

Qohelet's Fall:
The Use of Genesis 2-4 in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

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Abstract

In this thesis I will demonstrate that Qohelet uses the language and themes found in Genesis 2-4. Qohelet, himself a wisdom teacher, interprets the early chapters of Genesis as wisdom texts. He uses them to explain from within the boundaries of wisdom why the world fails to show the perfection of creation. Death and the frustration to be found in work are both understood by Qohelet in terms of the curse of Genesis 3. Qohelet does not set out to discover the meaning of life but he does endeavour to find what is good for humans to do during their short lives. This is a continuation of the task established for humans in their quest to master the knowledge of good and evil. Qohelet questions the efficacy of the retribution principle. In this he draws on the experiences of Abel found in Genesis 4. He uses the language and themes of Genesis 2-4 to legitimise his hetero-orthodox approach to wisdom. His rejection of retribution and his method of discovering what is good illustrate his use of Genesis. Ultimately Qohelet concludes that the world cannot be changed and that humans can only make the most of the world as it is.

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Abbreviations and Citations

Abbreviations follow the rules recommended by The Society of Biblical Literature, according to the SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999. The following abbreviation is not mentioned in The SBL Handbook of Style:

- | | |
|-----|---|
| TAD | <i>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt.</i> Vol 1-4. Eds. Ada Yardeni and Bezalel Porten. Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1986-1999. |
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All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Introduction

Life is full of trouble and then you die.
Longman.¹

The book of Ecclesiastes is perhaps the most enigmatic in the Hebrew canon. It contains much that appears unorthodox and contradictory. This has led to a wide variety of interpretations of the book. Qohelet has been diversely described as both a “sceptic” and a “preacher of joy.”² Others despair of finding any coherent message within the book at all. It is almost universally agreed that the book dates from the period of Persian or Greek occupation of the Holy Land (circa 539-164BCE), but precise dating of the book remains elusive.³ Many lenses have been proposed to help understand the book including Loader’s polar extremes, Leithart’s post-modern, and Fox’s embrace of contradiction.⁴ While all these shed light on the book, none accounts fully for its meaning. It is my intention in this dissertation to propose another perspective: that the book be read as a response to

- 1 Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 34.
- 2 Douglas B. Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: The Place of Hebel in Qohelet’s Work* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 170. Heinrich Heine is cited as describing Qohelet as “Das Hohelied der Skeptizismus,” the song of scepticism (as opposed to the Song of Songs) or as Holm-Nielsen translates it the “quintessence of scepticism.” For example, Svend Holm-Nielsen “On the Interpretation of Qoheleth in early Christianity,” *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (1974): 16; Graham S. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 2007), 9. Jastrow assumes that the book has undergone major changes from its original form, partly as he believes that adding to a book was considered normal practice, and partly to enable it to enter the canon. He believes the book was more radical and sceptical in its original form. He concludes that God does not intend humans to solve the problem of life (Morris Jastrow, *A Gentile Cynic: Being the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1919), 28, 142). See also: Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies 541 (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 167-168. Weeks ultimately concludes that scepticism is not the best way to characterise the contents of the book. He is a “qualified sceptic.” “Preacher of Joy” is the title of Whybray’s renowned article and a good summary of its contents. However, he does not use the phrase in the article itself (R. Norman Whybray, “Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1982): 87-98).
- 3 Fredericks is one of a very few conservative scholars who refuse to rule out Solomonic authorship (Daniel J. Estes and Daniel C. Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, vol. 16, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010), 32-33).
- 4 J. A. Loader, *Polar Structures in the Book of Qohelet* (New York: de Gruyter, 1979); Peter J. Leithart, *Solomon among the Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008); Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

the early chapters of Genesis and particularly the account of the fall in chapters 3 and 4. Whilst I do not claim that this approach exhausts the possibilities of the text (perhaps none can), I do believe it contributes significantly to a new understanding.

It has been noted by many commentators on Ecclesiastes that a synergy exists between Qohelet and the opening chapters of Genesis.⁵ Whybray describes this association as being made “frequently.”⁶ Hertzberg went as far as to state that Qohelet appears to have had Genesis 1-3 open before him as he wrote.⁷ Yet, few commentators have explored this connection in depth (a few exceptions are noted in the literature review below).

A theology of creation is a foundational concept within wisdom literature.⁸ It is my proposal that Qohelet goes beyond this to consider the relationship to knowledge, how people’s lives are shaped by the fact of death, and the reality of “curse” in the world’s current state: that is, its brokenness. In short, Qohelet’s world is one that reflects the pain and toil pronounced in Genesis 3 and the brotherly conflict of Genesis 4, but also with it the continuing possibility of finding satisfaction and fulfilment in life. For God creates a good world, which even after the curse of Genesis 3 is still capable of being beautiful for in it God’s purposes for humans are achieved. Therefore, in Qohelet’s theology a cursed world can still be described as very good.

The intention of this thesis is to examine the language, themes, and theology that Gen 1-4 and Ecclesiastes have in common. The most obvious is the use Qohelet

5 C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18c, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 51; Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, vol. 23a, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. John D. W. Watts and James W. Watts (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), xlvi; Dan Vogel, “The Legacy of Two Adams,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 33 (2005): 4. Further citations are given in the literature review below. I have followed the convention in this thesis that Ecclesiastes refers to the First Testament book and Qohelet to the author of the book. See Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lxvii.

6 R. Norman Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 60.

7 H. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 230, cited in Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, xlvi.

8 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 5.

makes of the “dust to dust” mimesis⁹ cited from Genesis 3. Both books discuss the prevalence of human evil, inaccessibility of knowledge, exclusion from God’s presence, the inability of this world to satisfy human nature, life’s brevity, the craving for immortality, and human sinfulness. These are juxtaposed in the common language of good and evil, life and death. Perhaps the most interesting is הַבָּל, Eve’s name for her second born¹⁰ and Qohelet’s inclusio.¹¹ הַבָּל is the Leitmotif of Ecclesiastes. I will explore how these themes help us to understand Ecclesiastes and the opening chapters of Genesis and to make sense of what appears to be the contradictory nature of Ecclesiastes.

References to Genesis 3 are extremely scarce in the canonical First Testament. There are several possible reasons for this omission. They include a late date for Genesis, or at least the first 11 chapters of Genesis, and an understanding that the curse was revoked in the blessings given to Noah in Gen 8:20-9:17.¹² References to Genesis 3 become very important in 4 Ezra, Romans and 1 Corinthians. They remain significant in most contemporary Christian theologies. It is therefore important to consider places within the First Testament where an understanding of the fall appears to be present.¹³

9 MacDonald uses the term mimesis as a synonym for and in preference to an intertextual reference to describe the reuse of language within the Bible (Dennis R. MacDonald, *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 2).

10 Wenham makes the connection to Qohelet here (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. John D. W. Watts and James W. Watts (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 102).

11 The phrase הַבָּל הַבָּל הַכָּל occurs in Eccl 1:2 and 12:8 and creates a frame for the contents of the book. In Ecclesiastes the inclusio also provides a summary of the contents of the book. In both Eccl 1:2 and 12:8 the frame editor cites the words as spoken by Qohelet.

12 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis, A Commentary*, trans. by John H. Marks, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 122. He describes Gen 8:21 as an annulment of the curse Yahweh laid on the earth. It is possible that the search for references to a fall in the First Testament is flawed because the kind of fall we are looking for is not to be found in Genesis either. This does not account for the absence of the names Adam and Eve from the First Testament, 1 Chr 1:1 and Hos 6:7 excluded.

13 The term “fall” with its pejorative connotations is used here with reluctance. It is used within this thesis to refer to the change encountered by humans between the Edenic setting of Genesis 2 and the post-Edenic world of Genesis 4 and recorded in Genesis 3. Genesis gives a restricted view of what these changes are. This will be discussed later in the section titled “The Fall.” I do not use the term to suggest that all of the ills of the world, real or perceived, can be accounted for with this short word.

1. Literature Review

Relatively few articles have explored the relationship between Genesis and Ecclesiastes. Anderson, Forman, and Artilus stand out. The major commentaries on Ecclesiastes make little mention of any link between Ecclesiastes and Genesis; Crenshaw, Enns, Farmer, Fox, Lohfink, and Mills make mention only in passing and without comment.¹⁴ Murphy gives only the briefest comment.¹⁵ Hayman states that Qohelet ignores Moses.¹⁶ Ridge notes an interplay between death and possession in Ecclesiastes that is unlike that found in any First Testament text but makes no link with Genesis. Eaton sees a strong connection between Genesis and Ecclesiastes but fails to elaborate.¹⁷ Longman, while examining the connections between the New Testament and Ecclesiastes, traces a link between Romans 8, Ecclesiastes, and the Genesis fall account: “Qohelet vividly captures the despair of a world without God.”¹⁸ Zuck finds a strong link between Genesis and Ecclesiastes in their anthropology, for both say the same things about humans.¹⁹

14 James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, ed. Peter Ackroyd, James Barr, and Bernhard W. Anderson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 104; Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary, ed. J. Gordon McConville and Craig Bartholomew (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), 59; Kathleen A. Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: Who Knows what is Good?* International Theological Commentary, ed. Fredrick C. Holmgren and George A. E. Knight (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 163; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 216; Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, A Continental Commentary, ed. K. C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 67; Mary E. Mills, *Reading Ecclesiastes: A Literary and Cultural Exegesis* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003), 27.

15 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 35.

16 A. P. Hayman, “Qohelet and the book of Creation,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 50 (1991): 95.

17 Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: IVP, 1983), 42, 46.

18 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 39.

19 The man was originally created good (Gen 1:31; Eccl 7:29), but fell into sin (Gen 3:1-19; Eccl 3:16; 4:1; 7:29), with the consequence of toil (Gen 3:14-19; Eccl 1:3, 8, 18; 2:11, 17, 22) and death (Gen 3:19, 24; 4:5, 8; Eccl 2:14-16; 3:20; 4:2; 9:5; 12:6-7). Made from dust and breath (Gen 2:7; 3:19; Eccl 3:20; 12:7), the man has limited knowledge (Gen 2:17; Eccl 8:7; 10:14; 11:5). He was created to live in companionship with others (Gen 1:27; 2:21-25; Eccl 4:9-12; 9:9). See Roy B. Zuck, “God and Man in Ecclesiastes,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991): 54.

Danker 1951

Danker maintains that the pessimistic view of Ecclesiastes is based on an understanding of humankind's total depravity.²⁰ This view rests on the assumption that the word הַבָּל is exclusively negative in meaning. Danker sees the world as Qohelet describes it, as a punishment from God. The way forward in such a world lies in accepting its contradictions and limitations and the perplexing nature of God's providence.²¹

Death, the ultimate judgement of Genesis 3:19, is the fundamental truth of Ecclesiastes. It is this that takes joy from life and is the source of human despair.²² It is death that causes all things to be הַבָּל.²³ For Danker, הַבָּל is best translated as "disappointment."²⁴ Death ends the potential to serve God on Earth but is not a final end, for beyond death lies judgement, which requires a response from each person. Danker does not see death as a final end of all things; in fact he sees judgement after death as the ultimate purpose of life. It is this humanity must prepare for.²⁵

Danker identifies four issues that create the problematic world that Qohelet describes: God's apparently arbitrary actions in history; the existence of death and judgement; human sinful desires which depart from God's will; and the unavoidable disappointments of life.²⁶ These he views as a judgement from God.

He describes this God-imposed misery (Eccl 1:13-14) as an obvious reference to Genesis 3:19.²⁷ He suggests that God cursed the ground in order to engage an appropriate moral response from humankind (i.e. faith towards God and moral behaviour towards others). The much-repeated references to finding profit Danker interprets as finding purpose, which is the goal of life and leads to God. In stating

20 Frederick W. Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 22 (1951): 9.

21 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 10.

22 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 15.

23 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 20.

24 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 16.

25 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 20.

26 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 9.

27 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 10.

this he is by no means critical of God.²⁸ Danker believes Qohelet rejects the retribution principle, saying that you cannot establish what God favours from a twisted world.²⁹ God's purpose is to deny humans the temptation to bargain over or seek reward for their moral choices.³⁰

According to Danker's reading of Ecclesiastes the nature of the world makes people confront the question of the purpose of life, and therefore brings them to God. Consequently Danker's overall reading of Ecclesiastes is not pessimistic. Joy is to be found by those who learn the lessons of a cursed world and prioritise their lives accordingly. הַבָּל is caused by a failure to find God's will in a broken world.³¹ This is certainly a possible way of interpreting Ecclesiastes, which preserves an orthodox interpretation out of the heterodox material it contains. How well this represents Qohelet's intentions is open to question. Two quotes will illustrate Danker's reading.

It is precisely at this point that Ecclesiastes makes his greatest theological contribution. He tells us that we shall never find a satisfactory answer to the problem until we see that the fault lies in us.³²

But if man will see that the perplexing circumstances of life represent God's own judgement on man's futile attempt to fulfil his destiny in this world, then the way is open towards a really purposeful life.³³

Forman 1960

Forman argues that the content of the first 11 chapters of Genesis has a strong influence on Qohelet's theology. He notes that the order and regularity of creation after the flood (Gen 8:22) mirror what is found in Eccl 1:4-7; 3:1-8, but whereas in Genesis these are reassuring, Qohelet finds them oppressive (Eccl 1:8; 3:10; cf. Job 7). Both accounts deal with the nature of human existence.³⁴ Both agree that humanity is dust and breath. These first 11 chapters deal with the presence of evil in the world (Gen 6:5), a theme important to Qohelet (Eccl 8:11; 9:3, 29). Forman

28 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 13.

29 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 1, 26.

30 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 15.

31 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 23.

32 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 22.

33 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 9.

34 Charles C. Forman, "Koheleth's use of Genesis," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 5 (1960): 257.

finds the role of women in Eccl 9:9 and 4:9-12 to be consistent with the description of woman as a helper and partner.³⁵ Both texts consider the nature and accessibility of human knowledge. This he finds not only in the garden narrative but also in that of the tower of Babel where access to God is prevented and knowledge restricted through the confusion of language.³⁶ The curse of physical toil in Genesis becomes that of mental toil in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 1:13; 2:23; 3:11; 6:7; 8:17).³⁷ In both it is death alone that provides relief, or at least an end. God is unknowable in Ecclesiastes, for He has withdrawn from humanity and this is why the impersonal Elohim is used rather than the more personal YHWH.³⁸

Gordis 1968

Of Gen 3:19 Gordis says, “Genesis itself sadly reflects on the brevity of human life and the inevitability of death.”³⁹ However, Gordis is more interested in the connection between Deuteronomy 23:22-23 and Ecclesiastes 5:1-6.⁴⁰ He also suggests that this passage contains allusions to 1 Samuel 15:22 and 1 Kings 8:46.⁴¹ Whilst these fall outside of the scope of this work it does demonstrate that Qohelet had a knowledge of at least parts of the Torah and Former Prophets and made use of them in his work.⁴²

35 He excludes Eccl 7:28 which he dismisses as a reflection of the traditional Semitic attitude towards women rather than a reference to Eve. He does note Qohelet has “another attitude toward women” found in Eccl 9:9 (Forman, “Koheleth’s use of Genesis,” 259-260).

36 Forman, “Koheleth’s use of Genesis,” 260.

37 Forman, “Koheleth’s use of Genesis,” 262. Anderson notes that this curse extends to intellectual work (Eccl 1:12-18), business and achievement (Eccl 2:4-23), and political work (Eccl 8:1-10:20) (Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 108).

38 Forman, “Koheleth’s use of Genesis,” 263.

39 Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and his World*, Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 19 (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 43.

40 See Bernard M. Levinson, “‘Better That You Should Not Vow Than That You Vow and Not Fulfill’: Qoheleth’s use of Textual Allusion and the Transformation of Deuteronomy’s Law of Vows,” in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 578, (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 28-41.

41 Here the case is weaker. Perhaps they would better be described as echoes.

42 Gordis, *Koheleth*, 44-45. Gordis also notes the absence of allusions to the Latter Prophets. Others such as Krüger, Janzen, and Meier maintain that Qohelet does make reference to the Latter Prophets. Thomas Krüger Jr. *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. by O. C. Dean (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 85; Janzen, “Qohelet on Life ‘Under the Sun,’” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008): 474, 482; Sam Meier, “Job 1-2 : a Reflection of Genesis 1-3,” *Vetus Testamentum* 39 (1989): 183. For a recent consideration of this issue see Richard L. Schultz, “Qoheleth and Isaiah in Dialogue” in *Reading*

Fox 1986

Fox does not explore the connections between the early chapters of Genesis and Ecclesiastes. According to Fox, Qohelet believes the world should be rational not absurd. He believes in divine justice but he fails to find evidence of it in the world around him. Fox suggests that Qohelet is critical of God because He has made a broken world.⁴³ This contradicts the early chapters of Genesis where God proclaims that the world is good. We therefore have to assume Qohelet believes that something is now wrong with the world.

Verheij 1991

Verheij makes a connection between the kingly experiment of Eccl 2:4 and Genesis' language of creation.

נטֻע	to plant	Gen. 2:8.
גַן	garden	Gen. 2:8, 9, 10, 15, 16.
עֵץ כָלְפִרְיָה	trees of every fruit	Gen. 1:11, 12, 29, 29a; 2:9, 16, 17.
לְהַשְׁקֹת	to drench	Gen. 2:5, 9.
צָמֵח	to sprout	Gen. 1:7, 16, 25, 26.
עֲשָׂה	to work, make	Gen. 1:7, 16, 25, 26, 31; 2:2, 3, 4, 18.

He notes that while for God the outcome of planting a garden was good, for Qohelet it was **הַבֵּל**. Verheij sees this as a failed attempt by Qohelet to recreate Genesis' idyllic world.⁴⁴ It is this that leads to the pessimistic nature of the book. While the comparison of language creates a strong link, Verheij's interpretation of this link does not find harmony with the rest of Ecclesiastes where such an idea is absent.⁴⁵ Waltke agrees with this approach. The garden of Eden and Solomon's labours are both to be understood as temples.⁴⁶

Ecclesiastes Intertextually, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 578 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 57-70.

43 Michael V. Fox, "The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 409-427.

44 Estes agrees, calling this enterprise a secular garden of Eden (Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 300).

45 Arian J. C. Verheij, "Paradise retried: On Qohelet 2:4-6," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 50 (1991): 115.

46 God is present in both, שָׁמַר and עֲבָד are used of both, the menorah is modelled on the tree of life and the temple in 1 Kgs 6 is ornamented as a garden. Both face east. See Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 626-632; Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical*,

Stratton 1995

Stratton considers Qohelet several times in her fascinating feminist interpretation of Genesis. According to Stratton, Qohelet takes up the questions that are asked in the garden of Eden.⁴⁷ These questions revolve around the issues of death, injustice, the limits of human knowledge and God as the limiter of such knowledge.⁴⁸ Her treatment of these subjects is regrettably all too brief.

Fredericks 1996

Like Fox he calls for a consistent translation of הַבָּל because of its “poetic consistency and grammatically *formulaic* presentation,” but he strongly rejects Fox’s *absurd* in favour of *transient* or *temporary*.⁴⁹ Fredericks frequently refers to the Genesis background of Ecclesiastes, which he bases on the central importance in both books of work and death. In both it is the curse that vitiates life. He believes that Qohelet does not set out to answer questions about the meaning of life but that he is primarily concerned with its transience.⁵⁰

This enjoyment in work itself, not only in its fruits of pleasure, is a creation blessing. The Garden was a place of work before the Fall, albeit work without burden. Still, even now, the curse having subjected the earth and humanity to an intense struggle with each other, there can be satisfaction in wise work.⁵¹

And again

How does one cope in a world where wickedness and folly surround every part of life, apparently outweighing all current righteousness and wisdom? The advice of Qoheleth, then, is that true wisdom will recognise the temporality of virtually all that is experienced and will accept the fact that our experience of a fallen world and the evil within it is soon to pass.⁵²

The curse of Genesis 3 is the all-pervasive background against which Qohelet thinks and writes.⁵³

Canonical, and Thematic Approach (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 250, 255, 259.

47 Beverly J. Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2-3* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 236.

48 Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 238, 241, 236.

49 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 51-52, 28.

50 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 52.

51 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 39.

52 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 46.

53 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 40.

Seow 1997

Commenting on the creation passage in Eccl 1:5-10 Seow observes that a “specific linkage to Genesis is both difficult to prove (the vocabulary is dissimilar) and unnecessary.”⁵⁴ He then notes that Israel was probably familiar with other cosmologies besides the Genesis account. Seow finds no relationship between the content of Genesis and Ecclesiastes. However, in the language of creation he finds linguistic parallels with Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah.⁵⁵

Anderson 1998

William Anderson’s 1998 article, “The Curse of Work in Qoheleth : An Exposé of Genesis 3: 17-19 in Ecclesiastes” seeks to establish that Genesis 2-4 provide a cognitive framework on which Qohelet builds. He notes that Genesis 2-3 may itself fall within the genre of wisdom literature.⁵⁶ His approach follows what he calls theological criticism.⁵⁷ By this he means examining the relationship of ideas and interests between different Bible passages. To use his words: the “science and art of discerning possible theological concepts and motifs of the Bible in relationship with one another.”⁵⁸ He believes this approach, when added to the linguistic evidence, demonstrates that “some notion of the fall may provide the broader context of Qohelet.”⁵⁹

He notes that Genesis is aetiological and seeks to explain how the world God described as good can be reconciled with a world that is corrupt and flawed. He concludes that a wisdom literature “preoccupied with creation theology”⁶⁰ cannot reconcile the two. It is because a life lived by wisdom’s precepts does not always

54 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 53.

55 Eccl 5:4 - Deut 23:21; Eccl 3:14 - Deut 4:1-2; 13:1; Eccl 11:8 – Isa 43:18; 46:8e. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 56, 53.

56 He makes this assertion on the basis that ANE wisdom literature is “preoccupied” with creation and order. Anderson gives no examples of which ANE wisdom literature he is referring to. He also notes the sentential themes and language Genesis 2-3 uses (William H. U. Anderson, “The Curse of Work in Qoheleth: An Exposé of Genesis 3:17-19 in Ecclesiastes,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 70 (1998): 100, 101).

57 Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 100.

58 Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 101.

59 Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 100.

60 Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 101.

bring prosperity that “wisdom fails to deliver.”⁶¹ From this premise he concludes that death, as described in Gen 3:19, is the ultimate expression of the curse.

Anderson first notes that Eccl 3:20 and 12:7 are dependent on Gen 3:19. According to Anderson, this establishes literary dependency and demonstrates that Qohelet is familiar with Genesis. (He does not consider whether other explanations for this may exist).

The second part of the article briefly considers the linguistic dependency of Ecclesiastes on Genesis. He discounts Ecclesiastes’ use of הַבָּל and אָדָם. The first of these he believes may be significant, for Abel’s death is an expression of the curse of Gen 3:17 but he sees no significant connection between the books in this word.⁶² The second, מְדִינָה, he sees as too common a word to be of significance. He examines the words used for sin and work in Ecclesiastes, רֹעֵחַת, מְעַשָּׁה, and עֲמָל, without considering how they are paralleled in Genesis. He concludes, “Qohelet also had a highly developed view of the sinful nature in the operation of the world.”⁶³

His examination of language is secondary to the theological parallels that form the substance of his examination. He explores four pericopae from Ecclesiastes: the curse of work (1:3-11); intellectual work (1:12-18); business and achievement (2:4-23); and political work. In the first two of these Anderson makes a compelling case. He notes that creation itself does not experience profit. It is an endless cycle in which nothing changes. It is from this perspective that human experience is considered. Creation provides a universal context in which to examine human effort.⁶⁴ Human beings will not be remembered because of the curse of death.⁶⁵ He sees the heavy burden God has laid on humanity (Eccl 1:13) as the enactment of the curse. He points out that Genesis 2 is about the quest for knowledge, which Ecclesiastes sees as perpetually frustrated. He notes the *hiphil* form of נִסֵּי in Eccl

61 By this he means the failure of the retribution principle to provide an all-encompassing framework for human existence (Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 101).

