mortem divine judgement in 1 Enoch and Daniel.[871] The discovery of Qumran scrolls has aided the dating of 1 Enoch and placed its oldest portions in the third century BCE,[872] long before the Maccabean revolt.[873] The writers of 1 Enoch apparently knew Ecclesiastes and perhaps reacted against it (e.g., 1 En. 102:4–103:15). Mazzinghi, however, bases his argument on Ecclesiastes being a polemic against early Enochism by placing the early 1 Enoch before Ecclesiastes or treating the two works as contemporary.[874] He compares texts from both books for his argument, but the converse may also be true according to which book appeared first. Ecclesiastes and 1 Enoch may not be too far apart from each other in their composition date, although we do not really know. Mazzinghi compares 3:17–21 with 1 Enoch 22,[875] in which each writer expresses his view on different subject matters (afterlife vs. eschatological judgement) with different assumptions, and a direct comparison seems inappropriate both in content and context. Qohelet questions the destination of the spirit in relation to human and animal, whereas the Enochic passage compares the righteous dead with the wicked, whose spirits are kept in four different hollow places for the great day of judgement.

This leads us to examine conditions in Qohelet's society and compare them with those under which Jewish apocalyptic eschatology may have emerged. Let us first examine what may have catalysed the emergence of apocalyptic eschatology.

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[871] Collins, "Apocalyptic," 47; John J. Collins, "The Afterlife in Apocalyptic Literature," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity Part 4, Death, Life-after-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity* (eds. Avery-Peck and Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 119–39 [esp. 127].

[872] VanderKam, *Enoch*, 79–114, places most of the Astronomical Book (1 Enoch 72–79 and 82) as the oldest, dating before 200 BCE (pp. 79–88) and the Book of Watchers (l Enoch 1–36) as the second oldest, which is pre-Maccabean, perhaps from the third century BCE (pp. 111–14); see also J. T. Milik ed, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 139–274.

[873] Collins, "Afterlife," 127. Recently Klawans writes that 1 Maccabees and Josephus suggest that "many Jews—even those who believed in the afterlife—saw no particular association between these events and the doctrine espoused by Daniel and 2 Maccabees," in Jonathan Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 99, 216. He concludes that "there's certainly no reason to think whether from Josephus or any other ancient Jewish evidence, that afterlife beliefs gained a stronger hold in Israel because of the Maccabean crisis or any other particularly challenging event."

[874] Mazzinghi, "Qohelet," 157–67.

[875] Ibid., 158.

Apocalyptic eschatology likely emerged and was driven by the following factors in the sociological and religious environment during the mid-Second Temple period:

1. A demand for divine judgment against injustice and oppression under foreign rulers.[876]
2. A need for redefining death and Sheol: appropriate for the wicked but an inappropriate destination for the righteous.[877]
3. A new concept of life after death among the Israelites—resurrection/ immortality—rather than insubstantial existence in Sheol/netherworld within and without Israelite society.[878]
4. A hope for individual resurrection along with national restoration.[879]

These are the result of uncertainties in both the national and religious outlook due to "cultural trauma"[880] during the postexilic period, which probably necessitated that Israelites should reassess their traditional beliefs. Not only did Israelites lose their kings and kingdom but they also came under upheavals from foreign powers and struggles during the post-exilic period, through which they tried to maintain their national and religious identities.[881] Conceivably, Israelites may no longer have felt God's protection or His guiding hand as a nation, nor His presence among them as His chosen people during the post-exilic period. Instead, they may have perceived God becoming remote and silent.[882] God no longer seemed to protect His people, and their scattered community probably sought their own survival and security, which were at the mercy of changing foreign rulers. As the rise of injustice, oppression, and the question of theodicy became major sociological and religious issues, people may well have felt compelled to seek new answers.[883] Farmer points out:

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[876] Snaith, "Justice," 314, 319; Collins, "Apocalyptic," 47; Collins, "Afterlife," 127; Noort, "Death," 266.

[877] Wright, "Death Pt.1," 25, 28; cf. Xavier Terrence, "Life after Death: In the Intertestamental Palestine Context," *JDh* 37 (2012): 468.

[878] Arnold, "OT Eschatology," 31. Arnold rightly states: "Although Israel shared many features in common with ancient Near Eastern prophecy and prophetic phenomena, we have at present no evidence outside of Israel for an eschatological notion of a glorious *Endzeit*, or a culminating and meliorative end to the historical process."

[879] Wright, "Death Pt.1," 27–28; Wright, *Resurrection*, 153; Anthony Petterson, "Antecedents of the Christian Hope of Resurrection, Part 2: Intertestamental Literature," *RTR* 59 (2000): 53; cf. 2 Macc 1:24–29.

[880] Collins, "Afterlife," 127.

[881] Lorenzo DiTommaso, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity (Part II)," *CBR* 5 (2007): 368; Jonathan Z. Smith, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," in *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 154.

[882] Situations described in this paragraph are also found in Ecclesiastes.

[883] Gottwald, "How," 195, 199–200.

> Once convinced that the traditional doctrine of retribution fails to reflect human experience, one either has to give up the idea of justice or one has to push its execution into some realm beyond the evidence of human experience.[884]

The above situation reflects much of what Qohelet describes in the book of Ecclesiastes. Qohelet insists that God will judge without any credible evidence to point to. As a sage he may have been compelled to insist on it, although all he could observe was the opposite result of increased injustice. It is possible that people were losing faith in justice in their society because of his mixed messages which were mutually exclusive. The issues that Qohelet has raised and depicted are:

1. Absence of justice against widespread wickedness and oppression in society.[885]
2. The same fate seems to befall both the righteous and the wicked indiscriminately.[886] Qohelet thinks that all alike die and go to the same place. The righteous are facing what the wicked deserve: oppressions and perhaps untimely or violent death, ending in Sheol—a place to which sinners and the wicked deserve to go.
3. Existence in Sheol is no life at all—it is non-life and non-living, not a desirable post-mortem existence.
4. Concern for individual fate and future security[887] relative to national survival.[888]

These issues are strikingly similar and reverberate with the factors which may have driven and effected the emergence of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. A need for modification or refinement of Israelite traditional beliefs in death, Sheol, and afterlife was a natural consequence.