62 Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 105.

63 Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 104.

64 Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 107.

65 Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 106.

1:18 which he suggests proportionately links intellectual work with grief. He observes that wisdom causing grief follows the same pattern as is found in Genesis 3.

Anderson's case is less convincing in his last two pericopae, achievement (Eccl 2:4-23) and politics (Eccl 8:1-10:20), as he is unable to tie them closely to Genesis. Anderson's view of the fall is traditional in that he links it to original sin.⁶⁶ This is a weak point in his work as the connection between the fall narrative and the concept of original sin exists in the interpretation of the account by Paul (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:20-22) and the church fathers,⁶⁷ rather than being inherent in the account itself. Anderson does demonstrate that Qohelet's work fits well into a Genesis framework.

Miller 1998

Miller in his excellent work on Qohelet's symbolic use of הַבָּל, notes that the word occurs eight times as the proper noun Abel.⁶⁸ He does not take this further by considering these instances alongside the other 35 uses of הַבָּל in the First Testament (see appendix 1), but he says that in the context of the Genesis account the meaning and significance of the name is uncertain and that Eve's intention in so naming him will probably never be resolved.⁶⁹ This is regrettable as Miller does an excellent job in categorising and analysing the use of הַבָּל outside of Ecclesiastes in the First Testament, Ben Sira and later rabbinic sources.⁷⁰

Krüger 2004

Krüger claims that the relationship between God and humankind found in Ecclesiastes is indebted to Genesis 1-11 and notes several points of contact: the beauty and goodness of the earth (Eccl 3:11-15; Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25; 2:9; 3:6),

66 Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 100.

67 Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 88:4; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.16:3; Tertullian, *De Anima*, 40; Origen, *Homilies on Jeremias*, 8:1.

68 Gen 4:2 (x2), 4 (x2), 8 (x2), 9, 25. Miller argues that הַבָּל is a symbol that must be translated according to context (Douglas B. Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of HBL," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 437-454).

69 Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes*, 35. Here Miller misses the point for it is not Eve's intentions that are pertinent but those of the author/redactor. I will consider whether meaning can be resolved for the name Abel in the section titled "הַבָּל and Retribution" page 140.

70 Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes*, 85-88.

the status of human beings (Eccl 3:18; 7:29; Gen 3), and death as divine judgement (Eccl 3:16-21; 9:1-3; 11:9-12:7; Gen 6:5; 8:21). However, he then states, “for these statements the book of Qohelet does not appeal expressly to Genesis 1-11.”⁷¹ He gives no reason why he does not consider Eccl 3:20 such an appeal even though he later acknowledges its dependence on Gen 3:17.⁷²

Sharp 2004

Sharp maintains that Ecclesiastes is intended to be understood as ironic in its use of hyperbole and הָבֵל, which she translates as absurdness.⁷³ She notes that the similarity between Ecclesiastes and the garden of Eden was acknowledged in the early rabbinic tradition. She cites the Midrash Rabbah on Qohelet to demonstrate this (Qoh. R. 7:13, 8:1). She notes that God is identified as Creator in the book (Eccl 3:11; 7:14; 10:20; 12:1).⁷⁴ Qohelet deconstructs the human choice of Genesis 3 by showing that human choices change nothing, their outcomes are unpredictable, and whatever changes ensue are of a strictly temporary nature. Qohelet is not a critique of the account of the fall and curse in Genesis, but of the meaning others have given to it. In this she has perhaps 4 Ezra in mind: human beings simply cannot change the world from perfection to sorrow, toil and evil in the way that is claimed for Adam and Eve (4 Ezra 7:12).

Language shared between the two corpora (Genesis and Ecclesiastes) is not *per se* determinative for the argument—as indeed shared language alone rarely is, barring the pointed use of uncommon words or demonstrable verbatim quotations.⁷⁵

According to Sharp, God is distant in Ecclesiastes in a way that He is not in the garden. God has established the world and left it to run its course, and in such a world, humans are as powerless to control their destinies as animals. They can

71 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 25.

72 Later he says “Thus, with reference back to Genesis 1, Qoh 3:11a offers a theological interpretation of the time-contingent nature of all human actions and suffering, as presented in 3.1-8” (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 86).

73 Carolyn J. Sharp, “Irony Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet,” *Biblical Interpretation* 12 (2004): 44.

74 Sharp, “Irony Representation,” 57.

75 Sharp, “Irony Representation,” 53.

only seek to avoid suffering and to make the most of whatever joy comes their way.⁷⁶

Having rejected the interpretation of the fall found in 4 Ezra, Sharp then gives her own: wisdom, such as is attained by eating of the tree does not achieve the desired outcome. She equates the wisdom gained by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the wisdom of the sages. Ultimately, it is not wisdom that meets human need but obedience to God. Adam's expulsion from the garden shows that wisdom can only be grasped within the context of obedience. This is the ultimate irony. Therefore, the voice of the epiologist instructing us to obey God is the true voice of the book, and its positioning at the end of a fruitless and chaotic search for wisdom is a deliberate part of the message. According to Sharp Qohelet is destroying his own text.⁷⁷

I propose reading Qohelet as communicating that obedience to God is the only human response that can prevent the inescapable miseries of transient, unpredictable human life from defining the human person. Only obedience, not wisdom as such, can name the human person apart from the injustice, chaos, and disintegration that eternally constitute the cosmos. Wisdom and striving cannot free us, cannot enact justice in the life of the human person or in the eternal rounds of the universe. Obedience alone names us, defines and constitutes us, for that is all of who we are.⁷⁸

And:

The meta-narratological message of the book of Qohelet inscribes the results of the sin in the Garden of Eden on the body of "Qohelet," on the corpus of the text, and on any hapless interpreter who falls victim to its irony.⁷⁹

Sharp then makes a strong connection between Genesis and Ecclesiastes but finds in it the opposite message to that found by most who make this connection. It is a rejection of the traditional theology of the fall: the world fails to deliver not because of sin but because of the inherent failure of wisdom to deliver.⁸⁰

76 Sharp, "Ironic Representation," 58.

77 It is clear from this that Sharp considers the book a unity. It is quite possible that the book contains three personae, Qohelet, Solomon and the epiologist, but one author (Sharp, "Ironic Representation," 67).

78 Sharp, "Ironic Representation," 65.

79 Sharp, "Ironic Representation," 65.

80 This raises the issue of how Sharp sees the relationship between the law and wisdom, a

Antic 2006

Radiša Antic proposes the three sons of Eve as a lens for reading Ecclesiastes.⁸¹ Ecclesiastes, he claims, attempts to answer the riddle of human existence.⁸² However, he qualifies this by summarising Sartre, “All humans know their acts are ultimately futile.”⁸³ It is death that is the ultimate futility in Ecclesiastes. As a result Antic adopts a pessimistic reading of the book. “The story of Cain, Abel and Seth in Genesis 4 presents an account of how harmony and happiness were transformed into absurdity, meaninglessness and pessimism.”⁸⁴

Antic adopts the common understanding of Cain’s name from the verb to acquire, possess or get.⁸⁵ This verb is used in Eccl 2:7 to describe Solomon’s adoption of an opulent lifestyle.⁸⁶ Cain, like Solomon in the first half of Ecclesiastes, is one who seeks fulfilment in fame, possessions, and power. This attitude characterises not only Cain’s competition with Abel for God’s favour but the account of his wife, the city he builds, and his offspring who are adept at music and technology (Gen 4:21-

connection strongly established in Baruch and Sirach (Bar 3:9; 4:12-13; Sir 2:16; 19:20). However, Sharp’s argument here does not derive from this understanding of wisdom as divinely revealed but rather from that found in Ecclesiastes, where discovering wisdom is a human endeavour, prone to failure and open to exploration using unconventional methodology (Eccl 7:23-26).

- 81 He notes a number of French articles linking Genesis and Ecclesiastes. Jacques Chopineau, “Hevel en hébreu biblique: Contribution à l’étude des rapports entre sémantique et l’exégèse de l’ancien testament” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Strasbourg, 1971); Andre Neher, *Notes sur Qohelet, L’Ecclesiaste* (Paris: Minuit, 1951); Jacques Doukhan, “La ‘vanité’ dans l’Ecclesiastes - notes d’étude,” *Srvir* (1997): 30. Doukhan also makes this point in his book *All is Vanity* (Jacques Doukhan, *Ecclesiastes: All is Vanity*, (Oakland: Pacific Press, 2006)). 6.
- 82 Radiša Antic, “Cain, Abel, Seth, and the Meaning of Human Life as Portrayed in the Books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44 (2006): 203-211.
- 83 Antic, “Cain, Abel Seth,” 203. The reference appears to be to Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Methuen, 1965), 54-55, cf. idem, “Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology” (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 507-529.
- 84 Antic, “Cain, Abel, Seth,” 203.
- 85 To “get,” “acquire,” or “buy.” Gen 33:19; 39:1; 47:20; Ruth 4:10; Neh 5:8. “נָקַד,” BDB: 888-889; “נָקֵד,” HALOT favours “arrow” or “smith” as the meaning of נָקַד and to “buy” or “acquire” for נָקַד. It notes that its use in Gen 4:1 is uncertain. HALOT, Bibleworks, loc 8361, 8423, cf. Antic, “Cain, Abel, Seth,” 203.
- 86 A major reason that Qohelet adopts the royal persona is precisely so that he can amass, acquire, and build. For the king has the freedom and resources to undertake the projects described in Eccl 2. According to Antic, it seems fitting to ascribe this attitude to a literary construct, Solomon, rather than Qoheleth. Anderson notes that if the Solomon persona is a fiction then the act of building in Eccl 2:4 is also a fiction (Anderson, “The Curse of Work,” 109).

22). However, as in Ecclesiastes, ultimately this produces no profit, for none of Cain's descendants survived the flood.

Abel's name (**הַבָּل**) describes his life, which is brief and as meaningless as Cain's. If Chapter 2 describes the characteristics of Cain then Chapter 1 describes Abel. For Antic, Abel is human life marred by the "suicidal" power of sin that stands opposed to the principle of creation.⁸⁷ Genesis 4 not only records the rise of evil, but the loss of good.

Eve's naming of her third son Seth (**שֵׁת**) signifies that she considered him a grant or gift from God. For Antic, this is the way out of the quagmire of meaninglessness, for the ability to enjoy life is a gift from God (Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:19). It must be noted that a quite different word, **מְתָה**, is used in Ecclesiastes. It is in accepting this gift that the problems posed by the lives of Cain and Abel are solved.⁸⁸

While this provides an interesting way of understanding Ecclesiastes, Antic provides little concrete connection between the two passages. The absence of the word Seth and the singular use of Cain do not strengthen his case.

Dor-Shav 2008

While the majority of scholars ignore the **הַבָּל**-Abel connection, Dor-Shav finds it the most immediate tool for understanding the book. According to Dor-Shav, "*vanity of vanities, all is vanity*" (AV) would have been instantly recognizable as an allusion to another text in ancient Israel's unique intellectual heritage: the story of Cain and Abel from the book of Genesis. The most important clue to the mystery of Ecclesiastes, therefore, is found in the striking reference it makes to the Bible's first book.⁸⁹

While we cannot be certain without the direct evidence of a citation, in my opinion it is likely that those who read Ecclesiastes would have been familiar with the story of Cain and Abel whether from the Genesis text as we have it today or a

87 Antic, "Cain, Abel, Seth," 208.

88 Antic, "Cain, Abel, Seth," 211.

89 Ethan Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 36 (2008): 215.

hypothetical oral tradition. Any translation of the Hebrew text into another language immediately obscures this connection for a modern reader. **הבל**, as a proper noun (the name Abel) and **הבל** as a noun, or adverb (Job 35:16), appear to be without connection. For those who know Hebrew the **הבל** of Genesis and the **הבל** of Ecclesiastes would appear to be connected.⁹⁰

Dor-Shav points out that Abel is an iconic figure. He is a shepherd, which immediately connects him to Israel's key leaders, Abraham, Israel, Moses, and David, who are all described as shepherds (Gen 13:2-6; 47:3; Exod 3:1; 1 Sam 16:11; 17:15; cf. Jer 23; Ezek 34). Abel lives under God's unqualified approval, and following the curse of death found in Genesis 3, Abel is the first human to die.⁹¹

Dor-Shav suggests that Abel's untimely death illustrates both Genesis' and Ecclesiastes' teaching on mortality. Abel does not win God's approval by any of the means Qohelet rejects as meaningless (wealth, wisdom, pleasure and fame) for "material success was not the basis of God's approval of Abel – his life was too short."⁹² He dies childless: "His life, therefore, left no trace. He walked without footprints."

According to Dor-Shav, Abel is every human.⁹³ His life is not meaningless but it is fleeting and absurd. Abel confronts us with our own mortality and forces us to consider the issue Ecclesiastes raises, which is to discover the purpose and end of our lives and how joy and wisdom may be attained.⁹⁴ The book prepares us for death, creates a lens for understanding spirituality, and opens the door to

90 Kugel notes that from the time of Rashi, an "omnisignificance" is found in much early Jewish exegesis which tended to assume that the diverse uses of a Hebrew word across the Hebrew Bible should be read as interconnected (James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 104; idem, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 17).

91 Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 216.

92 Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 216.

93 Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 217.

94 According to Dor-Shav these are the core issues the book raises (Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 215; idem, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part II," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 37 (2009): 20-23).

redemption.⁹⁵ In summary, Dor-Shav considers the meaning of Abel's life to be the inspiration for Ecclesiastes.⁹⁶

Janzen 2008

For Janzen the connection between Ecclesiastes and Genesis is indirect. Janzen concurs with the suggestion by Seow, Fox and Krüger that Ecclesiastes contains a "critical interaction with apocalyptic scenarios."⁹⁷ He notes that the book starts under the dominion of the sun, which along with the moon, God has given to establish times and seasons, and to rule over such a world (cf. Gen 1:14-16). The book concludes with the sun, moon and stars growing dark (Janzen takes Eccl 12 to be a cosmic poem). He notes that while in Genesis light is created on the first day, the sun is not created to have dominion until the 4th day. In this Janzen understands that the earth was under God's direct dominion until He appointed the sun to rule.⁹⁸ The death of the sun in Eccl 12 heralds an eschatological re-creation where God again has direct dominion (cf. Isa 60:19-20).⁹⁹

The point of this is to deny apocalyptic hope as long as the cosmos stands and to concentrate on living well in the current age.¹⁰⁰ The goal of the book is not to live

95 Dor-Shav describes knowledge as the highest form of spirituality. He sees redemption as understanding the world accurately and consequently being able to live well. Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part II," 20-21, 23.

96 Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 22.

97 Janzen, "Qohelet on Life 'Under the Sun,'" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008): 465. Janzen assumes a date for Ecclesiastes concurrent with the emergence of Apocalypticism. Janzen places Ecclesiastes in the Persian period. The use of the phrase "under the sun" is a direct rejection of the supernatural and future elements of apocalypse.

98 For Janzen, "under the sun" is a direct reference to the fourth day of creation (Janzen, "Under the Sun," 467).

99 Janzen, "Under the Sun," 474.

100 Janzen, "Under the Sun," 482. Apocalypse is a genre of writing that flourished between approximately 200BCE and 100CE. It usually describes a revelation received from God often through angelic mediation. This revelation requires the hearer to consider their current physical reality from the perspective of the supernatural realm. It does this through symbolic imagery and numerology. Apocalypse has a close association with eschatology describing future trials and deliverances associated with the end of the age. In the Bible, Ezekiel, Daniel, Revelation and parts of Joel and Zechariah may be considered apocalypses. Enoch, Jubilees, the Testament of Levi, and the Apocalypse of Zephaniah among others are extra-canonical examples of apocalypses or books that contain apocalyptic sections. While apocalypse refers to a genre, apocalypticism is the world-view that informs it. Hence while it would be extreme to suggest that either the narrative frame of Job or the Epistle to the Ephesians are apocalypses, they both contain elements of apocalypticism; they both revolve around spatial and temporal axes and both require that current reality be observed from a heavenly viewpoint (Job 1:6-20;

under the sun but to live before God.¹⁰¹

Steele 2010

Steele acknowledges a strong connection between Ecclesiastes and the Genesis creation account and the “fall into sin.” He equates Eccl 7:20 with the consequences of human choice in Gen 3. He notes the frequent use both narratives make of the verb “to see” (Gen 3:6, cf. 3:5; 7:11, 27, 29).¹⁰² Qohelet’s reference to *wife* in Eccl 9:9 may be an echo of Adam’s wife in Gen 2. “For Qoheleth, the fear of God refers to mankind’s living in knowledge of man’s place in relation to deity.” This is the opposite of the human quest for wisdom against divine command as found in Genesis. Fearing God, that is living within divine constraint, is the key to success (Eccl 8:12).

Qohelet’s argument that only those who fear God are wise is consonant with his doctrine of human sin, weakness, and ignorance. If the God-fearer fares well it is not because they obey the law, or seek wisdom, or make sacrifices, or act in a certain way, but simply because to fear God is what the nature of things requires (Eccl 8:12).¹⁰³

Steele strongly associates this with human work:

Thus, by returning his readers to the creation account of Genesis, which undergirds the entire book, Qoheleth points to that which is most certain and true. God has given work to mankind. He did so before the Fall, and he has commanded man to toil since the Fall. Thus it is through living by faith (the fear of God) within one’s vocation that one knows the grace of God, the acceptance of one and one’s works.¹⁰⁴

2:1-10; Eph 1:20; 2:2; 3:6, 9-10; 6:10-17). Understanding the narrative frame of Job as apocalypticism demonstrates that a connection may exist between apocalypticism and wisdom. A connection further established in Baruch and Esdras. See J. J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1-20 which contains the standard SBL Apocalypse group’s definition. In Eccl 12 the cosmic imagery of Eccl 12:2, the drawing to an eternal home (Eccl 12:5) and the destruction of the pitcher and the wheel (Eccl 12:6), suggest an engagement with apocalypticism and the redirection found in Eccl 12:1 and 13 presents a rejection of it.

101 Janzen, “Under the Sun,” 483.

102 Walter R. Steele, “Enjoying the Righteousness of Faith in Ecclesiastes,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74 (2010): 234.

103 Steele, “Enjoying the Righteousness,” 237.

104 Steele, “Enjoying the Righteousness,” 241.

However, like Sharp, he does something quite unconventional with this connection. According to Steele, Eccl 12 is the hermeneutical key to the book.¹⁰⁵ He understands this chapter as a cosmic un-creation. God is not only Creator, He is also the eschatological judge (Eccl 12:14).

Conclusion

Widespread agreement exists that Qohelet is influenced by the Genesis text. Two questions remain: How significant are these connections? To what end does Qohelet allude to Genesis in his work? The passing comment in many of the major commentaries suggests that Crenshaw, Fox, Longman, Krüger, Murphy, and Seow, consider the link to be of no relevance to understanding the book.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, authors such as Anderson, Antic, Danker, Dor-Shav, Fredrick, Forman, Sharp and Verheij consider it to be invaluable to the interpretation of the book. Among this latter group a bewildering number of different views exist as to how Qohelet's message should be read in light of Genesis. It is my intention in this thesis to consider the issues behind these divergent ideas and, if possible, to add to them.

105 Steele, "Enjoying the Righteousness," 231.

106 Anderson notes, "In fact, I have not come across a single scholar who denies Qoheleth's use of the Genesis material" (Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 99). Anderson is correct; I know of no author who *denies* the connection. However, as noted above, most simply mention it in passing and draw no significance from it. Commentators such as Fox who downplay it or Enns who mentions it only in regard to Eccl 3:20 can hardly be said to affirm the use of Genesis material (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 69; Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 59).

2. Intertextuality

If Ecclesiastes draws on Genesis, either by way of language or the employment of themes then some understanding of the ground rules and methodology for such connections across the text of the Bible should be considered. Canonical intertextuality, sometimes referred to as inner-biblical exegesis, refers to the link forged between two texts by the referencing of one biblical passage in another passage. Sommer describes this as where a biblical author may “evoke, interpret, paraphrase and otherwise employ compositions, by their predecessors.”¹⁰⁷ Such citations are common in Scripture and have received increased attention over the last two decades.¹⁰⁸

Traditionally intertextuality has been used to establish the provenance of the works in which citations are found.¹⁰⁹ In dating Qohelet, reference is often made to its use in the wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira. As Sirach is usually dated circa 185BCE,¹¹⁰ we can establish a *terminus ante quem* for the writing of Qohelet.¹¹¹ Time must be allowed for the work cited to be sufficiently widely known for an allusion or quote to be made or to be considered sufficiently important for it to be meaningful. It must be established which text has chronological priority. More recently, with an

107 Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6.

108 For example, Job 7:17-18 appears to quote Psalm 8:4.

109 Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, *Reading Job Intertextually*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 574 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), xvi.

110 Di Lella calculates 200-175 BCE as the approximate period that Jesus Ben Sira “practised his profession as a wisdom teacher” and ca. 180 as the date of his book. He bases this on the prologue to the Greek translation made by Ben Sira’s grandson. He dates the translation after the death of Eueregetes II in 117 BCE, completed in the grandson’s old age, and suggests forty to fifty years as the gap between the generations. He supports this from internal evidence noting that Ben Sira appears to give an eyewitness account of Simeon’s (219–196 BCE) priestly service (Sir 50:1-21). See Patrick William Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes*, Vol. 39, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 9, 10.

111 Eccl 1:3, 17 – Sir 44:9; Eccl 5:4 – Sir 18:22; Eccl 10:8 – Sir 27:25-26. While Di Lella does not make special mention of Qohelet, he does note that Ben Sira draws extensively from the books of the First Testament, most noticeably Proverbs. Ben Sira does this “in order to make them more understandable and more applicable to his own generation of believers” (Skehan and Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 43, 45).

increasing interest in canonical and narrative approaches to biblical texts,¹¹² intertextuality has become a valuable approach for understanding the texts themselves: how they draw on language and imagery from other biblical texts and therefore help to interpret each other.

Outside the Bible

The usage of the term “intertextuality” has become quite broad. Mischall defines it as a covering term for all the possible relations that can be established between texts.¹¹³ Ben-Porat states, “Literary allusion is a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts.”¹¹⁴ However, in its primary and technical usage, as coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966, it refers to a cognitive theory of textual meaning, notably how human beings make connections between texts and how they use their current knowledge to interpret new texts.¹¹⁵ That is to say, it is concerned with the

112 Both canonical and narrative approaches to Scripture are open to broad definitions. Both are concerned with the final form of the text, largely ignoring issues of higher criticism, redaction, or the historical development that a text may demonstrate. A canonical approach generally reads a given text as part of a canonical whole. It holds a high view of Scripture as an authoritative and God-inspired sacred text. A narrative reading emphasises reading the text as literature. It looks for motifs, themes, narrative and form structures within a text. It seeks to understand how narrative is used to convey meaning. Such an approach is not restricted to stories in the Bible but is equally be applied to other biblical writings such as poetry, where a similar methodology may prove helpful in understanding the text. Neither approach is in itself a rejection of a historical-grammatical approach; rather they are an attempt to go beyond this foundation in a quest for both meaning and application. See Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) and Joel B. Green and Max Turner, *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

113 Peter D. Mischall, “Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna N. Fewell and David M. Gunn (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 44.

114 Ziva Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” *PTL: A Journal for the Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976): 107.