Similarities are even more striking in the mode of thinking which one finds in both Ecclesiastes and apocalyptic literature. In a comparison of both Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic literature,[889] Gammie describes several dualisms which characterize

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[884] Kathleen A. Farmer, *Who Knows What Is Good?: A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 206; see also Terrence, "Life," 468.

[885] E.g., see 2:21; 3:16; 4:1; 5:7a [ET 8a]; 7:15; 9:3b.

[886] See 2:18–20; 3:19–20; 9:2–3a. Adams, *Wisdom*, 6, notes: "This sage is exasperated by the frequent unfairness of existence and the finality of death (a shadowy state in Sheol) for even the most righteous persons."

[887] See 2:18–19; 3:22; 6:12; 8:7; 10:14b; 11:8; 12:1.

[888] Cf. Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938), 151.

[889] Although the origin of apocalyptic literature, stemming either from wisdom (von Rad) or prophecy (Russell) is in debate, wisdom and apocalyptic literature apparently "share an essential ideological

modes of thought in Jewish apocalyptic literature: *cosmic* (forces of good vs. evil; darkness vs. light), *temporal* (this age vs. the age to come), *ethical* (the righteous vs. the wicked; the godly vs. the impious), *psychological* (good vs. evil internalized), *spatial* (heaven vs. earth), and *theological* (God vs. man; Creator vs. his creation) dualisms.[890] He notes that the spatial and ethical dualisms are prominent in both sapiential and apocalyptic writings.[891] Qohelet's monologic discourse touches on them all, but most emphatically on spatial and ethical dualisms. Qohelet contrasts the dwelling places of God and humans (heaven vs. earth), questions the destination of the human spirit, whether to heaven or under the earth, and frequently uses expressions such as "under the sun," "under heaven" and "on the earth"; all signify spatial dualism. Ethical dualism is manifested in his observation that wickedness has prevailed even in the unlikely places: the righteous are deprived of individual rights or justice; but the wicked escape punishment and prosper. Qohelet struggles with the theological implications of human existence vs. death and God's unfathomable activities vs. the futility of human toil. He expresses a deterministic view of time, the created world, and its Creator as well as his fatalistic view on life. Time, injustice, the destiny of human beings after death, and a deterministic view of the created world: all appear as issues and factors which have affected the emergence of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology.

Nonetheless, one crucial dissimilarity exists between the apocalyptists and Qohelet. What separates him from them has to do with temporal dualism, on which he touches but is one-sided. Both apocalyptists and Qohelet speak about time: the orientation of apocalyptists is futuristic, and they place their hope in the age to come, while suffering injustice in the present age, whereas Qohelet decidedly focuses on this life, on this side of death but not hereafter. This difference may be attributed to

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kinship in their conception of time and history." Simon J. De Vries, "Observations on Quantitative and Qualitative Time in Wisdom and Apocalyptic," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien* (eds. Gammie, et al.; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 263–76 [esp. 263]; John J. Collins, "Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age," *HR* 17 (1977): 135, notes: "Any comparison of wisdom and apocalyptic in the Jewish tradition must start from the fact that the apocalypses are presented as one kind of wisdom. Daniel, Enoch, Ezra, and Baruch were all sages rather than prophets." More recently many studies on Qumran wisdom texts, 4QInstruction in particular, indicate wisdom in transition from traditional wisdom into apocalyptic context in those texts. Cf. D. S. Russell, *The Method & Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC – AD 100.* (OTL; London: SCM, 1964), 205–34, 263–84.

[890] John G. Gammie, "Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature," *JBL* 93 (1974): 356–85.

[891] Ibid., 356.

Qohelet's self-realized wisdom versus mantic wisdom by revelation (רז נהיה)[892] in apocalyptic literature. In his self-realized wisdom Qohelet relentlessly emphasizes that the tyranny of death on the earth makes all activities in human life *hebel* and its levelling effect allows injustice free rein to pervade society. He apparently considers that death is the ultimate problem in all facets of human life and is the greatest of all evils, which no one can overcome. The finality of death in his view implies that God's justice avails only to those who are alive. Death sustains its upper hand in this world. Consequently, Qohelet recommends enjoying one's life and work whilst being alive, which may be an option for a privileged few like him but not for the majority who are oppressed or killed during the tumultuous era of foreign rule. Qohelet's self-realized wisdom and fatalistic view on life do not allow him to see anything beyond this life or to suggest any hope for future. His statement about life's futility and rampant injustice that Israelites have faced may have exacerbated all the more an existential sense of death's unpredictable threat and irreparable injustice, from which Israelites foresaw no immediate deliverance or future hope. Human wisdom even of *Solomon*'s calibre cannot uncover the mystery behind life's enigma and untimely death which plagues the righteous. Being constrained by the received tradition, Qohelet does not have an answer to the righteous dead to whom justice has been denied.

The reception of the book of Ecclesiastes is anything but uniform throughout its history, as if to reflect the book's apparently inconsistent views through Qohelet's mouth. Notable during the same period or shortly thereafter is the appearance of the books of Enoch and Daniel with a discrete message of apocalyptic eschatology, if one agrees to the current majority consensus on the books' dating.[893] Collins notes,

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[892] Literally, "the mystery that is to be/come," which is defined as "an apocalyptic reinterpretation of the biblical and early Jewish concept of 'the Wisdom of God'," by Torleif Elgvin, "Wisdom with and without Apocalyptic," in *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Oslo, 1998: Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet* (eds. Falk, et al.; STDJ 35; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 25; see also Florentino García Martínez, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition: Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense LI (2002)," *ETL* 78 (2002): 536–49 [esp. 544]; according to Daniel J. Harrington, "The *rāz nihyeh* in a Qumran Wisdom Text (*1Q26, 4Q415–418, 423*)," *RQ* 17 (1996): 549–53, the phrase appears about 35 times in the extant Qumran (mostly sapiential) texts. The term רז is a Persian loanword, which prominently occurs in apocalyptic texts (e.g., Dan 2:18–47 [8x]; 4:6; 4QEnc 5 ii 26–27 [1 En. 106:19]); and Matthew J. Goff, "Wisdom, Apocalypticism, and the Pedagogical Ethos of 4QInstruction," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (eds. Wright and Wills; SBLSymS 35; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 61, adds: "The *raz nihyeh* refers to revealed knowledge that pertains to the entire scope of history."

[893] Current majority consensus places Daniel in ca. 165 BCE. See James D. Martin, "Ben Sira: A Child of His Time," in *A Word in Season: Essays in Honour of William Mckane* (eds. Martin and Davies;

"Neither of these books is set in a time of persecution,[894] but both depict a world out of joint. . . . If this is correct, the apocalypse was written as a response to cultural trauma and offered an alternative reality in its visions of hidden places and life beyond death."[895] Bockmuehl summarizes the situation of emerging apocalyptic eschatology as:

> Faced with the theological problems of delayed deliverance and historical theodicy, Jewish religious thought . . . necessarily became engaged in a close reassessment of the received tradition and of the channels of revelation. Drawing on this re-reading of their Biblical heritage, and somewhat stimulated by the increasing secrecy of the surrounding popular pagan religions, many Jews found in the notion of revealed divine mysteries the key to a renewed understanding of God's sovereignty in history and the cosmos, being offered as it were an "insider's look" at God's dealings in heaven.[896]

In a similar vein, Ecclesiastes could have been written to provoke and trigger a reverse response to Qohelet. In other words, the author may have purposed to expose a borderline existential response to cultural trauma in Israelite society in the hope that Israelites may react against it and return to basic tenets of Torah teaching. His hope may have been realized in two strands of the movement. On the one hand is a response of the apocalyptists who rejected Qohelet's self-realized wisdom and sought God's revelation, as Goff aptly notes:

> Qoheleth's skepticism and the composition's emphasis on physical death as the ultimate end may have helped spark the production of literature in which hope for a blessed afterlife rests not on empirical evidence that can be critiqued but on a claim of heavenly revelation. The elect, perhaps prodded by the goads of the Teacher's words (12:11), developed a view of the world and themselves that transcends the skepticism and pessimism of Ecclesiastes.[897]

On the other hand there is a response by the orthodox wisdom teacher in the book of Ben Sira,[898] and sometime later the rise of sectarian conflicts, among whom are the Sadducees[899] who share Qohelet's view on death and the afterlife. Some scholars

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JSOTSup 42; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 146; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 266–67.

[894] Here Collins is pointing to the persecution in the Maccabean era.

[895] Collins, "Afterlife," 127.

[896] Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 1, who places the situation in the Hellenistic period.

[897] Goff, "Intertextuality," 224.

[898] In this thesis Ben Sira refers to the author and Sirach to the title of his book. Sirach dates around 200–175 BCE and was most likely written in Jerusalem. See Corley, "Wisdom," 271 and references cited therein (n. 13).

[899] See Jean Le Moyne, *Les Sadducéens* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1972), which probably is still considered the most comprehensive treatise on the Sadduceeism. Josephus' description of sectarian groups appears to be polemic and particularly anti-Sadducean.

identify Qohelet as a Sadducee or proto-Sadducean[900] who denies resurrection.[901] However, this view is based on only one verse in 3:21, as already noted, which simply reveals Qohelet's agnosticism and perhaps scepticism towards a post-mortem existence. Ben Sira in all likelihood was provoked by Qohelet and wrote his book in order to revert to and reaffirm the traditional Israelite wisdom, probably reacting against emerging apocalyptic eschatology.[902] He particularly echoes Qohelet's realistic view of death (Sir 14:12–17; 40:1–11; 41:1–4) and Sheol (Sir 7:17b), but differs from Qohelet in his view of future hope: outlasting death through descendants (Sir 30:4–5) and lasting remembrance by "posthumous fame" (Sir 41:11–13)[903]—the traditional view of family generativity—which Qohelet flatly rejects as a viable means for perpetuating one's life or name. The literary evidence suggests that it is not Qohelet but Ben Sira who cogently opposed the belief in apocalyptic eschatology.[904] Later, the Wisdom of Solomon is likely written as a negative response to Qohelet.[905]

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[900] Ludwig Levy, *Das Buch Qoheleth: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sadduzäismus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912); Paul Haupt, "Ecclesiastes," *AJP* 26 (1905): 125–71; Alicia Ostriker, "Ecclesiastes as Witness: A Personal Essay," *APR* 34 (2005): 7–13; contra H. Graetz, *Kohelet oder der Salomonische Prediger* (Leipzig: Winter, 1871), 37; Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 65, notes: "To call him [Qohelet] a Sadducee is also to anticipate history. He belonged undoubtedly to that wealthy skeptical aristocracy out of which the Sadducees were developed, but we cannot trace the Sadducees before the Maccabaean time."

[901] E.g., *Refutatio* IX, 29:1–2 in Antipope Hippolytus, *Philosophoumena: Refutatio omnium haeresium* (PTS 35; ed. Marcovich; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 375, describes Sadducees as follows: "They do not merely reject the resurrection of the body, but also deny that the soul lives on. There is only one existence here, and man is created in this life. The doctrine of resurrection is fulfilled in one's leaving behind children when one dies. After death there is no expectation of either good or evil, the decomposition of body and soul takes place and man sinks away into non-being (τὸ μὴ εἶναι), similarly to other living beings. The description is very similar to those by Josephus and in the New Testament." See also Harry Sysling, *Teḥiyyat Ha-Metim: The Resurrection of the Dead in the Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch and Parallel Traditions in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (TSAJ 57; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 126; interestingly, Wright, *Resurrection*, 136, considers Ben Sira as a spiritual ancestor of Sadducees, citing Sir. 14:16f; 17:27f; 38:21–23; 41:4.

[902] De Vries, "Observations," 272, notes that a counter-reaction against Qohelet led Ben Sira to "torah-orthodoxy."

[903] See also Maurice Gilbert, "Wisdom Literature," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Stone; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 298.

[904] Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 BCE to 200 CE* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 77–125; Corley, "Wisdom," 269–85; Benjamin G. Wright, III, "Putting the Puzzle Together: Some Suggestions Concerning the Social Location of the Wisdom of Ben Sira," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (eds. Wright and Wills; SBLSymS 35; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 108; Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 208; William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 354; cf. Levenson, *Resurrection*, 194–95; Klawans, *Josephus*, 103; contra, cf. Martin, "Sira," 141–61.