115 Kristeva defined intertextuality as “the sum of knowledge that makes it possible for texts to have meaning.” Julia Kristeva, *Semeiotikè: Recherches pour une Sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 146. While consulting the original source, I have relied on Stratton’s translation (*Stratton, Out of Eden*, 184). Hard intertextuality is usually considered to be synonymous with synchronic and soft with diachronic. However, Barton’s use of intertextual terminology differs from the norm. He describes Kristeva’s linguistic theory as “hard” intertextuality. He describes the application of this theory to a given text as “soft” intertextuality. For Barton hard intertextuality is the theory underpinning the practice: “a method or approach to the interpretation of texts” (John Barton, “Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?” in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 574 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 7).

application of “hard” intertextuality to selected texts.¹¹⁶ At its inception intertextuality was a subversive, politically-inspired, iconoclastic approach to literature. It attempted to wrestle the meaning of texts away from the intellectual elite and democratise them, opening them to each individual’s personal understanding. It rejected the notion that a text could have an authoritative meaning defined within the academic or religious establishments. Consequently, it was and is an approach that is strongly rooted in reader-response theory.¹¹⁷

Diachronic and Synchronic

Intertextuality may be described as diachronic or synchronic. A diachronic approach assumes that the reuse of a “referent text” by an “evoking text” is an intentional act by the author.¹¹⁸ Consequently, it assumes the precedence of the referent text.¹¹⁹ Intertextuality as defined by Kristeva is fundamentally synchronic. The reader has control over which texts are juxtaposed while provenance and authorial intent are irrelevant. Hence Riffaterre’s definition: “Intertextuality is the perception, by the reader, of relationships between one work and others which have preceded or followed it.”¹²⁰ An excellent example within the subject matter of this dissertation is Dan Vogel’s *Legacy of two Adams* that reads Genesis and Ecclesiastes against Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*. Such readings can be very insightful and the synchronic heart of intertextuality is by no means to be rejected even though some question the value of its application to biblical studies.¹²¹

The majority of those engaged in biblical studies lean towards the diachronic. Where biblical commentators note the use of a referent text authorial intent is assumed and with it a diachronic methodology. It must be noted that while some

116 Barton, “Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?” 16.

117 Barton notes this. Barton, “Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?” 13.

118 This terminology; the referent text and evoked, or alluding text is that of Ben-Porat (Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” 108, 110).

119 Geoffrey David Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 9 (2011): 283-309, 284.

120 Michaël Riffaterre, “La trace de l’intertexte,” *La Pensée* (1980), 9. Cited and trans. by Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 184.

121 Sommer describes it as not the most “useful” approach for biblical studies. Traditional biblical studies see meaning as placed in the text by its human and, if allowed for, divine author rather than being found in the text by the reader. Synchronic intertextuality challenges this approach while a diachronic approach affirms it (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 9).

scholars, notably Sommer and Fishbane, reject or at least ignore the synchronic approach,¹²² some like Barton and Miller wish to embrace both, seeing the distinction between the two as a false dichotomy.¹²³ It is certainly possible to accept both while maintaining the distinction between them. When addressing Qohelet's use of Genesis as a referent text one must consider whether there is sufficient evidence to indicate that Qohelet intended his work to be understood against the background of Genesis. If this is the case then the "simultaneous activation of the two texts" may be considered diachronic. If this is not the case a synchronic reading may still shed new light on the interpretation of both texts. Ultimately the choice of method lies not with the interpreter but with the nature of the text itself.¹²⁴ It is my thesis that Qohelet's use of Genesis is intentional.

Biblical Intertextuality

Miller notes that as far as biblical studies are concerned both "consensus on the exact nature of intertextuality" and an agreed methodology for it have yet to be established.¹²⁵ Because of this and the various meanings that can be attached to the

122 Sommer notes "the Christian understanding of meaning is deeply rooted in the historical grammatical method" (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 9). Cf. Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament," 290.

123 Barton, "Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?" 14; Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," 294. This may be observed in the interpretive community of which I am a part. For while authorial intent and an historical-grammatical hermeneutic are both deeply held, they are juxtaposed with a belief that the divine author has not abandoned the text and is still active in its interpretation (John 16:13). The Spirit of truth who bears witness to authorial intent, is also the creative Spirit who inspires imaginative, and perhaps individualist synoptic readings of the text and between texts. See "What we Believe - Assemblies of God in New Zealand Inc." <http://www.agnz.org/about/believe/> (24 December 2014); Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1937), 321; Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 246. This stands in contrast to the strong emphasis on the historical-grammatical method of Gordon Fee who is from the same interpretative community. See Gordon D. Fee, and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to read the Bible for all its worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

124 It is the perceived nature of the text that creates the tension between those who engage in intertextual studies within secular literature and those engaged in biblical studies. Kristeva's theories were developed for and applied to fictional literature as a creative method of extracting meaning from them by reading separate, even diverse texts, together. In biblical studies we deal with a closed body of literature that at times cites itself. Biblical literature is "historic" and didactic in nature for as a work of religion it is read to create a world view. It is understandable then why Sommer and Fishbane are mistrustful of a synchronic approach for fear of moving beyond the foundation of the text and indulging subjectivity.

125 Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament," 283, 285. Weyde agrees (Karl William Weyde,

word “intertextuality,” some prefer to call the diachronic method applied to Scripture inner-biblical exegesis.¹²⁶ There is also no consensus on the use of the terms “citation,” “allusion,” and “echo.” I will seek to clarify these terms.

Citations

Biblical authors reuse other texts (both canonical and extra-canonical) in a wide variety of ways. The most obvious of these are explicit citations identified by an introductory formula, for example, “in the book of Moses” (2 Chr 25:4; 2 Kgs 14:6; Dan 9:2). An explicit citation is a direct, attributed quotation from another work. These are rare and none occurs in the book of Ecclesiastes. Most citations are implicit, no formula is used, and readers must perceive a possible link for themselves.¹²⁷ For example Job 7:17-18 appears to quote Psalm 8:4. This is an implicit citation: no introductory formula is used. The passage is placed by a different author into a new context.¹²⁸ An implicit citation, however, is not necessarily given verbatim, but may be paraphrased in the evoking authors’ own words. There is wide agreement that an exact duplication of language is not necessary for a passage to be considered a citation.¹²⁹ There is no reason to expect an author to be so tightly bound to a source text that they lose their own authorial freedom. Language is a fluid entity and there may be many reasons why an author substitutes a synonym or selects a word of more contemporary resonance.¹³⁰ Implicit citations in either verbatim or paraphrased form are also relatively rare.

Allusions

An allusion is a reference to a text where no attempt at a citation, verbatim or paraphrased, has been made. It is an indirect reference in a passage found in the use of language or imagery that evokes another text.¹³¹ Allusions keep older works

¹²⁶Inner-biblical Interpretation: Methodological Reflections on the Relationship Between Texts in the Hebrew Bible,” *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 70 (2005): 287).

¹²⁷ Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1985), 7.

¹²⁸ Weyde, “Inner-biblical Interpretation,” 289.

¹²⁹ The direction of influence or the dependence of both on a third text must still be established.

¹³⁰ Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 1; Leonard, “Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions,” 246.

¹³¹ Weyde, “Inner-biblical Interpretation,” 298; Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 14; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 58.

¹³² A “tacit reference to another literary work, to another art, to history, to contemporary figures or the like” (Earl Miner, “Allusion,” *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex

alive by reminding the reader of their existence and importance. New life is breathed into older texts by transporting them into a contemporary context.¹³² For example, Elijah's encounter with God at Mt. Horeb in 1 Kgs 19 is described in similar terms to Moses' encounter with God at Mt. Sinai found in Exod 19 and 32. It appears the writer of the Kings account wishes us to understand Elijah's actions in light of Moses' experience.¹³³ Similar divine manifestations are found in Exod 19:16-20, and the forty-days motif occurs in each (Exod 24:18). A cave forms the location for both (Exod 33:22). Elijah's desire for God to terminate His covenant with Israel is to be understood in light of God's intention to do so in Exod 32:9. This gives us an interpretative lens with which to understand Elijah's actions. While Kings makes no direct quotation from Exodus, it uses similar language, themes (what Fishbane calls "analogous contexts")¹³⁴ and motifs to establish a connection. Each of these may be categorised as an allusion. This example also illustrates another important issue, that of subjectivity. How can we be sure that the writer or redactor of the Kings' passage intended it to be read in light of Exodus?

Revelation makes frequent use of allusions to the First Testament.¹³⁵ The description of the two great prophets of Revelation 11 is written in such a way as to evoke Moses and Elijah.¹³⁶ Ecclesiastes makes clear use of the same technique

Preminger (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 18. Cited in Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 10).

132 Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 17.

133 This indicates that Exodus was written before Kings, or possibly that the material that came to be collected into Exodus was known by the author of Kings. Durham states, "the process by which the book of Exodus came to its canonical form began as early as the time of Moses and continued at least into the third century B.C." (John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. John D. W. Watts and James W. Watts (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), xxi). Because of its multiple redactions, the different sections of Kings are difficult to date. It could not have reached its current form until after the last events it records during the exile. See Simon J. DeVries, *I Kings*, vol. 13, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. John D. W. Watts and James W. Watts (Dallas: Word Books, 1985), xxxvii.

134 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 287.

135 Richard Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993).

136 Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, The New Cambridge Bible Commentary, ed. Ben Witherington III, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158. A case for Enoch can also be made (Tertullian, *De Anima*, 50; Hippolytus, *On Daniel*, 2.22; Leon Morris, *Revelation an Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker

where the introduction does not directly establish Qohelet as Solomon but simply informs us that he was a son of David. This could refer to any king in the Davidic dynasty. However, the language that is used of this son of David's exploits in Eccl 2:1-9 leaves us in no doubt that Solomon is to be understood as the implied author.¹³⁷ This language draws heavily on 1 Kgs 4:29-34; 8:1; 10:14-29; 11:3. Here Qohelet is using allusion to establish context so that we might read the persona of King Solomon and his reign into this book. A second reason for this allusion may be to gain authority from the great patron of wisdom literature (and then to subvert it, for if Solomon in all his wisdom could not find meaning, no one can).¹³⁸

Echo

The terms allusion and echo are frequently used interchangeably. Distinction between them is possible. Sommer gives echo a more refined meaning.¹³⁹ An echo and an allusion demonstrate identical use of a source text but the purpose for which they are used differs. According to Sommer, an allusion is of interpretative significance whereas an echo simply decorates the text creating a pleasing effect for the reader; the former forges a link between reader and audience by "appealing to common knowledge," while the latter may be intended simply to display the author's knowledge rather than to evoke the meaning of the source text.¹⁴⁰ Such a distinction is difficult to prove as the author's use of a source text may be subtle. It is safer to assume that an echo is intended to create meaning by building on a source rather than simply being used as textual decoration. For Sommer an echo is always intended by the author, even if this is on a subconscious level.

Hays considers allusions and echoes to be "points along a spectrum of intertextual reference, moving from the explicit (allusion) to the subliminal (echo)." ¹⁴¹ This

(Leicester: IVP, 1969), 145). Cf. The History of Joseph the Carpenter, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A. D. 325, Volume VIII Fathers of the Third and Fourth Century*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson and Arthur Coxe (New York: Casino Classics, 1886), 394.

137 Weeks rejects this, suggesting that the similarities are superficial (Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 27).

138 Cf. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 11.

139 Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 15.

140 Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 19.

141 Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press,

implies two things: firstly that an allusion represents a stronger use of a referent text and an echo a more subtle usage and secondly, that there is a higher degree of certainty that an allusion is intended by the author.

Motif

A motif is a frequently used image that evokes a specific meaning within a mutual cognitive environment. Reference to Sodom as metaphorical of social deprivation in the Former and Latter Prophets demonstrates this (Judg 19; Isa 1:10; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:46; Amos 4:1; Zeph 2:9; cf. Lam 4:6). Motifs may be used to create a comparison or evoke a context. The *well* motif of Genesis and Exodus is another example (Gen 24:11; 29:2-11; Exod 2:16-17).¹⁴² Moses meets his future wife at a well, in the same circumstance that Jacob meets Rachel. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the prince of Egypt, raised in a gentile palace, is being transformed into a true Israelite.

Word Clusters

The use of the same words in two passages is not sufficient to demonstrate an inner-biblical reference, especially where such words are in relatively common use or where a common situation leads to the use of similar language. This is the situation we find in Ecclesiastes. Most of the words that the early chapters of Genesis and Ecclesiastes share are to be found spread liberally across the pages of the First Testament.¹⁴³ However, Fishbane suggests that where words common to two passages occur in clusters it may be indicative of an author or redactor's

1989), 23. What Hays calls an echo Sommer describes as an "influence," a citation of a text that is non-verbal; ideas, imagery, or genre are being used in order to build on a source text. Sommer maintains that such a use often reflects positively on the source (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 14). Influence is a broad construct and because influences are more subtle than allusions they are perhaps more open to a reader's interpretation than other diachronic categories. Hays also maintains that an echo many be unintentional.

142 Alter refers to this as a type-scene (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 52-57.

143 An example is the use of אָדָם. Adam occurs 49 times in Ecclesiastes (out of a total 4256 words 1.15%) and it is used 26 times in Genesis 1-4 (out of a total of 1442 words 1.8%). These two passages represent the highest density of usage of this word in the Bible. אָדָם is a very common word. It occurs 585 times in the First Testament. Therefore, to suggest that its use in Ecclesiastes reflects Genesis would be a difficult claim to support. Such a claim would require that אָדָם was being used in Genesis and Ecclesiastes in a different way from that found elsewhere in the Bible. As it is, all that can be said of it is that it is a common word.

intentional drawing on a referent text.¹⁴⁴ This becomes more likely where a similar word order can be observed.¹⁴⁵ He also notes that at times parallel terms may be employed and gives the example of 'עִמָּל' and 'עֲבָד' (Gen 3:29; Eccl 2:23).¹⁴⁶

This raises other issues such as the possibility that both accounts may in fact be reliant on a third passage which may or may not have survived, or the possibility that common language may be occasioned by common subject matter, or that the ubiquity of certain ideas was such that they were simply "in the air"¹⁴⁷ and the author used them without any conscious intent. Vos calls this an unconscious citation.¹⁴⁸ It may simply be coincidence.¹⁴⁹ For example, the phrase "the fear of the Lord" occurs frequently in wisdom literature (Sir 1:1; Prov 1:7; Job 28:28; Ps 19:9). It is unlikely that any of these uses represents a citation or indicates dependency.¹⁵⁰

144 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 323; Jeffery M. Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a test case," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 246; MacDonald, *Mimesis and Intertextuality*, 2.

145 An example might be Matthew's record of Jesus' baptism and testing in the wilderness as a retelling of the Exodus (Exodus 13-15; Matthew 3-4), or the allusion in Zech 7-8 to Deut 28-29; Jer 30-31. Zechariah appears to reverse the structural order. Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," 185. Passage structure may be indicative of intertextuality. For example, Carmichael interprets the commands of Leviticus 19 in light of the order of events found in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis. Carmichael does not use the term intertextuality. The import however, is clear. While Carmichael's article is fascinating, some of the connections he makes between the narratives of Genesis and Lev 19 are stretched. This is not to say that a parallel between the Lev 19 and the patriarchal narratives of Genesis is not to be found, only that it is not as extensive as Carmichael would suggest. See Calum M. Carmichael, "Laws of Leviticus 19," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 239-256.

146 Weyde, "Inner-biblical Interpretation," 298; Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 14; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 58.

147 Barton, "Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?" 2.

148 Louis A. Vos, *Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1965), 29, 40. He also refers to unconscious clustering where a number of elements found in another text are unintentionally incorporated into the author's own work simply because they are part of a mutual cognitive environment.

149 "Often what looks like a quotation may be due to coincidence. It must in part be a matter of opinion whether in a context it may be supposed that there is a use of the O.T. or an accidental agreement in diction," (Svend Holm-Nielsen, "Importance of late Jewish Psalmody for the Understanding of Old Testament Psalmodic Tradition," *Studia Theologica* 14 (1960): 17. Cf. Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," 287).

150 Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," 246. For example, "thus says the Lord" would be very poor evidence of an allusion because it is a stock phrase. While such a phrase does not indicate the dependency of one text on another it may indicate genre and therefore suggest a synoptic reading, where reading passages together may provide a better understanding of the connotations of a word or phrase.

The “fear of the Lord” is a common motif within wisdom and the frequency of its use arises out of a common theological context.

It is because of these uncertainties that, in the absence of an explicit quote, textual reuse is difficult to substantiate: in one passage a cluster of words may be mimetic while in another it may be coincidental and of no interpretive value. Sommer notes that by itself the use of a common motif is not evidence that a text is being evoked.¹⁵¹ The same can be said for allusions and even implicit quotations. It is because of this that Waltke notes that identifying citations, allusions or echoes is more reliant on intuition than science.¹⁵²

Identifying Inner-Biblical References

Establishing a methodology for identifying a textual connection remains the primary task. The diversity of ways in which dialogue between texts is manifested in the First Testament makes the task of establishing evidential criteria all the more difficult. There is always the danger that such criteria will be governed by a preconceived theory or hypothesis.¹⁵³ Two approaches tend to be emphasised by those seeking to catalogue inner-biblical references: context and lexicography. Most scholars acknowledge the importance of both but tend to prioritise one as the key criterion.

Waltke claims that only the examination of the context of both passages can alert the reader to the use of a citation, allusion or echo. Fishbane also looks for an “analogous context.”¹⁵⁴ The cumulative number of points of connection between two texts suggests the “density of the parallels.”¹⁵⁵ Leonard emphasises commonality of language as the most important factor in establishing an inner-biblical reference.¹⁵⁶

151 Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 8.

152 Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 130. Ben-Porat writing in the context of secular poetry concurs. She notes that much allusion works at an intuitive level (Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” 107).

153 This, of course, is not a problem if a synchronic approach is being undertaken where authorial intent is not a key consideration and the connection between two texts lies with the discretion of the reader.

154 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 287.

155 MacDonald, *Mimesis and Intertextuality*, 2.

156 Leonard, “Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions,” 246.

Hays suggest 7 tests for establishing an inner-biblical reference:

- 1) Providence: was the source text available to the secondary author?
- 2) Volume: the number of points of contact.
- 3) The frequency with which these occur.
- 4) Thematic coherence: Do the texts contain the same ideas?
- 5) Historical plausibility: Is it likely that the original audience would have recognised the connection?
- 6) History of interpretation: Have other readers observed the connection?
- 7) Satisfaction: Does the connection add to an understanding of either passage?¹⁵⁷

Distinctive phrases more than individual words combined with multiple instances of shared language indicate a stronger likelihood that dependence exists. Leonard notes that while a shared context may strengthen the case, it is not critical, and dependence may be present where shared ideology or form are not. Leonard states: "Shared language is more important than non-shared language."¹⁵⁸ He concludes: "Verbal parallels provide the most objective and verifiable criteria for identifying these allusions."¹⁵⁹ In my opinion, shared language is never sufficient by itself to establish dependence on a source text. For example, even though parts of the narrative frame of the book of Job seem to echo Genesis 3, Job's statement "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (Job 1:21), and its counterpart in Eccl 5:15, do not appear to be an allusion to Genesis even though they share two significant words (**שׁוּב** used of death and **עָרֵם**). There are major points of difference between the texts; in Job and Ecclesiastes, nakedness is associated with loss in Genesis it is associated with innocence and insouciance. It appears more likely that the expression refers to the common experience of all humankind. Not only do we not need to consult Genesis to

157 Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29-30. Hays's approach here is interesting. His first point suggests that he intends a diachronic approach, but his last indicates a synchronic approach. Hays consistently blends both in a way that suggests that like Barton and Miller he does not see them as in any way opposed to each other.

158 Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," 246.

159 Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions," 246.

elucidate our understanding of Job 1:21 but were we to do so it would add little to our understanding of either text.

While there is no consensus about methodology, I believe that both language and context are necessary to demonstrate an inner-biblical reference. As Sommer notes:

But if I find scores of such borrowings, and if they display consistent patterns in their reuse of older material, then the notion that all these cases result from happenstance becomes untenable.¹⁶⁰

Therefore, in establishing a connection between Ecclesiastes and Genesis I will seek to establish a shared thematic context and multiple lexicographical connections. It is only with a plurality of indicators that a case can be established.¹⁶¹

Sommer is the dissenting voice here, noting that a secondary text may be non-contextual and display a rejection or disregard for the original context. He cites Exod 34:6-7; Ps 103:8-9 as an example.¹⁶² However, if there is no connection between the contexts, it is hard to see why a citation or allusion is being made at all. It is safer to assume that even where an author wishes to develop a citation along new lines or use it to reject an earlier teaching, some shared context exists. As a diachronic approach is usually assumed, historical connections between texts must be established. While dating biblical texts is not without its difficulties, a degree of accuracy is often possible.

Ben-Porat presents a helpful model for understanding the connection between two texts. She notes that a “literary allusion,” by which she means all possible connections between two texts, includes a marker or signal that indicates that a

160 Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 5.

161 MacDonald, *Mimesis and Intertextuality*, 2; Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 14.

162 Here the compassionate and gracious language is repeated in the Psalm but is bereft of its original context. He notes the way the seven-year freedom motif is used in Lev 25:39-44 is a rejection of its use in Exod 21:2-6; Deut 15:12-18; Sommer also suggests Ezek 18:2; Jer 31:29 as the repudiation of a popular saying (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 19, 28). Shields considers this to “bear all the hallmarks of a wisdom wisdom saying” (M. A. Shields, “Wisdom and Prophecy,” *The Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 881a).

relationship exists.¹⁶³ This marker is, according to Ben-Porat, never the extent of the relationship only the clearest point, indicating that two texts should be read together. She suggests this signal opens the way to “intertextual patterning,” that is, definable attributes that form analogies between two texts. She notes that the current reader’s environment will affect how this is done and will form part of the final reading. She calls this local interpretation.¹⁶⁴ However the goal of this is more than simply identifying parallels, it is a reading of two texts, or portions of two texts together in order to discover meaning. This is the final goal of an intertextual reading.

The Purpose of Inner-Biblical Referencing

So far we have identified two issues: the difficulty of establishing whether inner-biblical references are intentional and the different kinds of intertextuality we might be looking for. However, according to Fishbane the major issue of intertextuality is to establish why the author or redactor reuses a passage, idea, or tradition, how it is used and for what purpose.¹⁶⁵ He suggests that there are several categories of intertextuality correlating to genre (legal, aggadic, and mantological).¹⁶⁶ He would classify Ecclesiastes’ use of Genesis as aggadic (suggesting a similar methodology to that found in the Midrashim). In this view Qohelet is simply expounding Genesis. This inner-biblical referencing may serve

163 Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” 109.

164 Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” 113.

165 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 319. It should be acknowledged that authorship of biblical texts is uncertain and each individual text will represent a different process. For some books this process may involve oral sources, formulated by a storyteller or prophet and then shaped by the community through retelling. It will also involve a writing process, which may include, editing, compiling, supplementing and redacting. Intertextuality may be formed into the text in any of these stages. Barton observes that the assumptions about the history of a text and approach taken by the commentator will often dictate the results that are found (John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 61-88).

166 Here Sommer is less subtle; he considers the transformation use of citation (to change or reinterpret), as exegetical. In so doing he avoids the risk of creating artificial categories (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 17). Weyde questions the validity of such distinctions. He notes that Fishbane and Sommer disagree whether Malachi 1:6-2:9 endorses the priestly blessing or rejects it, whether it is an allusion or an exegesis. Weyde, “Inner-biblical Interpretation,” 290, 292. Sommer does differentiate between revision, where a text is no longer relevant and needs to be reinterpreted, and polemic, where a text directly counters another (Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 25-27).

several purposes. If it is aggadic, the author may intend to explain a passage or tradition that is considered obscure. Or, he may intend to revise or reinterpret a passage in the light of a new context, providing clarity for a new situation.¹⁶⁷ Alternatively the objective may be to challenge or contradict an idea established in a previous passage (Fishbane gives the example of Job 7 cited above). Thus a citation may be used to suggest an organic connection between ideas found in different texts or to refute or modify an old idea by introducing a new perspective.

Which text controls the meaning or the citation? Or in what ways do both texts influence the reader's understanding? More commonly it is the secondary text that asserts control, often lifting a citation into a new environment for a new purpose. Creative freedom is used in inner-biblical exegesis when a writer moulds an original text to his or her own ends. Citations, allusions, and echoes provide connections and may engage the audience's imagination while permitting subtle evolutions and developments. This enables an audience to understand old texts in a new light. The original source may be used for its authoritative status or as a point of departure for a new understanding (Hag 2:13-14; cf. Lev 6:25; 11:28; 22:4-7).