[905] Cf. Marco Nobile, "The Hereafter in the Book of Wisdom (Wisdom 1–3)," in *Wisdom for Life: Essays Offered to Honor Prof. Maurice Gilbert, SJ on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (ed. Calduch-Benages; BZAW 445; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 250–59 [esp. 254–55].

The book specifies that it is the ungodly who share the view of Qohelet (e.g., Wis 2:1–9, 17; 2:21–4:20).

6.2 The Author's Purpose in Writing Ecclesiastes

What impact might the frame-narrative of Ecclesiastes have had when it became known? People probably either had to go along with Qohelet's borderline heretical resolution or turn to other sources of wisdom if they wished to be liberated from their current predicament and a bleak future. Israelites had nowhere else to turn, but to Yahweh, perhaps realizing that they needed to seek wisdom from above (רז נהיה) to know when it could happen if indeed God would judge and bring justice to all. God's revelation was necessary to gain such insight which was far off and too deep for Qohelet to secure with his wisdom and searches (7:23–24). Goff notes, "Wisdom is a two-step process—revelation then contemplation. One could say that the *raz nihyeh* gives the addressee the key but he has to open the door himself."[906] Qohelet contemplated without revelation—the key to unravel a mystery—and failed to find an answer.

Intentionally or unintentionally Qohelet's relentless emphasis on death's indiscriminate assault may have caused a growing discontent among Israelites and perhaps served as a provocation to reassess their traditional beliefs in theodicy and Sheol.[907] His unrelenting stress on the levelling effect of death and Sheol on both the righteous and the wicked, reducing human dignity to that of an animal, may have caused pious remnants to realize that death and Sheol may be "appropriate for the wicked but both are inappropriate for the righteous."[908] The fate of the righteous and the wicked in Israelite society should not be the same. It goes against the grain of the very nature of Yahweh, the God of Israel, who rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked in their tradition. Klawans remarks:

> The thought that God's chosen were destined to be eternally confined in Sheol—even though this is precisely what some biblical texts clearly state—was so counter-intuitive to many ancient Jews that the opposite assumption became a powerful argument in favor of the existence of some sort of beatific afterlife.[909]

Qohelet's emphasis on active life and its enjoyment, dismissing mere existence in Sheol as non-living, may in effect have caused Israelites eventually to reject his

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[906] Goff, "Wisdom," 65.
[907] De Vries, "Observations," 272.
[908] Wright, "Death Pt.1," 24–25.
[909] Klawans, *Josephus*, 98.

notion of death as the fate of all and Sheol as the destiny of all as acceptable. Furthermore, a realization that there would be no merit for the righteous living without God's presence may have triggered the righteous to question Sheol as an appropriate abode of the righteous dead, perhaps even temporarily.[910] Qohelet's insistence that death reigns *under the sun* may also have incited Israelites to react and affirm that Yahweh, not death, reigns and He can even cancel death. Qohelet's honest but unorthodox stance skewing traditional Israelite wisdom may well have "provoked a radical counter-reaction,"[911] from which arose "an eschatological hope of a divine victory over death."[912] If God creates, kills, and makes alive, then He can surely recreate life, as depicted in Ezekiel's imagery (Chapter 37). An affirmation of divine power over death eventually led Israelites to a belief not only in a post-mortem divine judgement but also in a new life—not just a spiritual blessing but "a return to bodily life"—namely, bodily resurrection as reward for the righteous dead at the end of age.[913] The belief in divine judgement after death "serves the purpose of theodicy by upholding the ultimate justice of God. It thereby provides hope to the oppressed and relieves the resentment caused by injustice in this life."[914] If this is correct, it is unlikely that such belief was already circulating in Qohelet's society. His sceptical pessimism, fatalistic attitude, resignation and helplessness in the face of death do not convey any sort of faith or hope for the future among his people, including Qohelet himself. Perdue sums up:

> There is no prophetic critique of the abuse of power in Qoheleth. The abuse of power is a point for despair, but not an impetus for reform. Nor is there the emergence of an apocalyptic community in which the power structure for a new social reality is being shaped in incipient form.[915]

Qohelet's "enjoy life" but also "fear God" statement seems hollow to those who are undergoing oppression and sufferings. His brutally honest outlook on the harsh reality of life and death, and the inability of his wisdom to counter outrageous oppression and wickedness in his society, however, may have caused desperate Israelites to realize their utterly powerless situation. They will eventually have faced a

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[910] Wright, "Death Pt.1," 25.
[911] De Vries, "Observations," 272.
[912] Wright, "Death Pt.1," 28.
[913] Ibid.
[914] Collins, "Afterlife," 137.
[915] Perdue, "Cosmology," 477–78.

decision either to give up or to turn to Yahweh, however silent and distant He may appear.

Oppression by foreign nations was no novelty for Israelites, and how Yahweh delivered them is recorded in their Scripture. It may have only been a matter of time before they would once again turn to Yahweh who had the power to rescue the oppressed, right the wrong, and punish the perpetrators, as they knew He had thus demonstrated in times past. Rowland states:

> In a sense, one can argue that Apocalyptic is an attempt to solve the problem of the dire scepticism which we find in Ecclesiastes. This comes by acknowledging the inability of man to make sense of his world from his own resources and resorting to divine revelation alone as the means whereby the obscurities of the present circumstances, as well as the mysteries of God himself, could be properly ascertained. In this respect at least there seem to be good reasons for supposing that von Rad has grasped the significance of one of the constituents of apocalyptic, indeed probably the most important of all, the quest for knowledge and the belief that some answers at least could be found.[916]

The writer of Ecclesiastes may well have felt need to bring Israelites back to the basic tenets of Israelite faith through Qohelet's existential and unsatisfactory resolution of their social problems. Qohelet's monologic discourse may be written to encourage reactions and push the immediate (and perhaps distant) audience to the edge, regarding what or whom Israelites should count on when faced with capricious death and injustice. Qohelet and the frame-narrator both present their conclusive instruction, but the choice seems to be left for the audience. The author seemingly leaves them to react and decide on what is right for their own good—perhaps because the situation was gravely out of hand or perhaps he trusted they knew what they had to do. Interestingly, one outcome of the author's purpose may have been more than what he had envisaged: that his small treatise for Israelite society might become a *goad* towards an emergence of apocalyptic eschatology.

In summary, this thesis proposes that the book of Ecclesiastes may have been positioned and perhaps served as a bridge between the traditional Israelite wisdom and the emerging apocalyptic eschatology.[917] Seriously questioning and challenging the traditional stance on theodicy which had perhaps become no longer sustainable in

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[916] Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 207–8; cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Vol. 2: The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (trans. Stalker; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), 112–25, 301–8; Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (trans. Martin; London: SCM, 1972), 277–83.

[917] Armin Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination: weisheitliche Urordnung und Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran* (STDJ 18; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 306; Katrina J. A. Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah: A Study of the Formation of a Mantological Wisdom Anthology* (CBET 6; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994); contra Levenson, *Resurrection*, 194.

an oppressed society, the book may have become perhaps a welcoming and necessary voice. Qohelet's radical voice could incite Israelites either to accept the status quo as Qohelet suggests, or to react and seek a new divine revelation from the God of Israel, who can kill or make alive what He has created (Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6),[918] and fear Him as the frame narrator suggests.

Maltby concludes in a statement from his survey of the book, saying,

> The main object of Ecclesiastes is not to speak of the after-life but to show the necessity for it by showing up our earthly vanities for what they are. In this Koheleth is wonderfully successful.[919]

The emergence of apocalyptic eschatology seems to support Maltby's assessment of Qohelet and its author's purpose.

6.3 Summary and Conclusions

Certain similarities in the social situations in which Ecclesiastes and apocalyptic eschatology emerged are striking. Qohelet's views and observations in his society are very similar to the situation when Israelites seriously begin to question their traditional views of death, Sheol and retributive justice, prior to the surfacing of apocalyptic eschatology. 1 Enoch, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon seem to have appeared at least partly as a response to Ecclesiastes during the mid-Second Temple period, and they have all reacted against Qohelet's stance, as the author probably hoped and expected.[920] History shows that two major movements in Israelite society also took place during the same period: the emergence of apocalyptic eschatology and sectarian conflicts.

It is probably safe to say that the author has had a specific purpose to write the book of Ecclesiastes in a "frame-narrative" structure with a main character who plays an antagonistic role: Qohelet's monologic discourse is a framed story within a framework which is controlled by the frame-narrator, the author's disguise. If the author placed Qohelet as a provocative voice in Ecclesiastes to solicit reactions or a response, as this thesis proposes, it is possible that he was successful. The above investigation also suggests that the book may have played a role in the emergence of

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[918] Cf. Taylor, "Eschatological," 103; Roland E. Murphy, "'To Know Your Might Is the Root of Immortality' (Wis 15:3)," *CBQ* 25 (1963): 88–93; Petterson, "Antecedents 2," 63.
[919] Arthur Maltby, "Book of Ecclesiastes and the After-Life," *EvQ* 35 (1963): 44.
[920] Contra Levenson, *Resurrection*, 194.

apocalyptic eschatology, regardless of whether such was intentional or incidental on the part of the author's purpose in writing.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary

Ecclesiastes among the OT books is an anomaly, but not without its significance. After all, it has survived inquiries concerning its questionable content and remains a part of canonical Scripture. Attempts and proposals for how one may understand the uncommon book among the sacred documents continue throughout the centuries. This thesis has endeavoured to make a small contribution for further insight by yet another attempt to read and make sense of Ecclesiastes.

This thesis has proposed that the book of Ecclesiastes is making a case for posthumous divine judgement. Specifically, I have argued that issues relating to death and injustice raised by Qohelet in Ecclesiastes point to a theological need for post-mortem divine judgement. I have also tentatively suggested that Ecclesiastes may have served as a provocative voice for, or as a catalyst to, the emergence of apocalyptic eschatology during the mid-Second Temple period and later sectarian conflicts within Judaism.

I was struck by his unusual obsession with death when I first encountered Qohelet. Questions were raised: Why is death emphasized so much in this section of the sacred Hebrew Scripture which is supposed to communicate hope? How can everything (הכל) that one accomplishes be assessed as "futile" (הבל) apropos of death? Why was Ecclesiastes written? What might the author have envisioned to convey to his reader?

These questions have led me to ponder whether there may be a historical significance and a specific purpose behind the composition of this enigmatic small book. In order to unravel such enquiries, three main areas of research have evolved in the course of this investigation: (a) a question of how best Ecclesiastes is to be read; (b) how ancient people viewed and dealt with death; and (c) what the author's purpose and message in Ecclesiastes may be.

In the preliminary chapter (Introduction), the problems associated with reading Ecclesiastes are identified. One problem is related to the book itself and the other is the historical social background; neither of which is straightforward to clarify. A brief

survey of historical approaches supports the idea that reading Ecclesiastes as a unified whole, which is a current trend in scholarship, may be fruitful. The issue remains, however, how one should read the book as a unity that seems to lack a clear theme or structure. This thesis has examined in detail two approaches which are currently favoured among scholars in Chapter 2: a canonical approach and a "frame-narrative" reading which Fox pioneered, and which has significantly influenced recent scholarship. As a result, I have discussed a minor modification of the "frame-narrative" which still leaves certain ambiguities and room for more cogent interpretations of the book's overarching message and purpose, in my view. I have argued that it is the frame-narrator (the epilogist) who plays the more important and prominent role in Ecclesiastes: the frame-narrator, not Qohelet, is the reliable narrator of the author's voice.

I have suggested that the unusual content of Ecclesiastes may be related to certain historical bearings when it was written. The current majority consensus places Ecclesiastes' composition sometime around the transition from the Persian to the Hellenistic period, leaning towards the late fourth and early third centuries BCE. As there is little internal or external evidence, it is no easy task to specify the book's dating to any period. This thesis has basically concurred with Segal's proposal and has placed Ecclesiastes' composition on the cusp of the Persian–Hellenistic transition period as a working hypothesis. This has opened the door to investigate and argue the case that this thesis presented, while fully recognizing the unavoidably conjectural nature of the discussions.