Waltke identifies two major kinds of intertextuality: transformative, where the inner-biblical reference is used in a new context and non-transformative, where it is used to evoke the original and to draw authority from it. Fishbane concentrates on the first of these categories, demonstrating at length how passages are reworked to fit a new environment, sometimes in ways that are diametrically opposed to their original use.¹⁶⁸ He largely ignores Waltke's second category.

Non-transformative intertextuality preserves the meaning of the citation in the new text in order to increase the authority and enhance the contextual richness of the latter. For example, Stephen's speech in Acts 7 incenses the crowd because the citation from Isaiah 66:1 also evokes the context of Isaiah 66:3, which is a condemnation of temple sacrifice.¹⁶⁹

167 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 232.

168 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 281-392.

169 Hays demonstrates this approach in his handling of John 2:13-22 and Ps 69 (Richard B. Hays "Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection," in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F.

Four Stage

Sommer applies Ben-Porat's four-stage approach to inner-biblical exegesis. This approach maps out the stages a reader goes through in evaluating intertextuality. Firstly the reader must be able to recognise markers that point to the use of a source text. Secondly they must be able to identify and have some familiarity with the source text.¹⁷⁰ Thirdly they must be able to appreciate how the evoked text expands or changes the meaning of the secondary text. Fourthly, out of this dialogue of perspectives a new meaning is created which encompasses and transforms both the source text and the secondary text and in so doing provides a richer biblical landscape and the possibility of deeper meaning.¹⁷¹

If we take Genesis 3:19 and Ecclesiastes 3:20, the first stage would be to identify whether "dust to dust" is a citation; the second whether its potential source is Genesis and whether Genesis was known to Qohelet's audience; third, to identify thematic connections such as mortality and human origins which are important issues in both texts. The last stage would be to analyse other thematic elements in Genesis that might help us to establish a cognitive environment that enables us to arrive at a richer understanding of Ecclesiastes.

Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 221-224).

170 The danger exists that a reader may miss or be unfamiliar with a reference made by an author. The recent emphasis on intertextual studies of the Bible illustrate that this has sometimes been the case. For example prior to Hays I know of no one who had observed the connection between Phil 1:19 and Job 13:16 (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 1-33). We have to assume that references exist in the Bible to other works that no longer exist.

171 Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 11-14. In saying this Ben-Porat indicates that two categories of meanings in a secondary text are possible, one that does not take into account a source text, and a new meaning which does (Ziva Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL: A Journal for the Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976): 110-111).

3. Dust To Dust

הכל הולך אל-מקום אחד הכל היה מז-העפר והכל שב
אל-העפר

All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Ecclesiastes 3:20

בזעת אפיק תאכל לחם עד שובך אל-האדמה כי ממנה لكחת
כיעפר אתה ואל-עפר תשוב

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Genesis 3:19

ויצר יהוה אלהים את-האדם עפר מז-האדמה ויפח באפיו נשמה
חיה ויהי האדם לנפש חיה

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

וישב העפר על-הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל-האלוהים אשר
נתנה

And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it. Ecclesiastes 12:7

As noted above, the diverse books of the Bible cite other biblical books in a variety of ways. It was also noted that establishing the existence of the citation, allusion or echo must be done with care. It will be argued below that Ecclesiastes reuses the language of Genesis 3 and 4 for its own ends. Lexicographic citations, the use of common words, are among the most difficult to substantiate and the reuse of relatively common words is insufficient to demonstrate dependency, though clusters of common language, such as we find in Ecclesiastes and Genesis, may be sufficient to demonstrate a link. It seems appropriate to start by examining the most plausible argument for a connection, or dependency, between Ecclesiastes 3:20, 12:7 and Genesis 3 and 4. This will be done under four headings – literature

review, exegesis, evidence of citation and an attempt to understand the end to which Qohelet uses Genesis.

Literature Review

Most commentators accept that the Ecclesiastes passages cited above do refer to Genesis but very few are prepared to explore how or why Qohelet uses this citation. Fox, Ryken, Enns, Lohfink, Farmer, Crenshaw, and Murphy each recognise Ecclesiastes 3:20 as a reference to Genesis but do not give this any interpretive consideration.¹⁷²

Seow does not note this as a quote from Genesis, but he does make a connection to Job 34:14-16.¹⁷³ Gordis notes a general resemblance to Egyptian, Sumerian and Akkadian sources as well as noting a wide range of citation from other books of the Bible in Ecclesiastes but does not note Eccl 3:20 in his chapter on quotations in Qohelet and mysteriously omits to address verse 20 in his commentary.¹⁷⁴ Farmer notes that the passage creates a tension with Genesis 1 where humans are not like animals.¹⁷⁵ Eaton states that the quotation is used to reveal “the character of fallen man.”¹⁷⁶

Krüger maintains strongly that this is a quote from Genesis 3 but ultimately says very little about this verse. His major focus is Ecclesiastes 3:11, “God has made everything suitable” (*ימנה*). This he describes as an interpretation of God’s repeated

172 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 216; Philip G. Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Preaching the Word, ed. R. K. Hughes (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 104; Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 59; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 67; Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 163; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 10; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 35, 37. To note two examples: “Qohelet expresses himself in terms of Gen 2:7, where God breathes the *חַיִם*, *נֶשֶׁמֶת חַיִם*, *life-breath*, and of Psalm 104:29-30, where life is dependent upon the presence of the divine *רוּחָה*, *spirit*, of God in living beings. Everything lives because of the divine breathing” (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 35-36). “Behind this observation stands the ancient story of the fall” (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 104). In none of these cases does the author go on to explore why Genesis is being used.

173 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 176.

174 While Gordis note the “Babylonian Kohleth” (The Babylonian Theodicy) by name and cites Gilgamesh OB VA+BM Tab. 3 lines 2-5 for his other claims he gives no direct references. Gordis, *Kohleth*, 51-62, 226. See A. R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Text*, Vol 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 279.

175 Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 58.

176 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 85.

appraisal of creation in Genesis as good:¹⁷⁷ (Delitzsch considers טוב and יפה as synonyms).¹⁷⁸ He then goes on to link this to a comparison of animals with humans. As the world is in every aspect beautiful it is not in need of change; wickedness exists only in that humans are unable to fulfil the task God has given them or to understand the “times” that He has sovereignly established (Eccl 3:1-8). In this failure, they have shown themselves to be no different from the animals.

Thus, with reference back to Genesis 1, Qoh 3:11a offers a theological interpretation of the time-contingent nature of all human actions and suffering, as presented in 3:1-8.¹⁷⁹

Krüger then makes a second point: Eccl 3:11 states, “yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” He notes that the Genesis story is also about a “grasping for knowledge,” and subject to the same limitations, for when Adam and Eve eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they seem to discover little more than their own nakedness, which Krüger associates with vulnerability and inadequacy.

The paradise story would then be understood here in the sense that people *cannot* go beyond the boundaries of knowledge set for them by God: the transgression of the prohibition eating from the “tree of knowledge” leads them only to the knowledge of their own nakedness.¹⁸⁰

In the light of this, Krüger asks if there is anything left in the world that remains good for humans and notes the tautology “there is nothing good but to enjoy something good.”¹⁸¹ He also notes the irony that in Gen 3:6 Eve’s actions were prompted by a desire for good. The good achieved in life is enjoyment, and to find good in the world is to make the most of the life God has given. Krüger notes that this search is exclusively temporal for it is part of the beauty that God has placed in creation that humans can only achieve good in this life. “Access to the tree of

177 Gen 1:4; 1:10; 1:12; 1:18; 1:21; 1:25; 1:31. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 84; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 57.

178 Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. by James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 259.

179 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 85.

180 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 87. It must be observed that Krüger’s comments represent only one of a wide diversity of views about the nature of the knowledge of good and evil and the meaning of nakedness. This will be explored on page 84.

181 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 88.

(eternal) life is and remains barred for human beings according to the will of God.”¹⁸²

Blenkinsopp considers Eccl 3:2-8 to be an example of Stoic influence.¹⁸³ Perdue agrees but considers *dust to dust* to be a citation from Xenophanes the sceptic.¹⁸⁴ Fredericks sees the Genesis account as an interpretive lens for reading all of Eccl 3:

God’s intention for death ever since the fall was for dust, whether human or beast, to become dust again. Furthermore the fall brought humans and animals even closer in identity, since humans became less reflective of God’s glory and more beastly in its lusts and conduct.¹⁸⁵

Exegesis – The Immediate Context

The connection between Gen 3:19 and Eccl 3:20 and 12:7 is not limited to the shared “dust to dust” language. There exists a strong parallel between the themes each passage addresses. It is therefore necessary to look at the context of Ecclesiastes 3:20 in some detail.

182 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 88.

183 Cicero, *De Fato* 18.41-42; SVF 3:944. Gammie considers the alleged Stoic influences in Ecclesiastes in detail. See John G. Gammie, “Stoicism and Anti-Stoicism in Qoheleth.” *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985), 169-187. Cf. Jason L. Sanders, “Greek and Roman Philosophy after Aristotle,” in *Readings in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards and Richard H. Popkin (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 102. In both passages, cited similarities with Eccl 3:2-8 exist in the way both authors use the concept of fate and the importance of the right moment. These are not strong enough to demonstrate dependence or to suggest that Qohelet was directly familiar with Stoic teaching. In my view the similarities represent ideas that were “in the air,” as Barton would have it, and show an indirect connection to Stoic thought (Barton, “Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?” 2). Blenkinsopp considers Eccl 3:9-22 to be a commentary on this section. Finding the right time for an event is a classic theme in Stoic thought and is also an important concept in Israelite wisdom (Prov 15:23; 24:27; 25:11; 26:4-5; Sir 4:20; 6:19; 31:28; 36:10). Fate, death, and finding what is good are all examples of Stoic thought. He sees a time to die as a possible reference to suicide (Eccl 3:2). Ultimately, Qohelet parts company with the Stoics for the correct time is impossible for humans to know (Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Ecclesiastes 3:1-15: Another Interpretation,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1995): 57, 58, 62).

184 Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 235; Xenophanes, Frag. 27. “All things come from the earth, and in earth all things end.” Cf. Lucretius 2.999-1000.

185 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 121.

Verse 16

ועוד רأיתי תחת השמש מקום המשפט שמה הרשע ומקום
הצדק שמה הרשע

Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice,
wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness,
wickedness was there as well. Eccl 3:16

Verse 16 starts a new section. “I saw” (**ראיתי**) occurs 18 times in Ecclesiastes.¹⁸⁶ On ten of these it is followed by “under the sun” (**תחת השמש**).¹⁸⁷ It usually indicates the start of a new section and occasionally a conclusion (Eccl 1:14; 4:15; 8:17).

It is immediately preceded by the first of the so-called *carpe diem* passages (Eccl 3:12-13), where Qohelet encourages his audience to make the most of life and enjoy food, relationships, and work.¹⁸⁸ This in turn follows the “time” poem (Eccl 3:1-8). The passage concludes with the end of the chapter and another *carpe diem* passage (Eccl 3:20) that forms a kind of inclusio.

Qohelet’s epistemology is both empirical and personal. While wisdom teaching relies heavily on observing the world and drawing lessons from this observation, this is normally in the form of a tradition handed down through generations. His approach could be classified as egocentric,¹⁸⁹ for while Qohelet uses aphorisms that I assume to be traditional,¹⁹⁰ Qohelet is also sceptical of some of the traditions of the sages which exist outside of his own intellectual experience.¹⁹¹ Qohelet uses the first person frequently.¹⁹² He never considers the possibility that his experience

186 Eccl 1:14; 2:13, 24; 3:10, 16, 22; 4:4, 15; 5:12; 17; 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10, 17; 9:13, 10:5, 7.

187 Eccl 1:14; 3:16; 4:1, 15; 5:12-13, 17-18; 6:1; 8:9; 9:13; 10:5.

188 Loader would say, “enjoy the day” rather than “seize the day.” In this he is perhaps distancing the use of the phrase as applied to Qohelet’s joy passages from its use in Odes of Horace. This distinction is helpful. Qohelet’s approach to the future is more open than that of Horace (Loader, *Polar Structures*, 102).

189 Leithart, *Solomon Among the Postmoderns*, 130. See also Doug Ingram, *Ecclesiastes: A Peculiarly Postmodern Piece* (Cambridge: Grove Biblical Series, 2004).

190 Gordis suggests this is a common feature of wisdom literature in order to preserve teaching across generations (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 21).

191 Fox rejects the idea that traditional wisdom exists. He notes that wisdom teaching spans 2,500 years and was ever-changing (Fox, *Time to Tear down*, 25).

192 Clemens notes that in Eccl 2:4-11 Qohelet uses the first person singular 37 times (David M. Clemens, “The Law of Sin and Death: Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1-3,” *Themelios* 19 (1994): 6). By my own reckoning this count is correct.

or evaluation may be incomplete or flawed. He does not appear to acknowledge any source of knowledge that may exist outside of his own observations and experience.¹⁹³

The passage begins with observations about justice. As he will do three times in this short passage, Qohelet establishes an all-inclusive proposition that his subsequent comments will call into question.¹⁹⁴ Where there is an expectation of justice and righteousness, wickedness is found instead. The place of righteousness is implicitly paired with the place of justice. Qohelet is not saying that righteousness no longer exists because it has been replaced by wickedness; Ecclesiastes does not teach a doctrine of total depravity.¹⁹⁵ The place of righteousness is where righteousness should be established even against a background of wickedness. In this passage justice is the avowal of righteousness and a condemnation of the wicked (Deut 25:1; 1 Kings 8:31).¹⁹⁶ Qohelet desires justice and is offended by its absence; injustice is simply a fact of life which humans are powerless to prevent.¹⁹⁷ The reader is likely to assume that Qohelet is envisioning a court of law.¹⁹⁸ Eaton and Fox believe that the issue here is human failure to establish a just and equitable society as God has required (Gen 9:5-6).¹⁹⁹ It is more likely that Qohelet is not restricting himself to a courtroom setting: for *life under the sun*, that is on earth, is the place where justice should be found and is not.

193 Weeks notes that while this is broadly true, Qohelet also states many things that he cannot know by empirical observation, such as what happens after death (Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 124).

194 There is no justice (Eccl 3:16); humans are no different from animals (Eccl 3:18); they have no advantage over animals (Eccl 3:19).

195 Ecclesiastes 7:20 “Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning.” This is another of Qohelet’s absolute statements that he will subsequently qualify (Eccl 7:28).

196 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 91.

197 Ryken, *Ecclesiastes*, 100. Murphy notes this as an observation of, rather than an attack on, the lack of justice (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 36).

198 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 126.

199 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 85. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 175; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 36. Fox does not limit himself to this meaning. The problem as he sees it is that divine justice may come too late for humans as their lives are so short and death comes before justice is done (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 25). Loader links judgement in this verse to death (Loader, *Polar Structures*, 95).

The heart of the book is a critique of the retribution principle (Eccl 9:11). It is the failure of this principle to which Qohelet refers in this verse. It would be wrong to assume that Qohelet rejects this contractual theology. Instead, like Job, he laments its impotence, as it is simply not observable in real life in a meaningful way. Lohfink suggests that injustice here is the condemnation of the righteous to death alongside the wicked (Eccl 2:16; 3:19; 9:5). This is an injustice in which God is complicit.²⁰⁰ According to Lohfink, Qohelet rejects the idea that God will establish judgement under the sun, as the world view of Deuteronomy and Proverbs would lead us to expect. Therefore, Qohelet here is being unconventional in his argument.²⁰¹ Qohelet is perturbed by injustice and will return to consider it further in Eccl 4:1.

Verse 17

אמרתי²⁰² אני בלב אתי-צדיק ואתה-רשע ישפט האלים
כ-יעת לכל-חפץ ועל כל-המעשה שם

I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work. Ecclesiastes 3:17

Verse 17 counters the absolute statement found in the preceding verse; ultimately, God will establish justice. This verse, and the one that follows it, use another of Qohelet's favourite phrases, "I said" (דִּבְרָתִי).²⁰³ This appears to be a linguistic device whereby Qohelet considers a thesis from different perspectives and then either accepts or rejects it. Here he states a belief that the retribution principle, through God's intervention, will ultimately be established and the righteous and the wicked will receive their due.²⁰⁴

The end of the verse is difficult to interpret (שם). The significance of the word שם and where or when it refers to is by no means clear. It may be taken

200 Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 66.

201 Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 162.

202 Qohelet appears to use אמרתי (Eccl 2:1, 2; 7:23; 9:16) and דברתי (Eccl 1:16) without distinction. He uses them together in Eccl 2:15 without a perceivable change of meaning. The book itself is דברי קהלה Eccl 1:1; cf. Eccl 5:1; 8:1; 9:17; 12:10, 11, 13.

203 Eccl 1:16; 2:1, 2, 15; 7:23; 8:14; 9:16.

204 Among the views of judgement found in the First Testament is that judgement is an expression of justice in which all wrongs are righted (Psalm 1:5).

to mean temporal or eschatological judgement. Seow entertains the possibility that this is eschatological judgement.²⁰⁵ However, the context of the passage is judgement in this world.²⁰⁶ For Crenshaw the issue is not when this time may be, but rather that God's judgement remains inscrutable to humans who are incapable of understanding or even perceiving God's works of justice.²⁰⁷ Krüger notes that if there is a time for justice, but that such a time is not now, then God is prepared to tolerate injustice.²⁰⁸ He continues: that ultimately God will establish a time for justice is a reason to trust Him.²⁰⁹ That God will establish justice is an idea that the frame editor "considered worth repeating" at the summation of the book (Eccl 12:14).²¹⁰ In the meantime, human beings live in a perpetual relationship with injustice.²¹¹

In the second half of the verse Qohelet returns to the opening subject of the chapter. Just as there is a time to be born and a time to die, there will also be a time for judgement. The times of Eccl 3:1-8 are inexplicably established by God. Humankind has no power over them (Eccl 8:8). God makes everything suitable for its time (Eccl 3:11), and humans can only make the most of the present by responding appropriately, squeezing from it, as it were, whatever happiness and enjoyment they can, and in this, strive to do good (Eccl 3:12).

Qohelet has identified another dichotomy: a time for justice and a time for injustice, the one in some undefined future, the other now. Qohelet finds himself in a world where currently injustice is found. The list of Eccl 3:1-8 is usually thought to identify negative and positive dichotomies,²¹² with the order of negative and positive changing as the list unfolds. Yet, according to Eccl 3:11 God has made all things suitable in their time so that even seeming negatives such as death, weeping, and uprooting may in fact become beautiful, or as the NRSV has it,

205 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 166.

206 Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 66.

207 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 102.

208 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 91.

209 Ryken, *Ecclesiastes*, 100.

210 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 120.

211 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 125.

212 Gordis, *Koheleth*, 219, Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 60. Krüger rejects this view but in doing so acknowledges that it is prevalent (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 77).

suitable (Eccl 3:11). Hence, Qohelet can describe the day of death as better than that of birth (Eccl 7:1-4; cf. 4:2).²¹³ (What would a world without death be like?) Therefore, even if this world is not ruled by divine justice, the righteous can still believe that its events are יפה. For within things perceived as negative God's purposes are achieved (Eccl 3:14).

Verse 18

אמרתי אני בלבבי על-דברת בני האדם לברם האלhim ולראות
שהם-בבמה המה להם

I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals. Ecclesiastes 3:18

The word usually translated as “testing” here is difficult. לברם could be an infinitive construct with a third person masculine plural ending. Other than the אמרי, which prefaces direct speech, no finite verb occurs in Qohelet’s statement and the word order has the subject after the object. Seow and Fredericks suggest this is an asseverative lamed.²¹⁴ Hence Fredericks translates this “God severely tests them”.²¹⁵

In later Hebrew ברר means to choose or select (1 Chr 7:40; 9:22, 16; Neh 5:18). Its most common meaning is to purify, purge, make clear (Ezek 20:28; Job 33:3; Zeph

213 This is another example of an absolute, radical statement that Qohelet will later mitigate (Eccl 7:17, 26; 9:4-5).

214 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 167; Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 110. This is the emphatic use of ל and is used to strengthen or emphasise a word. For example the TNIV translates כיילכלב חי (Eccl 9:4) as *even a live dog*. HALOT gives this emphatic use of ל a separate entry indicating that it should be considered a different word from ל used as the more conventional preposition. HALOT cites Eccl 9:4 as an example of the emphatic lamed but does not note Eccl 3:18 (“ל II” HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 4484). Waltke and O’Connor suggest that “it is strongly possible that the emphatic or asseverative lamed is etymologically distinct from the preposition” (M. O’Connor and Bruce K Waltke, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 211). They give Eccl 9:4; Isa 38:20 and Ps 33:1 as examples. DCH describes this use of the word among the other possible meanings of ל. It gives Job 5:7; 13:12; Prov 17:21; Lam 4:3; Isa 42:3; and Hab 3:6 as examples. In each case it gives “indeed” as a translation. It prefaces the entry with “perh.” suggesting some degree of reservation (“ל,” DCH 4:484a). Gesenius does not consider this form of the word (Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 18th ed., ed. Emil Rodiger, trans. by Benjamin Davies (London: Samuel Bagster, 1845)). Neither do Joüon and Muraoka (Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2011) 102-103, 124).

215 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 108.

3:9, Isa 1:25; 52:11; Dan 11:35).²¹⁶ The translation of “test” is unique to Ecclesiastes and is a natural development of its meaning to purge,²¹⁷ hence the NRSV translation of לְבָרֶם as “testing them.” If we take the meaning as to choose or select then this does open the possibility that the text should be translated, “God separates humans from animals.”²¹⁸ This is what God does in Gen 2:19-20 where humans in origin and nature are demonstrated as distinct from the animals. The context seems to imply that “testing” is a suitable translation. “God will make clear to them that they are like the animals.”²¹⁹ This could be interpreted in two ways: God discovers humans are like animals or causes humans to see themselves like this. Several First Testament passages consider this issue, usually metaphorically (Ps 49:11-13; 73:22). Fox claims that God made humans mortal to demonstrate that they are in fact animals.²²⁰

Again Qohelet proposes another thesis. God tests human beings to demonstrate that they are like the animals. The affirmation that humans are like animals is unqualified and absolute. He will later sharply restrict this initial statement by limiting the similarity to two aspects, that both die and both share the same breath. The suggestion then made that humans have no advantage over animals is intended to be both shocking and scandalous for the reader or hearer.

There is a more likely possibility. Qohelet delights in contrary hypotheses that are designed to challenge the reader’s basic assumptions. The two hypotheses in this case are that “humans are the same as animals;” and that “humans are not at all like animals.” Ultimately, he then takes a mediating position of “humans are like animals but only in two regards.” Ecclesiastes delights in these extremes.

216 “ברַר,” DCH 2:275-276; “ברַר,” HALOTSE 1:163-165.

217 The Targum translates it as לִמְבָחֵן הָעָם to “test them,” LXX διακρίνω to “discriminate,” “judge” or “doubt.” Murphy suggests to “separate” or “select” as the meaning of διακρίνω (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 30; Bibleworks, *Targum Qoheleth*, Eccl 3:18). It is possible that such a meaning existed in vernacular Hebrew long before its use in Ecclesiastes.

218 Neh 5:18; Ezek 20:38; Dan 11:35. Longman notes “to separate” as the basic meaning of בָּרֶר and notes that God separates humans from animals as a possible meaning of the text. He believes that the context requires בָּרֶר be translated “to test” and notes the Vulgate and Targum in this respect. He considers “to test” as a development of “to separate” (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 128).

219 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 85.

220 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 214.

Ecclesiastes empirically appears to hold contradictory positions in tension. Loader finds a series of polar statements within the book²²¹ – situations where two extremes are to an extent true, but one is chosen by Qohelet over the other (or a third pole is found which supersedes both). In the three extreme statements of the passage just considered, Qohelet deals with the extremes by finding a mediating position. Qohelet's method of exploring contradictions rather than simply expressing his final view as an authoritative teaching suggests that he expects the reader to engage in the same process.²²² We are being invited to consider the extremes and to find our own view between them.²²³

It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other.
Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes.
Ecclesiastes 7:18 TNIV

The test here is to discover humanity's real nature.²²⁴ Enns states that while the nature of this test is unclear God's purpose is to see if humans are like animals.²²⁵ That true justice cannot be established in the world is indicative of human nature,²²⁶ "as humans they are also only animals."²²⁷

221 Loader, *Polar Structures*, 10 *et passim*.

222 With regard to diversity within wisdom texts Farmer writes: "Studying the texts themselves leads to the conclusion that plurality of thought was not merely tolerated but was actually embraced and celebrated by the wise and those who held them in esteem" (Farmer, *Who Knows what is Good?*, 6).