In order to understand the historical context of Ecclesiastes, the initial task for this thesis was to investigate the concept of death, afterlife, and divine judgement in the ancient world. What seems to be most strikingly common in these concepts is that ancient people always seem to have believed in the existence of divine beings and held a clear understanding of a "divide" between divine and human from the beginning. Only god(s) possess immortality, while humans are destined to die. Nonetheless, ancient people never seem to have accepted extinction after death as their ultimate fate, but conceived some form of an insubstantial post-mortem existence. They sought a survival of their "soul" or "spirit" in various ways, supposing that their continuing being would reside in the netherworld, the underworld of the dead. Egyptians believed in a divine judgement after death, but people in other nations of the ancient Near Eastern world did not hold such a view.

The ancient concept of afterlife was in general a continuation of this life in a mirror image (Egypt and Mesopotamia) or in a better condition (Egypt and Greece). The funerary cults of the dead developed along with such views of the afterlife. Once established, the cults of the dead in the ancient world persisted essentially with little change, certain adaptations and additions adjusting to socio-cultural changes notwithstanding. Scepticism regarding a belief in afterlife also seemed to have existed alongside the established cultic practices.

Questions regarding human fate and destiny along with scepticism began to be raised and exacerbated when they found their tradition became unsatisfactory or questionable. Such a shift was more notably observed in Egypt and Israel when extensive changes in their society began to threaten national and individual security under foreign powers during the Persian and Hellenistic periods. This thesis has argued that Egyptian demotic literature and Ecclesiastes express similar sentiments concerning inscrutable divine activities and scepticism regarding human fate and the afterlife in the netherworld.

This seems to support this thesis' working hypothesis by placing the socio-historical context of Ecclesiastes on the cusp of the Persian–Hellenistic transition period. Ecclesiastes may have been written during a tumultuous period when Israelites began to question their traditional belief in divine retribution and the destiny of the righteous who suffered premature death.

With this proposed historical background, this thesis has investigated how best Ecclesiastes is to be read. A brief survey of historical approaches led to an examination of two major readings of Ecclesiastes as a unified whole: the canonical approach of Childs and Sheppard and a "frame-narrative" reading by Fox. A literary analysis has persuaded me to take the latter approach as better for the present purpose, although I have disagreed with Fox's interpretation of the relationship between the frame-narrator and the implied author, or which voice—Qohelet's or the frame-narrator's—represented the author's view. I have explicated along with schematic representations that the frame-narrative structure may best explain Ecclesiastes' overall scheme and show the frame-narrator's presence and participation in the entire discourse. I have pointed out that the frame-narrator's voice is heard at the three key junctions in addition to his epilogue. I have particularly paid close attention to the frame-narrator's interruption in 7:27 in the middle of Qohelet's monologic discourse, and discussed its role and significance in the frame-narrative. I then argued how the

frame-narrator may be playing the pivotal role in the delivery of Qohelet's monologic discourse as a framed story and may be trusted as an authoritative voice to control the entire discourse. In contrast to Fox, I have identified the frame-narrator, not Qohelet, as the most likely reliable voice in this book. In other words, Qohelet's voice does not necessarily reflect the author's view, but rather the frame-narrator is the author's disguise.

This interpretation is a departure from conventional historical approaches and from Fox; most of these have endeavoured to explain what the author tries to communicate through Qohelet, whom most scholars consider to be the author's guise. If Qohelet is not representing or expressing the author's view, then it calls for an examination for why Qohelet's monologue occupies the majority of the book and how it is integrated into the overall scheme of the book.

A question may be raised about whose view Qohelet is expressing if his voice does not necessarily reflect the author's view. This thesis has argued that there is a fundamental problem (or at least a serious concern) that the author felt needed to be addressed in the society in which he lived. Qohelet's voice may be a reflection of certain sentiments of the people in his society, different things that people were saying, which may at times have sounded haphazard, incoherent, or even contradictory. Such varied utterances from Qohelet's mouth may themselves be a sign of confusion, frustration, and questioning that people might have faced and expressed. With this in mind I have explored what Qohelet says and how his utterances may be interpreted by close exegetical reading of the text.

Death and divine judgement, or the lack thereof, have surfaced as the two serious issues that Qohelet repeatedly mentions in his monologue, even though he does not always use the word death or injustice directly. Instead, Qohelet uses such terms as "fate" (מקרה) and "place" (מקום) in his unique way to point to death by denoting them with the "same" (אחד) for "all" (הכל): "All have the same fate" and "all go to the same place." Schoors most succinctly describes this phenomenon as follows:

> The numeral אחד is found 17 times in Qoh and the feminine form אחת twice in one phrase (7,27). A group of attestations has to do with death. In 2,14; 3,19; 9,2.3 we find the expression מקרה אחד "one accident, one fate", i.e., the same fate that awaits all humans, be they wise or fool, righteous or wicked (2,14; 9,2.3), even humans and beasts (3,19). This unmistakably refers to death, as clearly appears from 3,19, where the equality of fate is defined by the clause כמות זה כן מות זה, "as the one dies so dies the other" . . . . In this verse it is further explained by the fact that both humans and beasts have one, i.e., the same, spirit (רוח אחד). Equality in death is also formulated by the clause in 3,20, הכל הולך אל־מקום אחד, "all go to one place", which is repeated in

> the form of a rhetorical question in 6,6, a self-quotation according to Backhaus. Verse 3,20b explains the clause by saying that all return to dust, another metaphor for the realm of death, which in 9,10 is called by its traditional name *Sheol*.[921]

Qohelet brings up the subject of death and its effects in almost every chapter in Ecclesiastes. In fact, he describes everyone undergoing the same fate, i.e. death, as "an evil among all that happens, or that is done, under the sun" (9:3a), the greatest evil among all events in human life.

In a similar vein, Qohelet observes that injustice is prevalent in his society, but not rectified because of death, although not directly blaming anyone. He mentions a corrupt regime and delayed execution of justice as being the reason for increasing evil. Strangely, Qohelet repeatedly affirms that God will judge because there is a time for everything, despite the fact of the righteous perishing in their righteousness and the wicked prevailing in their wicked deeds. Justice *de facto* is not done, or *de jure* delayed, but such reasoning provides hope only to those who are still alive, not to those who died without retribution. Qohelet's contradiction seems to be apparent even to himself, because the only resolution he presents to his audience is to enjoy life while they can. After death, there is nothing one can do. In fact, he exhorts people not to be too righteous or too wicked, risking their lives by extreme conduct. He has no answer to death rendering permanent the injustice experienced during life.

As a sage, Qohelet does not forsake wisdom teaching to fear God, and he seems to be constrained by his belief in traditional retributive justice. He apparently contradicts himself in the tension between what he holds true in traditional wisdom and what he actually observes. At the same time, he finds traditional beliefs in a good, long life with an heir and remembrance for family generativity, or post-mortem existence in Sheol to be unsatisfactory in the face of death's finality. Qohelet assesses everything that is considered valuable or worthwhile in life in terms of death's reality, and his conclusion is: "Everything is *hebel*." He relies on his own wisdom and claims that he has sought by wisdom an answer to the "puzzles" of what happens under the sun, but the thought of seeking divine wisdom or intervention never seems to occur to him. Qohelet sees death negating everything, except that one can enjoy what one does during one's fleeting life. Qohelet apparently does not entertain any thought for a possibility of post-mortem divine judgement, much less any kind of life after death. Unexpected premature deaths of the righteous in his society may have been

[921] Schoors, *Preacher II*, 276. Author's emphasis.

particularly troublesome to Israelites because they thought that such death would lead to Sheol, the most undesirable place of post-mortem existence.

One may wonder what Qohelet's monologic discourse is doing, if what Qohelet is expressing were the sentiments of people in his society. One of the important aspects of interpreting Ecclesiastes, which is often overlooked, is how the immediate audience may have received Qohelet's message when it was presented. Since Qohelet's discourse is narrated as a framed story, the frame-narrator may bring out added nuances or meaning(s) according to how he presents Qohelet and his message. This thesis has discussed reasons why Qohelet is portrayed in the persona of "Solomon" and has argued that Qohelet's language is unique and often contains ambiguities and multivalent meanings and connotations. I have argued that the author of Ecclesiastes may have envisaged that the book needs receptive ears and also contains messages that the audience need to hear.

Under the surface meaning of Qohelet's utterances, the author may well have embedded hints of his message in the words and phrases with more than one meaning that Qohelet used. A fresh interpretation of Qohelet's poem in 12:1–7 seems to be a key because it may be functioning as a pivotal juncture bridging between Qohelet's monologic discourse and the frame-narrator's epilogue. The epilogue then displays the frame narrator's role as the authoritative voice, while Qohelet may function in the role of an antagonist rather than a protagonist in the frame-narrative in terms of the overall message of Ecclesiastes. This thesis has suggested that Qohelet's voice may be meant to be provocative, likely soliciting reactions to what he implies in his utterances and also inciting the audience to follow either Qohelet's resolution or the frame-narrator's final instruction. It may have been the author's intent to respond to the outcry of people against injustice in his society under an oppressive regime by calling for faith in orthodox wisdom.

Supposing that such was the author's purpose in writing Ecclesiastes, this thesis has tentatively suggested that Ecclesiastes might have played a role as a catalyst or as a provocative voice towards the emergence of a uniquely Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. Circumstantial evidence suggests that Qohelet and apocalyptists seem to have lived in a similar social climate where traditional retributive justice was no longer at work and when Israelites might have begun to question their traditional beliefs. Qohelet seems to manifest his struggle in which he could neither remain a

"traditionalist" nor become an "innovator"[922] in the wake of inner conflict among Jews who were caught between their traditional belief and the new reality under foreign rulers in the Persian–Hellenistic transition period.

Levenson, however, disputes the idea that Ecclesiastes had an influence on Judaism when apocalyptic eschatology was emerging, and remarks:

> But even if we were to grant, quite without evidence, that the book of Qohelet exerted great influence on the literature of its time, we should still have to wonder why its challenge had to be answered but its own resolution rejected. It seems odd to say that a book was highly influential, on the one hand, but idiosyncratic and without followers, on the other.[923]

Levenson's opinion may be well taken if Qohelet's voice in Ecclesiastes represents the author's view. If, however, the author had positioned Qohelet's voice as his ploy to stimulate reactions in the mind of his audience, because he had an urgent message that he wished to convey through the frame-narrator, then there may be another way to interact with Levenson's final remark. Suppose the author envisaged Qohelet's radical stance as an influential provocative voice to steer the audience to the real message by the frame-narrator: Qohelet is to be idiosyncratic and influential but not persuasive. The author may have envisioned that Qohelet's stance would challenge people, but his resolution be rejected. In other words, Levenson's last remark may be exactly what the author wished or hoped to happen.

Jewish history suggests that there appeared reactions against Qohelet almost from its inception, as in 1 Enoch, Sirach, and later the Wisdom of Solomon. It is true that there were incidences where the death of the innocent occurred, but without the felt need of retributive justice for the dead themselves, in the pre-exilic period; for example, Abel (Gen 4:1–16), the prophets of Yahweh (1Kgs 18:4, 13), or Naboth (1 Kgs 21:7–16) as Levenson discusses in his book.[924] What makes a difference between the pre-exilic cases and Ecclesiastes may be the historical context of the latter. The former are more or less individual cases and no one raised an issue, as Levenson notes, although the prophets' case may be different and still happened under an Israelite king's rule within Israel. Ecclesiastes suggests that the Jewish people as a whole were probably in precarious situations when the lives of the righteous might have been alarmingly threatened while wickedness thrived in their society. This seems

[922] "Innovator," namely apocalyptist. Levenson, *Resurrection*, 191.
[923] Ibid., 194.
[924] Ibid., 192–93.

apparent as Qohelet relentlessly takes issues with seemingly unjustifiable death and argues like no one else in the entire OT that death occasions injustice. Thus, Levenson's wording may be right if the author, who probably disguised himself as the frame-narrator, hoped that Qohelet should be influential, but idiosyncratic and without followers.

The reception history of the book seems to indicate that is how the faith community responded: Qohelet has caused suspicion frequently enough that his voice has often been corrected or modified. In contrast, the frame-narrator's eschatological hope lives on in the faith community.