223 It is largely because of this approach by Qohelet that Leithart and Ingram read Ecclesiastes in the context of a postmodern cognitive environment. The term postmodern, while ubiquitous, is difficult to define. This is partly because it has come to mean so many things to so many people. Within a theological context I understand post-modernism as an approach to epistemology marked by pluralism and the rejection of all absolutes. Leithart describes it as a set of cultural and political values, held within Western societies, which he traces to Nietzsche. For Leithart these values centre around uncertainty, unpredictability, diversity and unexpected combinations. See Leithart, *Solomon among the Postmodern*, 15-16. Cf. Ingram, *Ecclesiastes*.

224 Ryken, *Ecclesiastes*, 103.

225 Enns does not explore the implications of this statement or what it may imply of God's creative work (Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 85). It could be understood simply as one of a series of things in Genesis of which God seems unsure (Gen 6:5-6; 11:5; 18:21). This may imply genuine divine ignorance or may simply be a rhetorical device to move the narrative forward. It is also possible that God's work in creation was not determinative, therefore the precise form creation may take is open to divine exploration.

226 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 65.

227 Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 67.

Fox links the idea of death and justice, suggesting that the passage warns that God's time of justice may come too late for it is pre-empted by human mortality.²²⁸ Lohfink also links the two ideas: injustice resides in the fact that both innocent and guilty are subject to the same death. God Himself is complicit in this.²²⁹ If we read this against Genesis then Qohelet is being critical that God's judgement upon humans has been insufficiently selective. Both the righteous and wicked are subject to the same curse and the same fate.

Murphy suggests two possible axes for this test: moral restraint or the inevitability of encroaching death.²³⁰ He concludes that for Qohelet death is key to the divine plan.²³¹ This agrees with Gen 3:22 where death, or more precisely the proscription of immortality, is seen as more than punishment. It is the reason the humans are expelled from the garden and forced to start their long journey east forging their own destiny.

It is possible that the eternity placed in the human heart is a reference to the tree of life (Gen 2:9; 3:22, 24), for humans know that longevity is no longer attainable. Further, as by eating of the tree of knowledge humans have in some way become like God (Gen 3:22), the need may exist for them to be shown that they are in fact like animals. Death is how God demonstrates this.

228 Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the new JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 25; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 23.

229 Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 66-67.

230 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 36.

231 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 37.

Verse 19

כִּי מָקָרָה בְּנֵיהֶן וּמָקָרָה הַבְּהָמָה וּמָקָרָה אֶחָד לָהֶם כְּמוֹת זֶה
כִּי מָוֹת זֶה וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לְכָל וּמֹתוֹת הָאָדָם מִזְהַבָּהָמָה אֵין כִּי הַכָּל
הַבָּל

For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. Ecclesiastes 3:19

It is here that Qohelet qualifies his initial broad statement. Humans and animals are identical in the “happening” or “occurrence” (*מָקָרָה* AV event) of their death.²³² Each has the same breath. Qohelet’s reference here is to physiological life. The word used for breath is *רוּחַ*. This is divergent from Genesis which uses *נֶשֶׁם* for breath. *רוּחַ* is used in Eccl 7:8 and 10:4 to refer to temperament but elsewhere it is used to refer to the wind, whether physically (Eccl 1:6; 8:8; 11:4) or metaphorically (Eccl 2:11; 4:6). In this verse, *רוּחַ* means “life force” (cf. Gen 6:3; 7:15; Job 4:19; Jer 10:14; 52:17).²³³ It is possessed by both humans and animals and it contrasted with death. A similar usage is found in Eccl 12:7.

The way that Qohelet compares humans and animals in this passage means that *רוּחַ* here can only mean what is common to humans and animals.²³⁴ For a third time an extreme statement is made which will again be qualified. Humans have no advantage over animals because they share the same life force. In Ecclesiastes death is the ultimate *הַבָּל* bring an end to both humans and animals life. In fact by Qohelet’s summation “everything is *הַבָּל*” a statement which occurs five times (Eccl 1:2; 1:14; 2:17; 3:19; 12:8), the first and last of which form an inclusio and overarching assessment. *Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity* (Eccl 1:2; 12:8).

232 Eccl 9:2, 3 uses the word in a similar context.

233 That which causes an animal or human to be a living being. The usage of *רוּחַ* is similar to the general meaning of *נפש*: a life, living being, soul, or in Eccl 7:27, mind (cf. Job 7:11; 12:10; Ps 143:6; Isa 26:9). See “*רוּחַ*,” HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 8704:6 and “*נפש*” idem. loc. 6283.

Crenshaw calls this the “life principle” (James L. Crenshaw, “The expression *mi yodea’* in the Hebrew bible,” *Vetus testamentum* 36 (1986): 281.

234 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 122.

Fox notes that all differences are obliterated by death.²³⁵ The difference between humans and animals is juxtaposed with the difference between righteous and unrighteous (Eccl 2:16; 7:17). Therefore, death negates all distinctions. Crenshaw emphasises that it is the lack of profit (*מוֹתָר*,²³⁶ NRSV advantage) that proves humans are like animals. Profit, here, is the avoidance of premature death.²³⁷

Verse 20

הִכְלַ הַוְלֵךְ אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד הִכְלַ הִיָּה מִן־הַעֲפָר וְהִכְלַ שָׁב
אֶל־הַעֲפָר

All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Ecclesiastes 3:20

Interestingly, while the rest of Scripture is silent on animals and Sheol, Qohelet certainly believes that animals are destined for the same place (*מקום*) as humans (cf. Eccl 9:10; Ps 49:10-12).²³⁸

While Fox does not associate this passage with Genesis in his JPS commentary, however, he does note that if death is intended as a punishment, then it is an absurd punishment because all die.²³⁹ Genesis establishes death as a punishment (or at least consequence) for humans. Genesis does not deal with death among animals.

It is here that Qohelet appears to cite Genesis: “All are from dust and all turn to dust again.” Qohelet’s citation is similar, but by no means identical to, Gen 3:19. Both consist of two short stichs. Each stich uses the word *עֲפָר* for dust.²⁴⁰ Both use the verb *שׂוֹב* for return.²⁴¹ Both are simple synthetic parallelism. Both centre on the

235 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 214. By contrast Andrews states that it is death that measures all meaning (Susan R. Andrews, “Ecclesiastes 7:1-19,” *Interpretation* 55 (2001): 300).

236 *מוֹתָר* is used only here in Ecclesiastes. *יתָר* is part of the book’s wide store of frequently repeated language. Both are from the root *יתָר*. The word *מוֹתָר* is used in Prov 14:23; 21:5 in a positive sense for all toil leads to profit.

237 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 96.

238 How Qohelet understands Sheol as the place the dead go to is open to debate. Eccl 9:10 suggests simply a place of nothingness, i.e. the grave. The question of Eccl 3:21 and comment in Eccl 12:7 suggest that for Qohelet the nature of Sheol is unresolved. See Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 18.

239 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 215.

240 HALOT notes a possible link between *הַבָּل* and Syriac *habla* meaning dust (“*הַבָּל*,” HALOTSE, 1:236).

241 The *qal* imperfect 2nd person masculine singular is used in Genesis and the *qal* participle

word dust. In Gen 3:19 dust is ontological and indicative; “dust you are” – where Ecclesiastes makes a statement of origin – “all are from dust” and destination “all turn to dust again.” In this Qohelet alludes to Genesis 2:7 where the human is formed of all humanity, not just Adam, and adds the word **הכל**. It should also be noted that Qohelet assumes this is true of all humanity, not just Adam, and adds the word **הכל**. Dell considers returning to dust to be an inclusio for the book.²⁴² If this is so then Ecclesiastes encompasses an entire life, coming from dust and returning to it.

הכל היה מזיהעפר והכל שב אל-העפר Ecclesiastes 3:20
 כי-עפר אתה ואל-עפר תשוב: Genesis 3:19

The similarity of the language indicates that Qohelet is implicitly citing Genesis. He does not use a quotation formula (contrast Dan 9:13). Nowhere in the book is such a formula used. Qohelet cites Genesis quite freely. As has been noted above, there is no expectation that a citation need be verbatim and in fact such citations are rare in the First Testament. This would suggest that the author sees the phrase as part of a living tradition, which he is free to modify, and also implies the reference will immediately be recognised by his readers. To apply Ben-Porat’s methodology, this implicit citation is the major “signal” or “marker,” which along with its counterpart in Eccl 12:7 suggests that Ecclesiastes should be read as an “alluding text” and the early chapters of Genesis as the “referent text.”²⁴³

We are not told in Genesis that animals, like humans, were made from dust but both Genesis creation accounts say that animals are from the earth: “And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind,’” Gen 1:24; “So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field,” Gen 2:19. The Yahwist account describes both the creation of humans and animals as **מזיהאדמה** (Gen 2:7, 19).²⁴⁴ Verse 7 tells us that the human was made from dust. It appears,

masculine singular in Ecclesiastes.

242 Katharine J. Dell, “The Cycle of Life in Ecclesiastes,” *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009): 189.

243 Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” 108-110.

244 Different verbs are used: **אציו** for animals in Gen 1:24 and **שׁרָא** for humans and animals in Gen 2:7, 19. In Gen 1:24 it is the earth, at God’s command, that brings forth life while in 2:19 it is God who acts directly.

then, that Qohelet has interpreted the common language of verses 9 and 19 to suggest that animals too are made from dust. This suggests that Qohelet is not only familiar with the “dust to dust” phrase found in Gen 3:19 but with the wider context of the creation account. Such a conclusion is supported by Eccl 12:7. While Eccl 3:20 is drawn from Gen 3:19, Eccl 12:7 is more similar to Gen 2:7.

Verse 21

מִי יְדֻעַ רוח בְּנֵי הָאָדָם הָעָלָה הִיא לְמַעַלָּה וְרוֹחַ הַבְּהָמָה הַיְרָדֶת
הִיא לְמַטָּה לְאָרֶץ

Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth? Ecclesiastes 3:21

Having considered that human mortality is primarily to do with its return to its source components, from dust to dust, Qohelet then considers the other shared experiences of humans and animals. What happens to their shared breath? The word for spirit is *רוּחַ*. Qohelet entertains the possibility that in death a difference exists between humans and animals. As Fox notes, death is always descent into Sheol.²⁴⁵ The spirit goes down, never up. Qohelet makes the radical suggestion that there may be a destination other than Sheol and that humans and animals may have different destinations. Prov 15:24 makes a similar contrast: the righteous ascends while the wicked descends to Sheol. The point Qohelet is making here is not the destination of the soul after death but rather the similarity of humans and animals. When Qohelet considers the dust passage again in Eccl 12:7 he replaces the conjecture of 3:21 with the emphatic claim that “the breath returns to God who gave it,” dust to earth and spirit to God (cf. Elihu Job 34:14-15).²⁴⁶ Sheol in the

245 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 215. For example: Gen 37:35; 42:38; Num 16:30; Deut 32:22; 1 Sam 2:6; 1 Kgs 2:6; Job 7:9; Ps 16:10; 30:3; Prov 15:24; Isa 7:11; Ezek 31:15; Amos 9:2.

246 Fox suggests that the immortality of the soul could show the influence of Plato—the spark of life returns to its ethereal heavenly realm (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 215; Plato, *Republic* 10, 608-612; *Phaedo*. 81.XXVIII; Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), 61). However, there are sufficient verses in books pre-dating this period that refer to redemption from Sheol, or being remembered in Sheol (Job 14:13; Ps 30:3; 49:14; Hos 13:14), even the possibility that only the wicked remain in Sheol, to indicate that life after death was far from a fixed idea within Israelite thought up to this point. The cult of Molech suggests that access to the dead was considered possible (Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics: A Continental Commentary*, ed. K. C. Hanson. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 246). Bloch-Smith catalogues the discovery of many artefacts in Iron Age

scriptures is generally presented as away from God (Ps 6:5; Isa 38:18, a view challenged in other places, e.g. Ps 139:8).²⁴⁷ As the body returns whence it came, so the spirit returns to its original source, God. Qohelet appears to understand the image of God as spirit but makes no further comment on what happens to the spirit of an animal.²⁴⁸

If the spirit does return to God then Qohelet has shown that in fact the righteous do have an advantage over the unrighteous for their spirits shall return to God and eternal justice shall thus make compensation for temporal inequities. But of eternal justice we can know little for we can only have knowledge of that which lies “under the sun.”

It is widely argued that here Qohelet is countering a contemporary view of the afterlife that he considered erroneous,²⁴⁹ and Murphy speculates that his thought may have been influenced by Greek views on the immortal nature of the soul.²⁵⁰ If such a view is assumed then Qohelet’s words must be interpreted as a polemical rejection of a doctrine that he considered erroneous. When we read Qohelet’s words without assuming he is disavowing a pre-existing tradition then his words may be read at face value and the possibility remains that he is entertaining the existence of life after death. By raising these questions and providing veiled hints at answers Qohelet surely intended to provoke his audience to think and find their own answers.

tombs from a wide variety of sites across the Holy Land. These include jewellery, figurines, tools, cooking utensils and food remnants. She concludes that these provide archaeological evidence of Israelite provision for, and hence belief in, the afterlife (Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 123 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 72-94, 140-141).

247 Even here the psalmist statement is built on the assumption that Sheol is away from God.

248 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 92.

249 Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 59; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 216.

250 Murphy states, “we cannot determine what precise philosophy he is arguing against,” but then goes on to suggest along with Lohfink, Euripides the tragedian, “Whatever sprouts from the earth returns to the earth in death, whereas whatever proceeds from the *αἰθήρ* (heavenly sphere) ascends to it again” (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 37; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 67). See Euripides, *The Suppliants*, 532. This hangs on whether *αἰθήρ* should be translated “heavenly realm” or simply “air.”

Does this mean that the judgement of verse 17 is an eschatological judgement? Fox rejects this idea, while Gordis endorses it.²⁵¹ Certainly in the last chapter the frame editor sees judgement as post-mortem and after the duty of every human being has been fulfilled.(Eccl 12:14). At this point Qohelet does neither. What he does do is to open the door to a possibility. Enns states that Qohelet rejects the idea of an afterlife, or at least the possibility of knowing about it. He argues that to state that something is unknowable is to reject it.²⁵² However, the converse is true. To raise a question is to open the possibility to a positive answer. If we assume that *up* means to God then Eccl 12:7 suggests Qohelet does believe that at least the spirits of humans do go up after death. Qohelet neither rejects nor endorses the concept of an afterlife. Farmer claims that the lack of concrete evidence about what will happen after death is God's way of testing our faith.²⁵³

Verse 22

וְרָאֵיתִי כִּי אֵין טֹוב מַאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמַח הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׂיו כִּי־הָוָא חָלָק כִּי
מֵי בַּיָּנוֹ לְרָאֹות בָּמָה שִׁיהְיָה אַחֲרֵי

So I saw that there is nothing better than that all should enjoy their work, for that is their lot; who can bring them to see what will be after them? Ecclesiastes 3:22

Work is defined by the activities of the “time poem” (Eccl 3:1-8) and by Solomon’s activities in chapter 2.²⁵⁴ The parameters of the phrase “after them” are unclear. It could refer to events on earth after the death of a person (Eccl 6:12; 7:14) but as the subject here is the human spirit it is more likely it refers to what happens to people after death, for, as noted previously, knowledge of what happens to the *רוּח* after death cannot be attained in this life.²⁵⁵ Qohelet is primarily concerned with what happens here – under the sun.

Is this a Citation?

251 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 216; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 215. See also Treifer’s comments on Bakhtin’s polyphony (David. J. Treifer, “Ecclesiastes in Dialogue with Modernity: A matter of life and death.” In *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 578 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 303-304).

252 Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 59.

253 Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 163.

254 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 111.

255 The alternative reading is that people cannot know what will happen in the world of the living after their death.

A verbal similarity exists between Gen 3:19 and Eccl 3:20. We must now consider whether this is a citation. The creation of human beings from the dust is a common motif in the First Testament (Job 4:19; 10:9; 34:15; Ps 90:3; 103:14; 104:29). Most frequently dust simply means the grave, or death, with no indication that the creation account is the source. Dust is also used to describe prodigious offspring (Gen 13:16; 28:14; Num 23:10). Returning to dust is simply a metaphor and a physiological description of death (e.g. Job 16:15; 17:16; 20:11; 21:26; Ps 7:5; 22:15; 44:25; 89:39; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2).

No other passage contains the dual concept of creation from dust and returning to it. The closest is Job 10:9, where humans are formed from clay (**בָּחָמֶר**) but return to dust (**עָפָר**). Reference in the preceding verse to the action of God in fashioning and making him (**יְדִיךְ עַצְבָּנוּ וַיַּעֲשֵׂנוּ**) suggest a connection to Genesis. Psalm 90:3 and 104:29 speak of returning to dust, implying that we came from dust. Psalm 103:14, like Gen 3:19, states that we are dust, again implying origin (and fragility).²⁵⁶

We cannot be sure that the idea of returning to dust originated with the Genesis account. However, the similarities would suggest this: both Genesis and Ecclesiastes go beyond using “dust” as a metaphor for death and “going down to dust” for dying. Both see it as the literal origin of humanity. Of all the references in the First Testament to returning to dust, Eccl 3:20 and 12:7 are the closest to Genesis.

Common Tradition

This does not rule out a common tradition. It is possible that both draw on a pre-existing Israelite creation account, which included dust as the source from which humans are created and to which they will again return. Creation themes are not uncommon in the First Testament and Ecclesiastes itself starts by evoking such a motif (Eccl 1:4-9). While most scholars date Genesis during the time of the exile²⁵⁷

256 Milton Horne, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2003), 375.

257 An exilic composition of the final form of Genesis is reliant upon an exilic date for the Priestly source. See Douglas A. Knight, *Julius Wellhausen on his Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); von Rad, *Genesis*, 38; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, vol.1, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), xxvi; James McKeown, *Genesis*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary, ed. J. Gordon McConville and Craig Bartholomew (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 8. Wenham

(or shortly beforehand)²⁵⁸ it is quite unlikely that the creation accounts, as found in Genesis, were first articulated at this time.²⁵⁹ Elements of Genesis 1 are unique and the 7-day-creation structure is found only in the Torah.²⁶⁰ Other elements are common to ANE creation accounts such as the Atra-Hasis and Enuma Elish that refer to humans being created from the ground.²⁶¹

The word עָפָר is subtly different from אָדָם in both meaning and implication.²⁶² It appears to be unique to the Israelite tradition. Dust usually has negative implications in the Hebrew scriptures, earth positive ones (Deut 32:24; 1 Sam 2:8; 2 Sam 16:13; 1 Kgs 16:2; 2 Chr 1:9; Isa 47:1). The use of dust in place of the clay (tiṭṭu) of the Atra-Hasis suggests at minimum the reworking of an existing tradition.

argues for an early Monarchy date. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 1:xliii. Even if this is the case it would be difficult to claim a date for Ecclesiastes that precedes Genesis. Therefore the direction of dependency is not effects by an early date for Ecclesiastes.

258 "The writers are living under the shadow of impending exile" (John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, International Critical Commentary, ed. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield and G. N. Stanton (New York: Scribner, 1910), lvi).

259 Fishbane encourages us to recognise that many biblical texts existed in an oral form prior to their written form. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 6. Hamilton says the same thing (Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 17).

260 Walton claims the use of a seven-day structure is intended to portray the first chapter of Genesis as the consecration of a temple. He cites Isa 66:1 to support this. According to Walton early Babylonian temples were consecrated over a seven-day period (John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 87). Kingsbury identifies a seven-day structure in dedication of the Babylonian temple at Larsa to Nigunanna. Kingsbury dates the tablet on which the text is found to the Old Babylonian period circa 18th century BCE (Edwin C. Kingsbury, "A Seven Day Ritual in the Old Babylonian Cult at Larsa." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963): 1-34). Cf. J. D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *Journal of Religion* 64 (1984): 275-298. Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*, Monograph series (American Schools of Oriental Research) 5 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). It is certainly true that the construction of the tabernacle appears to mirror creation. In Exodus 30 God instructs Moses to build the tabernacle in seven commands the last of which refers to the Sabbath. Paul J. Kissling, *Genesis, Volume 1*, College press NIV commentary, ed. Terry Briley and Paul Kissling (Joplin: College Press, 2004), 133.

261 Atra-Hasis tab. 1, lines 205-15; Enuma Elish 6:5. Enuma Elish does not state what blood is congealed with to form humans. Earth is assumed. The Atra-Hasis uses tiṭṭu (cf. טִיטָה) rather than erṣetu (earth cf. אַרְצָה). See Wilfred G. Lambert, Alan Ralph Millard and Miguel Civil, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian story of the Flood* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969), 57-58, 181, 185.

262 אַרְצָה is also in Gen 2:6 where it is contrasted with אָדָם. Water rises from the אַרְצָה but waters the אָדָם.

If a pre-existing source for the “dust to dust” phrase existed then similarities between Genesis and Ecclesiastes would suggest that both are quite faithful to it.

Eight Themes

While the verbal similarity is significant it is the similarity of the specific themes dealt with in Genesis and Ecclesiastes that strongly suggests that Qohelet knew the Genesis account and drew on both its language and its themes. As Ben-Porat notes, the identification of “signal” is only part of the process, and there remains the task of “intertextual patterning,” reading the evoked text and the referent text together to observe the points of contact.²⁶³ This patterning in turn strengthens the case for the validity of the signal in the first place. In the immediate context, eight of these themes are notable.²⁶⁴

Knowledge

First, as has been noted earlier, both passages are concerned with the acquisition of knowledge. God has placed a quantum of knowledge within human reach but this does not include God’s purpose for His creation.²⁶⁵ The limitations of human knowledge are an important theme in the book (Eccl 8:7; 10:14; 11:5). Genesis 3 is similarly concerned with knowledge. The woman has limited knowledge of her environment (Gen 3:2-3) and the serpent claims that what she does know is in fact incorrect (Gen 3:4), whereas he has secret knowledge about God (Gen 3:5a). It is his claim that she too can access this knowledge that sparks her interest (Gen 3:5b). The promise of the power that such knowledge can give turns out to be deceptive for it leads to loss rather than gain.

The meaning of the knowledge of good and evil will be considered later, alongside the question of how Qohelet understood these terms. While the phrase could mean many things, at its most obvious, it is the ability to differentiate between good and evil. Humans have demonstrated an inability to establish justice that is

263 Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” 109.

264 I will later expand this patterning across Ecclesiastes as a whole in order to establish the purpose for which Qohelet uses Genesis.

265 The words used here are **המעשָׁה** and **שְׁבֻעָה**. These words are used frequently in the Genesis creation account. However, as **שְׁבֻעָה** is a frequently occurring verb in biblical Hebrew, nothing can be implied by its use. **שְׁבֻעָה** is used 2,640 times in the Hebrew text of the First Testament.

symptomatic of an inability to recognise good and evil (Eccl 3:16). This is universal, for as argued above, even divine justice on the earth is ineffectual.

Judgement

This leads to the second point. Qohelet's concern here is with the absence of right judgement in the world and in Eccl 3:17, how God will exercise His judgement. Genesis 3 represents a clear judgement by God on human activity. Adam and Eve are questioned, condemned and punished. It is as judge that God deals with the serpent, the woman and the man and as judge that Qohelet believes God will continue to deal with the good and the bad. Reading this in light of Genesis, the human inability to establish justice is a consequence of God's initial judgement, for humans have been left to choose good and evil for themselves.

Mortality

Thirdly, Qohelet discusses mortality. Human beings die in the same way that animals die. In Eccl 3:19, 3:12 and 3:22 Qohelet reminds us that life is finite. Genesis never indicates that humans are in themselves immortal, but we are told that eating from the tree of life gives immortality (וְאֶבֶל וְחַי לְעוֹלָם)²⁶⁶ and eating of

266 עַמּ is used in Ecclesiastes 3:11. Where the NRSV translates it "past and future," the traditional translation adopted in most versions of the Bible is eternity or pertaining to the eternal. Some scholars would suggest that it means of "long duration," for example, Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 34. This is a safer translation as it is difficult to establish at what time Hebrew culture understood the concept of eternity. It is possible that it refers to a different category of time, זָמֵן and עַת meaning temporal time and עַמּ being a time beyond immediate human perception or experience. Barr rejects the notion of a movement in the words used for time from tangible to intangible, in the case of עַמּ a development from time outside of human experience to eternity (James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, Studies in Biblical Theology 33 (London: SCM Press, 1962), 85). He suggests "perpetual" as conveying the mean of עַמּ in this context. While perpetual may include the idea of eternity he also notes that nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is the word עַמּ used unequivocally to mean eternity (Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 117). Seow suggests that עַמּ here means a "consciousness of and yearning for that which is transcendent." This divorces עַמּ from the idea of time, broadening it considerably (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 173). While this makes good sense of the passage in question the other instances of עַמּ in Ecclesiastes are closely associated with the passage of time (Eccl 1:4, 10; 2:16; 3:14; 9:6; 12:5). Gault considers it a metonymy for a wide variety of concepts, such as unmeasured time, all time from beginning to end or all creation, that is, all God's eternal work (Brian P. Gault, "A Re-Examination of 'Eternity' in Ecclesiastes 3:11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 (2008): 39-57). He also suggests it could be a desire to know the future (Gault, "A Re-Examination of 'Eternity,'" 42). There is of course the possibility that it represents the tree of life, a motif surprisingly absent from Ecclesiastes considering its presence in other wisdom literature (Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4) and Qohelet's concern with time, death and length of life.

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, death. It is in this context that the LORD God states, “dust you are to dust you will return.” For Qohelet it is mortality that is humankind’s defining condition.²⁶⁷ Genesis 3 is, in part, an etiological account of the origin of death in humans.²⁶⁸ It is not only the phrase but also the wider context of mortality that connects the two passages.

Toil

Fourthly, work is the subject of Eccl 3:17, and found in the inclusio of Eccl 2:22 and 3:22. In Genesis, work is referred to before and after the eating of the fruit. Before the incident the man was set in the garden to work (**עָבֹד**) the ground (Eccl 2:5, 15), and to keep (**שְׁמַר**) the garden. After the fruit incident it is with toil and pain (**בָּעֵבֶן**) that he will work the cursed ground. Adam is evicted from the garden and told to work the ground (Gen 3:23) but the nature of work has now changed and has become onerous and burdensome.

That work has become a curse is an important theme in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 3:9, 13, 22).²⁶⁹ In Genesis, the ground curse is ordained by God. It is to this that Qohelet refers when he states that work is “their lot” (**חֲלֹק**), Eccl 3:22. He also identifies work as at least a substantive part of the “business” (**עִנִּין**) that God has given people (Eccl 3:10).

Throughout both Ecclesiastes and Genesis 3:17-19, toil is seen as a negative idea, one that is **חֲבָלָה** for it produces no advantage (e.g. Eccl 3:9). Work is not specifically mentioned in the time poem but taken together the fourteen pairs represent work. Interestingly, verses 13 and 22 of Eccl 3 do not concur that labour is pointless or a burden because humans can enjoy whatever profit flows from it. In this profit humans find what is good (**טוֹב** NRSV “better”)²⁷⁰ in life. In place of **עַזְבָּן** and **עַזָּה**, Qohelet speaks of **שְׁמָחָה**, pleasure and enjoyment that is not a curse but a gift from

267 Fox claims that God makes humans mortal to show that they are beasts (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 216). It is, however, unlikely that **לְבָרָם** can be shown to bear this meaning

268 This creates an interesting contrast with the eleventh Gilgamesh tablet: the point of contact is obvious, a serpent who steals the fruit of a tree that gives immortality. In Gilgamesh death is normal and immortality something humans seek, but fail, to attain. In Genesis longevity of life is assumed and the condition of mortality is brought about by the serpent and fruit.

269 Verses 9 and 13 use the word **עַמְלָה**, in verse 22 **בְּמַעַשְׂךָ** is used.

270 This is the normal translation of **טוֹב** when used in an aphorism and certainly within the range, especially when followed by **מִן**.

God. The word curse is absent from Ecclesiastes in this context. In both passages work is intended to achieve the same outcome, to eat and, in the case of Ecclesiastes, to drink.

Eccl 3: 9 asks “What gain have workers from their toil?” The Genesis 3 passage raises diverse and deep theological questions. The most immediate and practical question that Genesis 3 asks is what is the condition of human life following the traumatic and cataclysmic events in the garden of Eden? The answer suggested in Eccl 3:13 and 22 is that work provides people with an opportunity to find happiness if God’s ordinance is embraced. In a narrative sense Genesis makes the same point for it is only when Adam and Eve leave and forget the garden that the earth can be populated and subdued. God’s purposes in Genesis are achieved outside of the garden.²⁷¹

The *carpe diem* passages of Eccl 3:12 and 3:22 are not a call to hedonism but a reminder that the call in Gen 2:15-18 to work and enjoy the fruit of the garden was replaced, following the act of disobedience, by a call to work under much harsher conditions (Gen 3:17-19). The same reward for work is offered before and after the fall in Genesis and in Ecclesiastes, work and eating. Humans participate in the good that God intended in creation.

Dust and Breath

Fifthly, in both passages humans are constituted of dust and breath (Eccl 3:19; Gen 2:7), and described as living beings (Gen 2:7, 19). In Eccl 12:7 the breath given by God returns to God in an obvious parallel with Gen 2:7 where God breathes life into the human formed from the dust. In Eccl 3:19 and Gen 3:1 it is only dust that returns to its source. Although breath is used in all three passages in Ecclesiastes it is רוח while in Genesis נשמה is used; רוח is not used of life in Gen 1-3, while נשמה is rarely used of life elsewhere (Job 26:4; 33:4; Prov 20:27).²⁷² In fact, breath and spirit are not parallel words but are cause and effect. It is God’s נשמה in Genesis

271 Here is another fascinating intertextual dialogue, for the first three chapters of Genesis mirror the last three chapters of Revelation.

272 This is consistent with its use in Rabbinic literature. Jastrow gives “breath,” “spirit,” and “soul.” That is what composes the life of a human or animal and is then absent in death (Marcus Jastrow, “הנשמה,” *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, Vol 2 (London: Luzac, 1903), 119a).

נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה רُוחַ in Ecclesiastes parallels רֹוחַ in Ecclesiastes parallels נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה in Genesis. Despite the frequent use of dust in connection with death, the juxtaposition of spirit, life, breath or soul, with dust is rare (Ps 7:5; 104:29; Tob 3:6).

Like Animals

Sixthly, Qohelet states that human beings are like animals whereas in the Eden account animals, although arising from the same source and made of the same substance as humans, are not made in the image of God and are created after the human has been created. The account of the creation of humans is also separated from that of animals.

In Gen 2:18 God asserts that the human is incomplete without a helper, an idea which Qohelet shares (Eccl 4:9-12; 9:9 cf. Sir 36:29). Therefore, God creates all the animals but this only underlines the difference between human and beast because although Adam names each one it cannot provide the companionship he needs (Gen 2:19). Naming the animals also differentiates the human from them. The conclusion is that the human is not like any of the animals. In Gen 1:28 the human is told to rule the animals (but in 3:1 it is the craftiest of all God's animals that seems to have the upper hand). Qohelet, like Genesis, considers the question of humankind's relationship to the animals and concludes that they are different despite a common nature in the earth of which they are made and the death for which they are destined. The Genesis account therefore concludes that humans are not like animals.

Genesis identifies another distinguishing feature of humans, their desire to be like God, a desire seen as partially granted in Gen 3:22. It is this desire that will control their destiny. Yet Fredericks claims that, paradoxically, it is when people seek to become like God that they become more like the animals, no longer reflecting God's glory but human beastliness, becoming subject to lusts and irrational behaviours.²⁷³

In Qohelet's lament, that humans have no advantage over animals (Eccl 3:19) because both are mortal, lies the implication that the gift of immortality would

273 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 12, 125.

restore that advantage,²⁷⁴ for the death of humans is an injustice but not that of animals. Why so? The advantages over animals that Genesis implies differ between the Priestly and Yahwist accounts. The Priestly account tells us that humans are made in God's image, receive His blessing and are granted dominion over the animals and the earth. In the Yahwist account, Adam names all the animals and enjoys an intimate relationship with God, which includes the gift of work and the right to eat of the tree of life, "advantages," if one can so call them, that the animals do not share. After the fall one of the advantages lost is the right to eat of the tree of life. Perhaps, then, it is from here that Qohelet derived the idea that humankind has a right to, or at least expectation of, immortality.²⁷⁵ Is this the מָלֵעַ that God has placed in human hearts and whose loss Qohelet feels so deeply?

One other element that needs to be added here is that although the relationship between people and God is damaged (Gen 3:8-9), it is not lost for God continues to take an interest in humanity (Gen 3:21; 4:6). Qohelet tells us that the purpose of God's actions is that we might revere Him, which implies a continuing relationship.

If Fredericks is right and Eccl 3:11 is a reference to Genesis, then Qohelet's uses of beginning and ending in this passage also become significant. Human beings are unable to understand what God has done from beginning to end (Eccl 3:11). Qohelet seems to take his cue for this beginning (**שָׁבֵר**) from Genesis' opening words. End (**גָּזֶב**) here could refer simply to death or to the eschatological dimension found in Eccl 12, but it probably refers to the fate of the **רוֹחַ** after death. In Genesis, God gives humans life and in Ecclesiastes He receives that life back (Eccl 3:20; 12:6). It follows from this that Qohelet would go on to consider the nature of this beginning and the relationship between past and present (3:15). For him this is an ongoing state of affairs.

274 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 86. There is a danger here that we *gap fill* badly and allow our own ideas of what this advantage may be to be read into the text. It is only close attention to the context that can mitigate this.

275 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 125.

A Test

A seventh point should be considered here. The notion of test is central to Qohelet's understanding of the creation account.²⁷⁶ Can Adam find companionship in animals or does his nature require a companion like himself (in fact taken from himself)? Can the human capacity for obedience and self-control (a product of that rationality which sets them apart from the rest of creation) triumph over the serpent's temptation? Is the sensuality of instinct, the seduction of that which is pleasing to the eye and good for food, for a moment more important than a continuing relationship with the Creator God? And is it not in the exercise of this natural instinct to satisfy the physical needs that people most resemble the animals?²⁷⁷ And if "dust to dust," or mortality, is the consequence of eating from the tree of knowledge, how will humans cope with this experience? Though the Eden account is commonly interpreted as a test of obedience, Qohelet widens it to include a consideration of the difference between human and animal. Or does the test lead in a different direction? Do the humans possess the intellectual ability to question God and find their own destiny, or will they, like animals, simply slavishly obey an embedded instinct? Each of these raises the question of what it means to be human.

Good and Beautiful

Lastly, it has been noted above (page 44) that God has made all things beautiful, therefore even things perceived as negative, like death, war and mourning in God's timing may have positive outcomes. Genesis describes God's creation, by His own declaration, as good. However, the intervening events mean that by the time we reach Gen 6:5 God's assessment of humanity is very different. It is the

276 Edwin Good notes that the tree is a test of some sort and wonders why human beings with so little experience are subject to a test that could jeopardise God's work of creation, with a punishment of uncreation. He also notes that this part of Genesis is intended to highlight the similarities between humans and animals, whereas I would maintain it is intended to emphasise their difference (Edwin M. Good, "The Unfilled Sea: Style and Meaning in Ecclesiastes 1:2-11," in *Israelite Wisdom*, ed. John G. Gammie (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 25, 27).

277 If I were to follow Kristeva's synchronic intertextuality I might read Gen 2-3 against the opening chapter of Dune where Paul, the hero of the book, faces the ordeal of gom jabbar – a poison needle is held to his neck while pain is artificially induced in this hand. "Why are you doing this?" he demanded. "To determine if you are human" (Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Chilton Books, 1965), 5).

thesis of this work that Qohelet's world, as he describes it in Ecclesiastes, is one that expresses the results of the curse of Gen 3 seen in the world of his time. In this world humans are still capable of finding and doing good. It is this challenge that falls to humans in a post-curse world.

Taken together, these eight points demonstrate that Eccl 3:20 shares an analogous context with Genesis 3.

Why does he quote it?

Now we must ask what Qohelet hopes to achieve by citing the Genesis passage. As has been seen, both the context and basic meaning of the two passages coincided, so Qohelet is not rejecting the content of the material found in Genesis, nor is he substantively reworking it for a new environment.

It is common to find creation motifs in wisdom literature.²⁷⁸ Both Proverbs and Job draw heavily on creation imagery. While both books do draw on Genesis, (Proverbs in its tree of life and Job in its patriarchal setting (Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Job 1)), the description of creation they use appears independent of Genesis. Neither Proverbs nor Job makes direct citations from Genesis. That Ecclesiastes does both, draws into question the suggestion made by Gordis that wisdom books only cite earlier works to preserve tradition and enhance the authority of their teaching.²⁷⁹

Firstly, there is a degree of, to use Fishbane's interpretive structure, "aggadic" interpretation to be found in Ecclesiastes.²⁸⁰ The major area where Qohelet differs from Genesis is in his redefinition of the work motif, finding it first (along with Genesis) a curse and then redefining it as a source of joy (Eccl 3:13, 22). More subtly, it is only in Genesis that the וְתַחֲנֵן is from dust and returns to dust; in Ecclesiastes this applies to all of humanity. Therefore, Qohelet confers a universal dimension upon Adam, either as humanity's progenitor or because the word is

278 Murphy describes wisdom as "a creational theology" (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 114).

279 Gordis, *Koheleth*, 16.

280 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 232, 320-325. Fisbane notes several different types of uses of a source text. He describes an "aggadic" use as the reworking of a text, using the kind of homiletic techniques later found in the Talmud. That is intended to interpret and expand a source text.

synonymous with humanity. The latter seems more likely as פֶּנְךָ is used as a simple collective pronoun, rather than to emphasise human unity or origin. In doing this he establishes the Genesis narrative as a source text for his consideration of life.

For Qohelet, unlike Genesis, although the human and the beasts receive the same breath, the physical body and the divine life source are separate. The equality of human and beast in the death that comes to all creatures is an injustice to humans alone. He also removes a possible advantage humans have over animals for both owe their animation to the divine breath. Their similarity is more apparent than real for only humans know that they will die; the distinction, therefore, is one of knowledge. In this he is expanding and drawing attention to the significance of death among people and in doing so introduces a major theme in Ecclesiastes.

Humans and animals are the same in life and death but Qohelet questions the destination of the life force of each after death. This suggests a qualitative difference between the two life forces. He states that such an issue is unknowable. By raising the issue he opens the possibility that such a difference exists. Yet in granting humans knowledge Qohelet also acknowledges the severe limitations to which it is subject for all humankind's attempts to understand God's ways are doomed to failure (Eccl 11:5). The question is not formulated in such a way as to assume a negative answer but merely the impossibility of knowing the answer. In Eccl 12:7, Qohelet suggests that while dust returns to earth, the נַפְרָא returns to God who gave it. In doing so he answers the question he poses in Eccl 3:21, at least as far as humans are concerned.

Secondly, Qohelet's purpose is to re-contextualise²⁸¹ the Genesis account. It is clear from the relative brevity with which Qohelet addresses Genesis and from his basic agreement with its meaning (toil excepted) that exegesis is not his primary goal. He seems happy to leave the dust motif as he finds it, assuming a continuity of meaning. As is common when a primary source is used by a subsequent text without substantially reworking it, the quotation gains authority from the

281 Again to use Fishbane's interpretive structure (Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 414).

source.²⁸² As is true with any informative citation he breathes fresh life into the creation text, causing his audience to consider again the meaning of a passage that may well have been very familiar to them. Qohelet has raised the question of the nature of humankind and their relationship to animals, God, work, death, human choice, good and evil against the background of Genesis. Throughout the book he will continue to address the nature of human existence, addressing these issues from his own perspective. Qohelet can claim the support of Genesis in his work. This is important as it means he can portray the somewhat negative world he sees as firmly rooted in Israel's primary creation account.

Conclusion

Qohelet draws heavily on the context of Genesis. He makes an implicit citation of two passages (Gen 2:7; 3:19) and uses a subset of the same language. While the linguistic similarities suggest intertextuality it is the way the major themes in Eccl 3 draw on the major themes of Gen 3 that is the strongest indication that Qohelet is deliberately evoking this chapter. These points of contact should be considered as "intertextual patterning."²⁸³ These shared themes are also significant as they are not confined to Eccl 3 and will recur throughout the book. The way Qohelet uses these themes suggests his work draws upon Genesis.²⁸⁴ It is safe to assume that he is citing the same tradition recorded in Genesis. Our lack of knowledge regarding the oral and written pre-history of the book of Genesis means that certainty is impossible. However, similarities in language and the numerous points of contact, which cross the content of both the Priestly and Yahwist sources, mean that it is most likely that he is citing the written tradition found in Gen 2-3.

By using Genesis as a referent text, Qohelet introduces the theme of temptation and the ensuing curse of work. Beyond this Qohelet has established a background against which he can instruct his audience how to live with brokenness and in it

282 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 318. If, of course, the reader recognises that a allusion is being made.

283 Ben-Porat talks of maximum intertextual patterning. All that has been demonstrated thus far is that Eccl 3 can be read against Gen 2-3. An important step in this process, which she notes may seem superfluous, is the identification of the "alluding text" (Ben-Porat, "The Poetics of Literary Allusion," 110). In this case it is Ecclesiastes as a whole that is the "alluding text" rather than simply chapter 3.

284 I am unaware of any author who dates Ecclesiastes before Genesis.

find what is worthwhile. A dialogue is established between the texts (based on an interplay of theme and implicit citation), which is mutually illuminating and which allows a new understanding to emerge.

4. Created Upright.

לבד ראה־זה מצאתי אשר עשה האלֹהִים אֲתָּה־הָאָדָם יְשָׁר וַהֲמָה
בקשו חשבנות רביהם:

See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.
Ecclesiastes 7:29

At the end of chapter 7, Qohelet makes a statement about the nature of humankind that has often been understood as a reference to Gen 3.²⁸⁵ This is not an isolated verse for it occurs at the end of a section that contains a sustained argument (Eccl 7:25-29) and verse 29 must be understood as the conclusion of this argument.

In Eccl 7:1, Qohelet begins a list of aphorisms reminiscent of the book of Proverbs, representing in both style and content the conventional wisdom that Proverbs contains.²⁸⁶ Aphorisms are found throughout the book (Eccl 2:14; 4:5, 6; 5:7) but become more predominant as the book draws to a close (Eccl 9:17-11:8).²⁸⁷ In this section there are five *better* statements (Eccl 7:1, 2, 3, 5, 8), five *do not* statements (Eccl 7:9, 10, 16, 17, 21) and three wisdom questions (Eccl 7:10, 13, 16). Verse 18 may be considered a riddle. There can be no doubt that in his own view (and that of the frame editor, 12:9-11), Qohelet is a wisdom sage (**חכם**).²⁸⁸

285 See the literature review for a comprehensive list: see page 2 above.

286 This is not to presuppose a direct dependency upon Proverbs, but that given our limited knowledge of Hebrew Wisdom the compendium that is the book of Proverbs represents a base line. A comparison with ANE wisdom would suggest this. Proverbs is largely positivist, while Ecclesiastes and Job present a darker wisdom. It may be assumed that the latter is a reaction to the former. Jastrow goes as far as to say these aphorisms are “entirely in the style of Proverbs” (Jastrow, *A Gentle Cynic*, 76).

287 An aphorism is a short catchy phrase giving good advice, stimulating thought and providing insight. Aphorisms in Hebrew Wisdom are usually written in two-line parallelism (three and four line also occur). Ibn Ezra noted that three things form such an aphorism, few words, good sense and fine imagery (Moses Ibn Ezra, *Shivtei Israel*, 12c). Separating aphorism from discourse is by no means an easy task in Ecclesiastes. The layout of the NRSV suggests its translators consider Eccl 7:14-22 to be a wisdom discourse. I detect no change in style that would indicate this. I have considered three issues in separating lists of aphorisms from discourse: is there evidence of a sustained argument across several verses? does the section contain summary or conclusion? is the verse direct observation (e.g. I saw, I observed, I tested?) In this chapter I consider Eccl 7:1-14 and 16-22 to be collections of aphorisms.

288 A sage or wise person (Eccl 8:1; 9:15) is one who understands the principles of God as revealed in creation and who conveys this wisdom to others (cf. Prov 1:1; 25:1). A sage is an advocate of

While many of these aphorisms would certainly not be out of place in the book of Proverbs, they do demonstrate elements particular to Qohelet, for example, a positive approach to both death²⁸⁹ and sorrow.²⁹⁰ Among these aphorisms stands verse 15, where Qohelet observes that good is not always rewarded and evil not always punished. Righteousness does not always bring long life. This principle of reward for deeds is one that the book of Proverbs and some of the wisdom Psalms champion.²⁹¹ The way that Job engages his friends on this topic suggests it was an issue of debate within Israelite wisdom (Job 3:17; 9:22; 21:7-14; cf. Job 4:7; 11:13-20; 15:17-20; 18:5).

Verse 23-24

כִּלְזָה נָסַתִּי בְּחִכְמָה אָמַרְתִּי אֲחִכְמָה וְהִיא רְחוֹקָה מִמֶּנִּי רְחוֹקָה
מֵהַשְׁהִירָה וְעַמְקָעַם קַיְמַצְאָנוּ

All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me. That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out? Ecclesiastes 7:23-24

These verses, and the aphorisms previously mentioned, are rooted in the tradition of wisdom literature within which Qohelet places himself: “All this I have tested by wisdom” (Eccl 7:23).²⁹² And wisdom cannot provide a sufficient understanding:

wisdom teaching. By the time of Ben Sira this was an institutionalised role within a school (Sir 51:23). We have no direct evidence that formal wisdom schools existed in Israel prior to this time. Even here it is possible that school is a metaphor for a less formal mode of education. In the Bible חכם probably refers to a person recognised to be wise rather than a professional class of teacher. This is evidenced by its diverse use (see below). Sages clearly had a role in teaching (Prov 1:5-9; Eccl 12:9) but it is unclear in what circumstances this took place. Golka suggests an informal family/village education as well as an apprenticeship model and the kind of wisdom schools that Perdue also proposes. Other possibilities exist: itinerant public teachers, for example. The description of Qohelet in Eccl 12:9 would fit this possibility well. Kingly advisers, artisans, and prophets are also described as wise (2 Sam 13:3; 1 Kgs 5:11; 1 Chr 22:15; Jer 8:8; 18:18). To what extent these wise people were similar to the kind of sage described in Eccl 12:9 is unclear. See Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 3-5; Friedemann W. Golka, *The Leopard's Spots: Biblical and African Wisdom in Proverbs* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993); Perdue, *Sword and Stylus*, 50.

289 Verse 17 and 26 shows a more conventional use of death as an end that wisdom will help the disciple to avoid. Death in this context means premature death (Prov 5:23; 12:28; 14:27).

290 Death: Eccl 7:1, 2; cf. 4:2; 9:3. Sorrow: Eccl 7:3; cf. 1:18; 2:2.

291 Pss 34:13-14; 91:16; Prov 1:19; 2:18; 3:2, 16; 4:10, 22; 6:23; 7:23; 8:35; 9:11; 10:2; 11:4, 16, 27; 12:28; 13:14; 14:27; 15:24; 19:23; 22:4; 28:16.