2. Prospect

A few prospective studies may be envisaged. Some striking similarities in the factors which may have influenced the composition of Ecclesiastes and the emergence of apocalyptic eschatology may suggest an intertextual reading of both Ecclesiastes and apocalyptic literature,[925] which in turn may spur further exploration in defining the role of wisdom in apocalypses.

Apocalyptic eschatology was not uniformly accepted among the Israelites when the concept first arose. Jewish literature and history indicate that there arose a sectarian movement and conflicts as the resurrection motif in the eschatological judgement became prominent. Because of space limits, the current research did not delve into Ecclesiastes' role in the emergence of conflicts within Judaism: how Qohelet's statements about death and divine judgement might have influenced the sectarian movements. In this regard an intertextual reading between Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira, and early Rabbinic literature may shed further light on the sectarian movements.

Examination of the reception history of the book of Ecclesiastes may provide a further clue to indicate whether or not Qohelet's monologue is set up as a provocative voice, a voice which may perhaps be meant to be rejected. History shows that Qohelet's message has always been treated with correctives as if one should not take Qohelet's words seriously or at face value in faith communities. Perhaps this may have been the author's expectation. Further research may clarify and strengthen this hypothesis.

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[925] The legitimacy of an intertextual approach has already been noted. See, e.g., Goff, "Intertextuality," 214–25 [esp. 223].

This thesis has not determined whether the book of Ecclesiastes was written as a direct stimulus (intentionally) or served simply as a catalyst (incidentally) if it played a role in affecting the emergence of a uniquely Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. This remains to be for further exploration, perhaps dependent on the further research suggested above.

At the least, this thesis has proposed another way of reading Ecclesiastes for a better understanding of the book and its role and place in the context of the mid-Second Temple milieu.

APPENDIX

1. Comparison of Eccl 1:2–11 vs. 12:1–8

<table>
<tr><th>1:2–11</th><th>12:1–8</th></tr>
<tr><td dir="rtl">2 הבל הבלים אמר קהלת הבל הבלים הכל הבל:
3 מה־יתרון לאדם בכל־עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש:
4 דור הלך ודור בא והארץ לעולם עמדת:
5 וזרח השמש ובא השמש ואל־מקומו שואף זורח הוא שם:
6 הולך אל־דרום וסובב אל־צפון סובב סבב הולך הרוח ועל־סביבתיו שב הרוח:
7 כל־הנחלים הלכים אל־הים והים איננו מלא אל־מקום שהנחלים הלכים שם הם שבים ללכת:
8 כל־הדברים יגעים לא־יוכל איש לדבר לא־תשבע עין לראות ולא־תמלא אזן משמע:
9 מה־שהיה הוא שיהיה ומה־שנעשה הוא שיעשה ואין כל־חדש תחת השמש:
10 יש דבר שיאמר ראה־זה חדש הוא כבר היה לעלמים אשר היה מלפננו:
11 אין זכרון לראשנים וגם לאחרנים שיהיו לא־יהיה להם זכרון עם שיהיו לאחרנה: פ</td><td dir="rtl">1 וזכר את־בוראיך בימי בחורתיך עד אשר לא־יבאו ימי הרעה והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר אין־לי בהם חפץ:
2 עד אשר לא־תחשך השמש והאור והירח והכוכבים ושבו העבים אחר הגשם:
3 ביום שיזעו שמרי הבית והתעותו אנשי החיל ובטלו הטחנות כי מעטו וחשכו הראות בארבות:
4 וסגרו דלתים בשוק בשפל קול הטחנה ויקום לקול הצפור וישחו כל־בנות השיר:
5 גם מגבה יראו וחתחתים בדרך וינאץ השקד ויסתבל החגב ותפר האביונה כי־הלך האדם אל־בית עולמו וסבבו בשוק הספדים:
6 עד אשר לא־ירחק חבל הכסף ותרץ גלת הזהב ותשבר כד על־המבוע ונרץ הגלגל אל־הבור:
7 וישב העפר על־הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל־האלהים אשר נתנה:
8 הבל הבלים אמר הקוהלת הכל הבל:</td></tr>
<tr><td>השמש: 1:3, 5 [bis], 9
בוא: 1:4, 5
שוב: 1:6, 7
הלך: 1:4, 6 [bis], 7 [bis]
הארץ: 1:4
עולם: 1:4, 10
סבב: 1:6 [tris]; סביב 1:6 [n.]
זכרון: 1:11 [bis, n.]
הבל הבלים אמר קוהלת ... הכל הבל: 1:2</td><td>השמש: 12:2
בוא: 12:1
שוב: 12:2, 7 [bis]
הלך: 12:5
הארץ: 12:7
עולם: 12:5
סבב: 12:5
זכר: 12:1 (v)
הבל הבלים אמר הקוהלת הכל הבל: 12:8</td></tr>
<tr><td>2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”
3 What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?
4 A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever.
5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there again.
6 Blowing toward the south, Then turning toward the north, The wind continues swirling along; And on its circular courses the wind returns.
7 All the rivers flow into the sea, Yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, There they flow again.
·
9 That which has been is that which will be, And that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun.
·
11 There is no remembrance of earlier things; And also of the later things which will occur, There will be for them no remembrance Among those who will come later still. (NASB)</td><td>1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no delight in them”;
2 before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;
3 in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim;
4 and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.
5 Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.
6 (Remember Him) before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed;
7 then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.
8 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “all is vanity!” (NASB)</td></tr>
</table>

2. Comparison of Gen 2:15–17 vs. 3:17–19

2:15-17	3:17-19
[15]ויקח יהוה אלהים את־האדם וינחהו בגן־עדן לעבדה ולשמרה [16] ויצו יהוה אלהים על־האדם לאמר מכל עץ־הגן אכל תאכל [17] ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות	[17]ולאדם אמר כי־שמעת לקול אשתך ותאכל מן־העץ אשר צויתיך לאמר לא תאכל ממנו ארורה האדמה בעבורך בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חייך [18] וקוץ ודרדר תצמיח לך ואכלת את־עשב השדה [19] בזעת אפיך תאכל לחם עד שובך אל־האדמה כי ממנה לקחת כי־עפר אתה ואל־עפר תשוב
[15] Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; [17] but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." (NASB)	[17] Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. [18] Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you shall eat the plants of the field; [19] By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return." (NASB)

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