292 Fox considers “all this” to refer to all that happens in life (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 263); cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 270. Wisdom here I take to mean Qohelet’s own mental abilities as he states

"it is far from me ... far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?" (Eccl 7:23b-24; cf. Job 28). The wisdom Qohelet seeks lies always beyond his grasp.²⁹³

Why is this? Ogden suggests that the wisdom methodology does not add up to the knowledge of all that God does.²⁹⁴ There is no indication that this knowledge is the goal Qohelet sets himself. Gordis differentiates two kinds of wisdom, the purely practical, which is the one to which Qohelet appeals, and the ontological.²⁹⁵ Krüger suggests there is an original wisdom of creation, that has been lost and a traditional wisdom of the sages which remains.²⁹⁶ Such a distinction is not found in wisdom literature.²⁹⁷ Wisdom is inherent in the created order of the world and thus a revelation by God and of God. Qohelet's rejection of wisdom is not total for he recommends wisdom (Eccl 9:17-18), makes use of its methodology (Eccl 7:27), and imitates its genre (Eccl 10:8-20). Wisdom methodology is the observation of creation processed through human intellect. Wisdom genre refers to the various forms in which wisdom is written: aphorism, beatitudes, riddles, questions, numerical sayings, admonitions, and prohibitions.²⁹⁸

It is in the practical realities of life under the sun that the limitations of wisdom are most apparent and the absence of the retribution principle most disturbing (Eccl 7:14-15). While this does not altogether exclude the existence of punishment for evil and reward for good in this life or that length of life and righteousness correlate, it does suggest that such instances are rare. The retribution principle is defective but not non-existent.²⁹⁹

Qohelet then questions his ability as a wise man to grasp wisdom and to reap from it the rewards it promises. He applies this to himself ("it is far from me" Eccl

"I will be wise" cf. Eccl 12:9. However, as his methodology is that of a wisdom sage, it is impossible to rule out "this I tested as a wisdom teacher" or even "this I tested against wisdom teaching" as possible meanings.

293 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 115.

294 "Methodologically and essentially, the sage is prevented from discovering all that God does" (Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 132).

295 Gordis, *Koheleth*, 270. Cf. Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 263; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 76.

296 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 144.

297 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 264.

298 This is of course assuming wisdom can be considered a single genre.

299 Eccl 7:14-15 does draw into question the causative link between righteousness and long life.

7:23b), before he states that it is true of all humanity (Eccl 7:24). This failure prompts him to renew his search in a different area. In verse 25 he turns to search out wickedness-folly and foolishness-madness. The suggestion Qohelet is making is that humankind's wickedness-folly and foolishness-madness saps their ability to attain wisdom or apply its lessons. Perhaps "the woman" is to blame for she has ensnared the sinner (Eccl 7:26).³⁰⁰

It is possible that Qohelet is alluding to Eve here. Clemens holds this view.³⁰¹ It is therefore possible that Qohelet considers Eve responsible for Adam's fall. (4 Ezra 7 does not see Eve as culpable).³⁰² I will consider this below. The serpent's use of the masculine plural in Gen 3:5 suggests that Adam is present. This is also explicitly stated (וְתַחַן גָּם־לִאִישָׁה עָמָה). Reading the text in Hebrew makes it much harder to blame Eve alone as Adam is also present and therefore complicit.

Like the book as a whole, this passage uses repeated language to effect. Seek (**בָקֵשׁ**) occurs three times (Eccl 7:25, 28, 29). To find (**מִצָּא**) occurs eight times (Eccl 7:24, 26, 27 [x2], 28 [x3], 29).³⁰³ **חַשְׁבוֹן** also occurs three times. **חַשְׁבוֹן** is used here in the book for the first time. It is widely considered a mathematical or accounting term meaning to reckon, plan, or calculate.³⁰⁴ Seow, in keeping with his theory of a Persian social and economic setting, describes it as meticulous accounting and as keeping a ledger.³⁰⁵ Longman suggests that in Ecclesiastes it means the explanation that stands behind the world; Murphy and Fox find it to mean an answer or conclusion.³⁰⁶ This is certainly the way that it is used in verse 25 where the NRSV translates it the "sum of things." This passage, like so many others in Ecclesiastes,

300 Cf. Philo QG 1.43; *Leg* 2.19-45.

301 Clemens, "The law of sin and death," 7.

302 For further consideration see Susan S. Lanier, "(Feminist) Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2-3," *Semeia* 41 (1988): 67-84 and Jack Levison, "Is Eve to blame: A contextual analysis of Sirach 25:24," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 617-623.

303 **מִצָּא** is used four times in this passage of something Qohelet found: a woman (26), a man (27, 28), and a conclusion (29); three times of something he has not found: wisdom (24), an answer (28), and a woman (28), and once of something he still hopes to find: an answer (27).

304 Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 86; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 145; "חַשְׁבוֹן," HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 3302.

305 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 260, 270.

306 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 202; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 76-77; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 268. Ogden agrees, seeing it as the "total picture," the conclusion. Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 131. Gordis also takes this approach. It is the substance of a thought (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 271).

is about searching, finding, failing to find, and drawing conclusions. What is unusual here is that the conclusion Qohelet comes to is not dismissed as **הבל**.

Verse 25-26

סבותי אני ולבוי לדעת ולתור ובקש חכמה וחכון ולדעת רשות
בסל והסכלות הוללות ומוצא אני מר ממות אתחאה אשה אשר-היא
מצודים וחרמים לבה אסורים ידיה טוב לפני האלים ימלט
מןנה וחוטא ילכד בה

I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness. I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.
Ecclesiastes 7:25-26

Here Qohelet renews the search he had begun in Eccl 1:12-2:3. Qohelet seeks to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness (Eccl 7:25). The Hebrew text has this in pairs connected by a waw (**רשות בסל והסכלות הוללות**).³⁰⁷ While he has discovered wickedness before this (Eccl 3:16), it is here for the first time that he turns to examine it. Folly (**בסל**) is used only here in Ecclesiastes. Madness and folly have already been examined (Eccl 1:17; 2:3, 12-13). Qohelet sought wisdom but instead found folly. While most commentators consider these to be two pairs, Fox, following the LXX, considers them four separate words.³⁰⁸ Grammatically, Fox's suggestion is problematic for it simply ignores the waw. The four words should be considered as two hendiadyses.

Fox notes that in the next verse the sum of these four words turns out to be personified in a woman.³⁰⁹ However, nothing in the context suggests that Qohelet has Eve in mind.³¹⁰ Most commentators consider the woman in question here to be

307 While most commentators consider these to be two pairs. I assume waw here to be the waw-copulative. HALOT notes its use in hendiadyses. "ν," HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 2379.

308 The Septuagint separates the four words with *καὶ* making it clear that its translators understood four ideas to be intended rather than two compound ideas (*σοφίαν καὶ ψῆφον καὶ τοῦ γνῶναι ἀσεβοῦς ἀφροσύνην καὶ σκληρίαν καὶ περιφοράν*). See Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 51; idem, *Time to Tear Down*, 268.

309 Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 51.

310 Eve in Genesis is seen as ensnared herself: it is the serpent that is seen as setting a trap. Nor is she described as the cause of death. In Genesis this is because of Adam's actions (Gen 3:19). In

lady Folly, the adulteress described in Prov 1-9 and contrasted with lady Wisdom.³¹¹ Lohfink sees the description here as positive because womankind is stronger than death,³¹² yet the connection to the adulteress of Proverbs is more probable. The description given in Eccl 7:26 is markedly similar to that given in Prov 7. In Prov 1-9 the wisdom disciple must make a choice between lady Wisdom and lady Folly, but by the end of the book the metaphoric lady Wisdom has become the literal wise wife of chapter 31. It is unlikely that anyone with a knowledge of Proverbs could read Eccl 7:26 independently of this trope.³¹³ Qohelet cannot be alluding to all women here for if the wise were to shun all women the species would die out. Ben Sira makes this distinction, for while his view of women as a class is negative (Sir 9:2; 25:13, 15, 19, 24), he praises his wife as virtuous (Sir 7:19; 36:29). In fact a division is being established between those who are enticed by wickedness-folly and foolishness-madness (described as sinners), and those who resist such enticements (described as God pleasers, cf. Eccl 2:26). Woman is the personification of wickedness, folly, foolishness and madness, not their source.

Verse 27-28

רָאָה זֶה מִצְאָתִי אָמַרְתָּ קָהָלֶת אֶחָת לְאֶחָת לְמֵצָא חַשְׁבוֹן אֲשֶׁר
עוֹד־בְּקָשָׂה נְפָשִׁי וְלֹא מִצְאָתִי אָדָם אֶחָד מַאֲלֵף מִצְאָתִי וְאָשָׁה
בְּכָל־אָלָה לֹא מִצְאָתִי

See, this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum, which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. Ecclesiastes 7:27-28

The language of verse 27 suggests that Qohelet is building to a conclusion, adding one thing to another to form a conclusion. This supports the suggestion that **חַשְׁבוֹן** is an

contrast Eve is the mother of life (Gen 3:20). The rest of the book does not consider wickedness a gender issue.

311 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 204; Krüger, *Qoheleth* 147; Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 87; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 260; Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 183; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 75. Fox rejects this. For him, verse 28 shows that Qohelet is referring here to all women. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 51.

312 Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 101. Cf. Cant 8:6.

313 While it is probable that Qohelet knew Proverbs there is no definitive evidence to support this. It is also possible that the two-women trope pre-dates Proverbs. Weeks agrees that this is an allusion to the adulterous women of Proverbs (Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 100).

accounting term. Qohelet follows classic wisdom methodology that draws conclusions from observation rather than abstract reasoning.³¹⁴ The inclusion of “says the teacher,” found elsewhere only in the frame, adds to its significance. Seow suggests the phrase is intended to invoke the authority of the author.³¹⁵

Qohelet finds one man among a thousand but not one woman among them.³¹⁶ This verse is enigmatic. The Hebrew text does not tell us what Qohelet found in this one man,³¹⁷ nor what he failed to find in any woman, nor from which group she is taken. Seow considers this verse a quotation that Qohelet rejects. He considers the vocabulary to be uncharacteristic of Qohelet.³¹⁸ The TNIV along with most commentators assumes that the one man is upright,³¹⁹ a word borrowed from the following verse. This would seem to be at odds with Eccl 7:20 where no human (**מִדָּא**), is found to be righteous.³²⁰ It has been a technique of Qohelet to establish and then counter an argument (see comment on Eccl 3:20). Verses 20 and 28 are generally considered contradictory. However, in fact they suggest an affinity between the idea of there being very few just men and none at all. It is impossible to maintain that none is an example of hyperbole and that one in a thousand is an

314 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 131.

315 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 272. By contrast Longman suggests that the frame editor is distancing himself from the misogynistic views of Qohelet. He states that Qohelet (the body of Ecclesiastes) is not the message of Ecclesiastes any more than Job’s friends’ statements are the message of Job. The comparison is false because the book of Ecclesiastes cannot be separated from the views of its author, Qohelet, whereas those of the three friends can be from Job (Job 42:7-9). What is more, the frame editor champions Qohelet as a wise man, although he may disagree with him (Eccl 12:9-11). It is also doubtful that Ecclesiastes can be distilled to a single message (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 204). Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 271.

316 Longman suggests that **נְלָא** here means military unit. Hence, there are no women in the army (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 206). While **נְלָא** is used this way elsewhere (Num 10:31; 31:5; Judg 6:15; 1 Sam 10:19), his suggestion makes little sense of the context and can only be taken seriously if we consider this verse to be a random aphorism. Fredericks considers this a wisdom riddle to which we have lost the answer. Such riddles tend to require imaginative answers, which strongly suggests that we should not take it at face value (Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 185).

317 It contains no adjective that makes the meaning of the verse less than clear.

318 He notes that among the 48 other times **מִדָּא** is used in Ecclesiastes it is only here that it means, according to him, a male rather than a person (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 264). Crenshaw agrees: “I sought but did not find that women are worse than men” (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 147). Cf. Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 101.

319 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 206; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 77; Strafford J. Wright, *Ecclesiastes*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 1177.

320 This idea is not unique to Qohelet (1 Kgs 8:46; Isa 53:6).

attempt at a precise analysis.³²¹ The difference between zero and 0.1% is so slight as to negate the supposed contradiction found here.

Since the theme of the section is the inaccessibility of wisdom, the reference to one in a thousand who, like Qohelet, can claim at least some portion of wisdom, serves to underline the scarcity of wisdom, not to deny its existence. Indeed, elsewhere Qohelet acknowledges the existence of the wise (Eccl 2:14, 16, 19; 6:8; 7:4, 5, 7) and the frame editor describes Qohelet as wise. Qohelet does not claim to be wise, but only to have wisdom (Eccl 1:13, 16; 2:3, 9) in a greater measure than any who ruled over Jerusalem before him.³²² Verse 7:23 is often considered self-contradictory,³²³ when it is simply an expression of the limits placed upon humankind's ability to grasp wisdom. To be wise, which Qohelet claims as his unrealised goal, and to use wisdom, the techniques of the sages, are not one and the same thing.

The debate around the supposed misogynistic nature of this verse has distracted attention away from its meaning within the context of the passage.³²⁴ The word "man" here is **מִנָּא**, which Qohelet uses as a collective noun for humanity. It is used this way in the following verse (Eccl 7:29) and in Eccl 7:20. Qohelet's statement, then, is that one human in a thousand is wise. It is his following statement that proves controversial, "and in all these not one woman." The word here is **אֲשֶׁר** which would naturally be paired with **עֵינָא** not **אָדָם** (Gen 2:23, 24; Exod 11:2; 21:28; Num 5:6; Isa 4:1). This suggests we are not dealing with simple word pairing. The creation narrative does pair **אֲשֶׁר** with **אָדָם** (Gen 2:25). If **אָדָם** is used

321 One in a thousand is used as a hyperbole elsewhere (Deut 1:11; Josh 23:10; Judg 15:16; Job 33:23).

322 Considering that the King Solomon pseudonymity is used here, this is not as great a claim as it sounds for Solomon is wiser only than his father and a group of Jebusites (cf. 1 Kgs 5:12). How this passage should be read in the light of Genesis 14:18 is an open question: is Qohelet wiser than the mysterious Melchizedek? Estes suggests that if the kingly persona is a literary device then kings here could refer to previous Jerusalemitic wisdom teachers (Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books*, 282). To be described as wise implies an achieved goal. Qohelet would claim this is something he is in pursuit of but has not yet achieved, 1 Kings does portray King Solomon as the classic exemplar of wisdom (1 Kings 3:12, 28; 4:29-34 ;5:7, 12).

323 For example: Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 259; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 263.

324 There is an irony here. In the exclamation "says the teacher" the MT uses the feminine form of the verb **אָמַרְתָּ** not the masculine that is found in 1:2 and 12:8. Wisdom is found among women! As Fox notes the addition of one to one in Ecclesiastes 7:27 also uses the feminine form (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 270).

here for men then Qohelet is certainly not looking for women among them. The question remains: from within which group has Qohelet failed to find a woman? The Hebrew would suggest it is not from within the thousand-strong test group. If we consider solely this verse then it means that within the 0.1%, “of all those who met my criteria none was a woman.” In contrast, I would suggest this refers to the two groups identified in verse 26, those who please God and the sinners.³²⁵ Wisdom may be found in one in a thousand of those who please God and escape wickedness, but it will not be found in any who are enticed by the wickedness.³²⁶ Ecclesiastes 7:26 is not primarily about gender. Almost all have been seduced by the adulteress of Proverbs. Even among those who set themselves to please God, true wisdom is rare, and this is a failure of humanity and therefore of both male and female.

Longman suggests that the adulteress of verse 26 may herself be one in a thousand women. While the metaphor uses gender, Qohelet is not denigrating women: gender is not the principal issue.³²⁷ Krüger suggests that just because this woman cannot be found does not mean she does not exist. Lady Wisdom is elusive.³²⁸ Man here is the seeker and woman the goal but the quest has failed and wisdom has not been found. For Seow the object of the search is personified folly that Qohelet does not find among women.³²⁹

In Qohelet the righteous and the wise are not synonymous (unlike Proverbs) because wisdom is more than moral and spiritual intelligence: it is an understanding of the world. Krüger states that for Qohelet wisdom should lead to moral perfection.³³⁰ It is just this moral imperfection that he laments in this passage. It is a fundamental wrongness with the world that is identified here (and the book as a whole). At the start of his address Qohelet laments that what is lacking cannot be counted (Eccl 1:15). The righteous should not perish in their

325 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 186.

326 The righteous and the wicked of verse 15.

327 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 204.

328 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 147. Cf. Prov 1:28; 18:22; 31:10. If this passage is read against Proverbs 1-9 then Qohelet is being ironic, for lady Wisdom has vanished.

329 Seow finds support for this in some LXX mss including LXX^P that omit the definite article. Hence, “I find her” (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 261).

330 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 146.

righteousness (Eccl 7:15) but should be able to attain a goodness free of sin (Eccl 7:13); wisdom should be accessible (Eccl 7:23-24) and by more than the one in a thousand. Yet the world fails to live up to Qohelet's expectation and for this God is partly to blame, for both good and evil come from Him (Eccl 7:14).

Verse 29

לבד ראה־זה מצאתי אשר עשה האלֹהִים אֲתָּה־הָאָדָם יְשָׁר וְהַמָּה
בקשו חשבנות רבים:

See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.
Ecclesiastes 7:29

This verse explains Qohelet's two-fold dilemma, which is to account for the ubiquity of wickedness-folly and foolishness-madness and the scarcity of righteousness and wisdom. Even those who seek wisdom, in itself a commendable goal, often fail to achieve it and so bring misery upon themselves (Eccl 1:18). This is the culmination of Qohelet's argument and cannot be divorced from the preceding verse. "This alone I have found" (**לבד** by itself or this only),³³¹ implies an important and singular pronouncement. Its use also implies the summation of his search for wisdom in Eccl 7.³³² This phrase is used of no other pronouncement in Ecclesiastes.

Qohelet, in fact, makes two statements connected by a waw: God made humans upright and they have devised many schemes. While this may appear a bleak conclusion, Qohelet is pointing out that the limitations of wisdom are not to be ascribed to the way God made humanity (cf. Eccl 3:11; 12:1), for He made them upright. "Made" (**עשָׂה**) is used of God's creation of humans in Gen 6:6 (the context of which is also the universality of human sinfulness). It is also used as a summary of all God's creative acts (Gen 2:2; 3:1). In Gen 1:27 humankind is created (**בָּרָא**) and in Gen 2:7 the human is formed (**יִצְחַר**). In their creation humans are *straightforward*, NRSV, or *upright*, TNIV. **ישָׁר** is used only one other time in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 12:10). The word means "straight," "level," "correct," "right,"

331 Exod 26:9; 36:16; Judg 7:5; Est 4:11; Isa 26:13. "Alone," "only," "by oneself," or "by itself" ("לבד," DCH 4:509b).

332 "This is my conclusion, God made humans upright ..." (my translation). Fox follows this approach (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 53).

"just," or "righteous."³³³ HALOT adds "honest," "fortunate," or "pleasant."³³⁴ Primarily, the word means "straight" (Ezek 1:7) or "level" (Isa 26:7) and in a moral sense it means "just," "righteous," or "upright." DCH notes, "moral uprightness."³³⁵ As such, it is an attribute of God (Deut 32:4; Ps 25:8). Job is described as יְשִׁיר (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3) and in Kings and Chronicles the word is used to describe monarchs who did what was right before God, while elsewhere in wisdom literature it is used metaphorically to describe a correct path (or a path that appears correct) (Prov 12:15; 14:12; 21:2). The NRSV's *straightforward* suggests simplicity.³³⁶ However, this is not an idea found within the biblical use of the word and was perhaps chosen by the NRSV translators to contrast with the implied complexity found in the second part of the verse. Longman suggests "virtuous",³³⁷ Enns, "straight";³³⁸ Seow, "balanced";³³⁹ and Eaton, "faithful" or "obedient."³⁴⁰ The context requires an ethical attribute. The TNIV's *upright* or Longman's *virtuous* fit the context best.

In Ecclesiastes humanity is not virtuous, for none are righteous (Eccl 7:20); wickedness-folly and foolishness-madness are found in place of wisdom; many are ensnared and wisdom is all but unattainable. This implies something very wrong with humanity. In regard to the deeds done under the sun there is a crookedness (**עֹמֶד**) that cannot be made straight (**צָרֵט**) and this is accompanied by a sense of inadequacy that cannot be satiated.

What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. Ecclesiastes 1:15

Qohelet finds this deficiency primarily in human affairs, not in creation that continues as it always has (Eccl 1:4-7). In Eccl 7:29 the cause of this anomaly is seen as human in origin. In Eccl 7:13 it is God who has made certain unspecified things

333 "יְשִׁיר," BDB 448b.

334 "יְשִׁיר," HALOTSE 1:449.

335 "יְשִׁיר," DCH 4: 399b-400a.

336 Supported by Krüger (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 149). Fox suggests "plain." Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 53. Cf. Eccl 12:10 "wrote words of truth plainly" (NRSV); "what he wrote was upright and true" (TNIV).

337 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 207.

338 Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 88.

339 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 275.

340 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 116.

crooked (**תָוַע**) which humans are unable to straighten (**צְקַנֵּת**).³⁴¹ This is one of many instances in the book where God's sovereignty is seen as absolute and unassailable (Eccl 9:1). Whatever things God has made crooked, they do not include humans (cf. Job 19:6). Qohelet does not claim that humanity was created wise.

The book as a whole portrays a strongly negative view of the human condition. People gain no benefit from hard work (Eccl 1:3) or from anything done under the sun (Eccl 1:14); life is a God-ordained but unhappy business (Eccl 1:13); madness and folly are all-pervasive (Eccl 2:12; 10:1); wickedness is inescapable (Eccl 8:8); love and hate are equal forces (Eccl 9:6); knowledge and wisdom are unattainable (Eccl 3:11; 7:23, 28) and when found only lead to grief (Eccl 1:18); happiness is elusive (Eccl 2:1-8; 6:3); life is oppressive (Eccl 4:1); the blessing of the righteous cannot be relied upon (Eccl 2:15); human life is full of pain, vexation, restlessness, sickness, and resentment (Eccl 2:23; 5:17); life is short (Eccl 6:12) and people are subject to the indignities of the ageing process and ultimately face nothing but death (Eccl 4:13; 12:1-7). Death itself negates any profit people might have accrued in life (Eccl 2:18). God Himself may be angry and bring destruction (Eccl 5:6). Justice is not to be found (Eccl 5:8) while examples of injustice are commonplace (Eccl 8:9). Life is unpredictable, the future unknowable and disaster can strike at any time (Eccl 6:1; 9:12; 10:8-11, 14; 11:6). Heroes go unrecognised (Eccl 10:6-7) and the good unrewarded (Eccl 9:14); the human condition is one of darkness (Eccl 5:17), where a stillborn child can be considered more fortunate than the father of a hundred children (cf. Job 3:11-12).

This list sometimes appears contradictory, for it says that wisdom cannot be found and yet when found, brings grief, or that in work nothing can be gained but that which is gained is nullified by death. In fact, they are examples of hyperbole, which is a literary device perfectly suited to Qohelet's ideological purpose. The world is not totally depraved,³⁴² and despite the claim of Eccl 7:20, the righteous do good (Eccl 3:17; 8:4); wickedness and righteousness and wisdom and folly are

341 This contrasts strongly with Bildad's words in Job 8:3. The word to "straighten" or "correct" is used of Qohelet's work in Eccl 12:9.

342 Weeks leans towards this idea. He translates Eccl 2:24 "I know there is no good in humans" (*Weeks, Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 68).

inextricably intertwined in the human experience. Joy may be found if the right approach to life is taken (Eccl 8:1). There is some fundamental flaw in the human makeup, some deficiency from God's original conception (Eccl 7:29) to which must be accounted the cause of all the failures and woes in this world. These contradictions can often be explained as linguistic devices to prompt thought and make readers/listeners re-examine their views. Beyond this I concur with Fox that the contradictions that are found in the book mirror the contradictory nature of the world. In both cases contradiction expresses the purpose of the book.³⁴³

והמה בקשו חשבנות רבים

but they have devised many schemes. Ecclesiastes 7:29b

The first strophe describes how God acts and the second how humans act. Wisdom is rendered ineffective because of human behaviour. Human folly is a self-perpetuating paradox and a spur to wisdom for the perplexities of the human condition compel people to seek in wisdom, for an explanation and a solution. **בקש חשבון** is the very process that Qohelet himself is engaged in (Eccl 7:25).

חשבון is frequently used as a place name in Scripture (Num 21:25; Deut 1:4; Josh 9:10; Judg 11:19; 1 Chr 6:81; Neh 9:22; Song 7:4). Outside of Eccl 7 it is used only as a noun in Eccl 9:10 where it is translated *thought*,³⁴⁴ and in 2 Chr 26:15 where it is used of some kind of military technology. In Eccl 7:25 it is translated in the NRSV the “sum of things” and in 7:27 it is the *sum* of one thing added to another. In each case it is the product of intellectual activity. This is especially noticeable in Chronicles where it is the **מחשבת חושב**. An un-nuanced translation of this would be *the idea of a thinker*.³⁴⁵ **חשבון** here means an “explanation,” “summary,” “conclusion,” an “overarching understanding of something,” or, according to Ogden, the “big picture.”³⁴⁶

343 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 26.

344 **חשבון** is from the root **חשב** from which the verb “to think” also derives. “**חשב**,” HALOT Bibleworks, loc 3295.

345 **חשבנות** has slightly different pointing in the MT in 2 Chr 26:15 (**חַשְׁבָנוֹת**). This is the only other plural use of the word in the MT.

346 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 113.

Only here in Ecclesiastes is the word plural. As noted above, in general usage (referring to accounting or a ledger), it is a calculation or a solution.³⁴⁷ **חַשְׁבּוֹן** is probably an Aramaic loan word since it is found rarely in the Hebrew scriptures and as a noun exclusively in the later books.³⁴⁸ The translation *schemes* NRSV or *inventions* AV draw on Chronicles where the emphasis of the word is not on what is produced (possibly a siege engine),³⁴⁹ but on its existence as a clever idea – something the boffins came up with!³⁵⁰ Hence, “scheme” or “invention” is a good translation and “solutions” would be equally good.

Not all agree that the second half of the verse should be read negatively. Ogden translates **וְהַמָּה** as *and they*. He interprets the meaning positively because humans have used their uprightness to be creative thinkers.³⁵¹ He states that the creation story is “perhaps not in mind.”³⁵² Ogden’s conclusion is that while Qohelet has failed to find a **חַשְׁבּוֹן**, this failure may not be universal and others may succeed. This solution could be moral as well as intellectual for he concludes that every human has the potential to develop in the right way.³⁵³ Gordis, who does consider this a reflection of the “paradise story,” suggests that the schemes that humans have developed are found in the inventions of Gen 4:20-22.³⁵⁴ He makes this proposal on narrative grounds, assuming that Gen 4 explains the outcome of Gen

347 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 268. Ogden suggests it is late Hebrew, deriving from a root meaning to devise or deduce (Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 129. Cf. DCH 3:329). “Reckoning” or “conclusion” (“חַשְׁבּוֹן”) HALOTSE 1:360). Jastrow gives “account,” “sum,” “accountability,” “punishment” or “reward.” The examples he gives are from the Talmud and Targumim and are either in regard to accounting or understanding the nature of the world, for example, “He **חַשְׁבֵּן מִים** ‘He understands the calculation of water,’ b. *Abod. Zar* II 42:3 (Jastrow 1:509a).

348 Seow cites a Persian period text from the Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt to support **חַשְׁבּוֹן** as a loan word (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 13). Crowley 81 – Bodleian Library MS. Heb. a. 5 (TAD III, 3.28.79).

349 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 78.

350 Seow suggests “imagination run wild” (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 270).

351 Humans have found “many ways to explain things” (Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 134). This is unlikely considering the less than positive view of human intellect or righteousness expressed by Qohelet in the rest of the chapter. A negative interpretation is also possible. Within the narrative context of Gen 1-2 a part of being made in God’s image is being creative, for God creates. (A narrative approach suggests we look to understand an idea within its context). In Eccl 7:29 the creativity is seen as perverted and contrasted with God’s upright creating.

352 Frustratingly, Ogden gives no reason for this (Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 134).

353 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 134.

354 Gordis, *Koheleth*, 273.

3. This interpretation is possible only if the verse is considered as a stand-alone aphorism, for it does not make sense of the context of the passage that is concerned with the inability to find wisdom and the seductive force of folly.

The use of the personal pronoun and the repetition of מֵצָא and חַשְׁבּוֹן suggest a sustained argument across the preceding six verses. In verse 27 the *scheme of things* that Qohelet finds is negative. Even if the waw conjunction is translated “and”, it is still possible to take the second stich as a counterpoint to the first. Doing so adds a tone of resignation to Qohelet’s voice: “God made humans upright and they have found their own answers.” It could also imply a subsequent event. “God made humans upright and then they have ...” This contrasts an original upright status with a later defective status brought about by human ingenuity.

In verse 29 Qohelet concludes his argument. The reason wisdom is hard to find is because the adulteress (folly in Eccl 2:3) is deadly and only one in a thousand attains wisdom. This is because humans have moved away from their God-given uprightness and have sought out their own חַשְׁבּוֹנוֹת רַבִּים. Longman states that humans have corrupted themselves,³⁵⁵ and Murphy uses the word perversion.³⁵⁶ While both make sense of the passage they do not make sense of the word חַשְׁבּוֹן, which suggests an intellectual process.

It is this process that Qohelet has himself been undertaking (Eccl 7:25, 27). It now appears that this is a dangerous endeavour. Fox describes this as a paradox for it is because of the human search for wisdom that wisdom has become inaccessible.³⁵⁷ Krüger makes sense of this by suggesting that humans have lost their uprightness in the search for great knowledge.³⁵⁸ Effectively human beings have “found the wrong answers.”³⁵⁹ We assume these wrong answers are the things that Qohelet explores and rejects in his book: wealth, fame, wisdom, and reputation. Wisdom is

355 Longman considers this “an obvious reflection of the first few chapters of Genesis” (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 207).

356 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 77.

357 Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 51.

358 Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 149. Fox suggest that humans have engaged in too much reasoning, the very thing Qohelet himself is guilty of (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 51).

359 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 77.

inaccessible because humans have distorted it. The lack of wisdom is the result of human, not divine, activity, and humans are to blame for their own condition.³⁶⁰

Seow makes an interesting comment here. He points out that wisdom and accounting are not separate ideas but a wordplay in which profit occurs when wisdom and folly are entered in the correct columns of the ledger. Humans have done this accounting wrongly for they have “cooked the books” and engaged in “imaginative accounting.”³⁶¹ God on the other hand balanced the accounts when He created humans “upright.”³⁶²

Why should this be read in the light of Genesis? Most obviously Qohelet’s statement that God made humans draws our thoughts to creation. God’s creation of humans as שָׁרֵך agrees with the Genesis account of humans being made in God’s image (Gen 1:27) and the general statement of Gen 1:31 that all that God had made (עַשְׂתָּה) was very good (טוֹב מְאֹד).³⁶³ This includes the first humans. The contrast found in verse 29 is the same as that found between Gen 1-2 and Gen 3. God creates humans in a way that pleases Him but human action brings about a negative change. Secondly, the Genesis account agrees that in some way something went wrong with creation. This resulted in God invoking a curse on the land and if we read Genesis as a continuous narrative this curse also manifested itself in the moral confusion so evident in the book. Genesis 6:5 indicates that God considered something to be very wrong with humanity. Any interpretation of Gen 3:1-6 must also account for God’s strongly negative response to it.

Lastly, Qohelet, like humanity and Eve, is engaged in the same unsuccessful quest for knowledge and wisdom (חכמָה in Ecclesiastes and שֶׁבֶל in Genesis), which is the ability to distinguish good from evil (טוֹב: Eccl 7:20, 26; Gen 3:5, 6; רַע: Eccl 7:25; Gen 6:5; רַע: Eccl 7:15; Gen 3:5). The serpent of the Genesis account and the adulteress both lure humans into wickedness, folly, foolishness, and madness.

360 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 148; Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 116.

361 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 275.

362 I will suggest in the following chapter that this what the humans of Gen 3 in fact do.

363 שָׁרֵך is also used of God (Deut 32:4; Ps 5:8; 25:8; 92:16).

Conclusion

Qohelet recognises that some kind of fall has occurred. Humans, who were created upright, are observably no longer so. This is demonstrated not only in this passage but also across the whole book. He places the responsibility for this on human activity and not that of God. He connects what is wrong with humans to their search for **חַשְׁבּוֹנָה**. It is because of this that wisdom cannot be found by humans and when found, proves unable to produce the results that humans expect it to.

5. The Fall, Good and Evil

לבד ראה־זה מצחתי אשר עשה האלים את־האדם ישר והמה בקשו
חשבנות רבים:

See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.
Ecclesiastes 7:29

It has been established that Qohelet almost certainly knows the Genesis tradition from which he makes two implicit citations. The previous section has demonstrated that Qohelet acknowledges some kind of fall theology. He recognises that something is not the way that it should be with the world. Moreover, it is not the way that God created it to be. This is not unique within the First Testament, which records the existence of both good and evil within the world. The terror texts of Judg 17-21 demonstrate the scope of evil even within Israel (Judges 19), and the giving of the law and its perceived superiority over practices of the surrounding nations indicates that human behaviour is frequently defective and falls short of divine standards (Deut 4:8; Ps 143:2; 147:20). The reliance of Deuteronomy and Proverbs on the retribution principle demonstrates an attempt to rationalise a world in which evil is present. What makes Ecclesiastes unique is the way that it addresses the defectiveness of the world directly. In this it goes beyond anything found even in Job's more morose moments.

It is now appropriate to consider Gen 3 in order to discover in what way it compares with Ecclesiastes. Genesis 3 has been a formative passage for Christian theology, particularly the doctrine of death. It has been used to support the doctrine of original sin,³⁶⁴ and total depravity.³⁶⁵ Lay Christian theology³⁶⁶ has seen this passage not only addressing the human condition but also explaining why disease and natural disasters plague our planet.³⁶⁷ It is a passage where

³⁶⁴ See Augustine, *Confessions* V.10.1, *Nupt.*, II.26.43; Article II, Augsburg Confession of faith; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. by Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke, 1957), 217, (II, 1, 8).

³⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:250, 1:253 (II, 3, 2,5).

³⁶⁶ To use Grenz definition (Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology?: An Invitation to the Study of God*, Downer Grove: IVP, 1996), 29-30).

³⁶⁷ See Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible with Practical Remarks and Observations*, vol. 6 (London: Marshall, 1837), 954. For a more recent approach to cosmic fall see Erwin W. Lutzer,

understanding has often lagged behind the claims that have been made from it. With the possible exception of the early chapters of Job no clear reference to the fall passage is found outside of Genesis.³⁶⁸ The passage became important within Judaism during the Second Temple period and the years following the destruction of the temple, in 4 Ezra and in the writings of St Paul. With the exception of Hosea 6:7, Adam is nowhere used as a personal name except in genealogies.³⁶⁹ In contrast, creation is frequently addressed in the First Testament and humans are referred to as **בני אדם**.³⁷⁰ This suggests that the tradition that lies behind Gen 1-3, if not the passage itself, was well known among the biblical authors (Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:13; cf. Job 15:7).³⁷¹ In Ecclesiastes **האדם** is used as a matter of course and as a

Where Was God?: Answers to Tough Questions about God and Natural Disasters (London: Tyndale, 2006) and Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). For a balanced consideration see John J. Bimson, “Reconsidering a ‘Cosmic Fall’,” *Science And Christian Belief* 18 (2006): 63-81. Cf. Romans 8:19-23.

³⁶⁸ Isaiah 14 and Ezek 28 have also been suggested but probably represent two separate traditions. Contra Daphna Arbel, “Questions about Eve’s Iniquity, Beauty, and Fall: the ‘Primal Figure’ in Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Genesis Rabbah Traditions of Eve,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 641-655. The flood narrative resonates with the first three chapters of Genesis. Noah’s action on reaching land, drinking the fruit of the vine and exposing his nakedness, should be understood as a second “fall” narrative. (Gen 4:1-16 may also be understood in these terms).

³⁶⁹ References to Adam are found in the deuterocanonical books (Jdt 1:14; Tob 8:6; Sir 40:1; 49:16; 4 Ezra 3:5, 10, 21, 26; 6:54, 56; 7:11, 70, 116, 118) and the pseudepigrapha. See Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); Gary A. Anderson, Michael E. Stone and Johannes Tromp, *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). Hosea 6:7 is itself a disputed text as **בָּאָדָם** could simply mean “like men” cf. AV.

³⁷⁰ Ecclesiastes shows a preference for **בני האדם** (Eccl 1:13; 2:8; 3:10, 18, 21; 8:11; cf. 6:7; 7:29). Only 7 of the 49 occurrences have **אָדָם** without the definite article (Eccl 2:21; 7:20, 28; 8:1, 8; 9:15; cf. 2:26). In Eccl 1:3; 2:18, 24; 6:11, 12; 8:15 (cf. 2:26) the definite article is recognised as present by the Masoretic pointing. This is in marked contrast to the rest of the First Testament where it occurs only 5 times (Gen 11:5; 1 Sam 26:19; 1 Kgs 8:39; 2 Chr 6:30; Ps 33:13). **בְּנֵי אָדָם** occurs 20 times (**בְּנֵי אָדָם** is used 99 times). **אָדָם** is a very common word in Biblical Hebrew, used almost 600 times. Consequently, the uses of this word by itself suggest no necessary link with Genesis. Only a quarter of these use the definite article (including Ecclesiastes and Gen 2), usually because it is required by the context.

³⁷¹ The interdependence between the various accounts of creation found in the First Testament is open to debate. It is far from certain that either the P or J accounts should be considered the oldest Israelite telling of an origin story. It is perhaps significant that creation told in days is absent from any other account (contrast Exod 25-40 where the construction of the Tabernacle appears to have a strong synergy with the days in Gen 1: God speaks to Moses seven times, the last of which relates to the Sabbath). Linguistic similarities may also be noted (Gen 1:31-Exod 39:43; Gen 2:1-Exod 39:32; Gen 2:2-Exod 40:33; Gen 2:3-Exod 39:43; Gen 2:3-Exod 40:9). It is

collective noun. This does open the possibility that Qohelet wishes us to think of the **האדם** found in Genesis (Gen 1:27; 2:7, 8, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25; 3:8, 9, 12, 20, 22, 24).

Genesis 3 may be considered a wisdom narrative. In ancient Egypt the serpent was a symbol of wisdom,³⁷² and in Proverbs the tree of life was also used to represent wisdom (Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4). **דעת**, **שכל**, and **ערום** are all associated with wisdom.³⁷³

uncertain what oral creation accounts existed among the early Israelites. The discovery of a fragment of the Gilgamesh account found at Megiddo, dating from the late Bronze Age, suggests that Gilgamesh was already disseminated in Canaan. While this is prior to the Israelite presence in the land it does increase the likelihood that Israel encountered the Babylonian account of creation prior to the exile. See George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 1:339-47. Fisher draws a parallel between the Ugarit creation, kingship texts and the Israelite understanding of creation. He also notes the seven-day structure of creation in Genesis mirrors the construction of Baal's temple at Sapân. He describes this as "Baal type creation" that is an ordering of creation from chaos. (In contrast to "El type" *ex nihilo* creation). He notes that for Baal this leads to kingship; that is supremacy within the pantheon. According to Fisher this same pattern can be observed in Ps 93 and Isa 51-54 (Loren R. Fisher, "Creation at Ugarit and in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 313-324). Cf. John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1-61.

372 Pyramid Texts 664c-665c; 1146. Samuel A. C. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts*, Vol 4 (New York: Longmans, 1952). Cf. Matt 10:16. Joines also notes that the serpent is a symbol of chaos and of restoration of youth. She notes that these themes are interlinked Egyptian sources and in the Gilgamesh epic. Tab 11 lines 173-176; 281-282; 2 299-307 (Karen R. Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament: A Linguistic, Archaeological, and Literary Study* (Haddonfield: Haddonfield House, 1974), 2, 3, 22. eadem, "The Serpent in Genesis 3," ZAW 87 (1975): 1-11; George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 1:721-722). Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, A Continental Commentary, ed. K. C. Hanson, trans. by John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 237; Kissling, *Genesis*, 182; E. J. van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1-11*, Biblical Interpretation Series 06 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 4-5.

373 George E. Mendenhall, "The shady side of wisdom: the date and purpose of Genesis 3," in *Light Unto my Path*, ed. Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim and Carey A. Moore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 319-334; Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, trans. by John J. Scullion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 237; Blenkinsopp, "Ecclesiastes 3:1-15," 57; Kissling, *Genesis*, 181; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 87; Luis Alonso Schökel, "Sapiential and Covenant Themes in Genesis 2-3," In *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. James Crenshaw (New York: KTAV, 1976), 470. Stratton goes further by describing Adam as a sage (Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 224). Kugel notes an Israelite tradition of Eden as divine wisdom, the garden of the Torah (Sir 24:26-31; Philo, *Leg 1:65*) (Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 111).

Genesis contains a series of instructions. In chapter 1 God blesses humanity and instructs them to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28), and in the following verse He tells them which foods they may eat. In chapter 2 the Yahwist provides more information than the Priestly text. The humans are assigned a place to live by God (Gen 2:8) and assigned work to do (Gen 2:15). The humans are portrayed as dependent on God in every aspect of their lives. The reader could be excused for wondering whether Eden is a paradise or a prison. God also gives a command and a prohibition. In the NRSV the command sounds like a casual promissory statement: "you may freely eat of every tree." The Hebrew is stronger: **אכל תאכל**, "surely you will eat."³⁷⁴ Eating of the trees of the garden is necessary for life.³⁷⁵ The humans will prosper and flourish as they eat. They are not expected to grow crops, simply to tend trees (and in the Priestly tradition, to eat all that grows across the face of the earth). Eating in the creation motif of Proverbs is a metaphor for living (Prov 1:31; 9:5-6; 24:15-16; 31:24). The command to eat what is good is therefore more than simply about food: it suggests finding a full and blessed life.

The humans are told they must not eat of one of the two trees found at the centre of the garden (the holy of holies, if we understand the garden as a sanctuary),³⁷⁶ for on the day that they eat they will die. It is unclear whether death here should be understood as a punishment or a consequence. As death is not imposed upon the disobedient humans when they eat and since, in contrast to eating (3:14, 17, 18, 19), death plays a minor role in God's curse pronouncement, it is preferable to understand it as a consequence.³⁷⁷ The passage deals with mortality (3:19, 22)

374 This syntax mirrors the consequence attached to the prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge: **מוות תמות**. While the infinitive absolute tends toward the permissive: "you may eat," it also strengthens the verb and may be used as an imperative, hence my translation.

375 To this extent all trees in the garden are trees of life.

376 This view was stated in Ramban (Moshe ben Maimon, *Ramban: the Torah with Ramban's commentary*, trans. by Yaakov Blinder, ed. Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2004), 99, 133); Yaakov Y. Ben Ashkenazi, *A Rabbinical Commentary on Genesis* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1885), 29. This view may be alluded to in Jub 3:12, cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 89; Blenkinsopp, "Ecclesiastes 3:1-15," 64.

377 This does not negate the possibility that death here is spiritual. The couple's relationship with each other (Gen 3:12) and with God (Gen 3:10, 23) is harmed in the act of eating. This alienation can be described as spiritual death (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 125; Russell R. Reno, *Genesis*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, ed. R. R. Reno, Robert W. Jenson, and Robert L. Wilken (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 89). The text makes no distinction between spiritual

rather than divine execution.³⁷⁸ Adam is promised long life (Gen 3:17) and lives, according to the text, 930 years (Gen 5:5). The idea that death exists only because of the fall is contrary to the Genesis account: rather, immortality results from eating of the tree of life. Humans were never described as immortal. Eve's answer to the serpent's question illustrates this, for they are reliant upon God as their provider and protector.³⁷⁹ God's commands are wisdom statements and God is the purveyor of wisdom for the newly created humans. By His direction they will find life and avoid death (cf. Prov 10:2, 16; 11:4, 19; 13:14; 14:27; 15:24). Life and death are found in the two trees of the garden and the choice from which to eat.

and physical death. Moberly looks for a more subtle meaning of death in this passage. He compares it to the curses of Deut 28, summarised in Deut 30:19 as choosing death. For Moberly, death is living outside of God's blessing and is defined by the curse of Gen 3:14-19. For Moberly, this includes "the difficulty that the human heart and mind can have in genuinely trusting God as a wise Creator and living accordingly" (Moberly, *Genesis*, 86; idem, "Did the Serpent get it Right?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (April 1988): 1-27; idem "Did the Interpreters get it Right?: Genesis 2-3 reconsidered," *Journal of Theological Studies* 59 (2008): 22-40; "The Garden of Eden and the hope of immortality," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1994): 172-175; contra James Barr, "Is God a Liar? (Genesis 2-3) – and related matters," *Journal of Theological Studies* 57 (2006): 1-22).

378 Adam's death, when it happens, is treated no differently from any of the deaths recorded in Genesis 5. It is safe to assume that he died of old age. There is no indication that God caused his death directly (contrast Gen 38:7; Lev 10:2).

379 Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 237, 239.

The identity of the serpent here is significant. Traditionally, Christians have understood the serpent as a guise for Satan.³⁸⁰ Within both ANE and biblical literature the serpent is a polyvalent symbol capable of positive and negative meanings.³⁸¹ Genesis itself describes the serpent as part of God's creation and as crafty (**עִירֹם**).³⁸² The word crafty is used in Proverbs of the prudent or intelligent person (Prov 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:8, 15, 18; 22:3; 27:12). It is one of the synonyms Proverbs uses for the wise. In the creation account "serpent" is not a pejorative term and the woman has no reason to mistrust it. The force of temptation in Genesis is none other than the wisdom God Himself has placed within creation. Brueggemann is probably correct in emphasising that the serpent is a literary device intended to open up a theological debate.³⁸³ This theological debate is

³⁸⁰ Kelly claims that the first author to unequivocally identify the serpent as Satan is Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 45 and 79). Kelly argues strongly that the Christian concept of Satan is formulated not from the Bible but from the Church Fathers (Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 176). For further consideration see Gary A. Anderson, "The Exaltation of Adam and the Fall of Satan," in *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays*, ed. Gary A. Anderson, Michael E. Stone and Johannes Tromp (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 83-110. See also: Tertullian, *Marc.* 2.10 ; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.26.2; Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 16.11; Severian of Gabala, *On the Creation of the World* 6.2; Augustine, *Civ.* 14.13; John of Damascus, *Orthodox faith* 2.10. Among conservative commentators today see Leon J. Wood, *A Shorter Commentary on Genesis* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 32; Reno, *Genesis*, 79. Even contemporary conservatives such as Sailhamer reject the idea that the serpent here is Satan in disguise, while at the same time noting that the behaviour of the serpent prefigures a New Testament understanding of Satan (John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in the Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 50). Ashkenazi describes the serpent as wicked and desiring Eve to die (Ashkenazi, *Genesis*, 27). The Wisdom of Solomon (Wis 2:24) is the first known direct identification of the serpent as Satan. Even here it is the context that makes this association. Satan is blamed rather than identified. It is also possible that this passage refers to Gen 4 rather than Gen 3.

³⁸¹ For example Gilgamesh tab. 11 lines 305-307. See also Waltke and O'Connor, *An Old Testament Theology*, 260; Martin Kessler and Karel Deurloo, *A Commentary on Genesis: The Book of Beginnings* (New York: Paulist, 2004), 58; Kissling, *Genesis*, 184. Borgman describes the serpent as the disruptive force that moves through Genesis, and is found in the strife, famine and violence of the book (Paul Borgman, *Genesis: The Story We Haven't Heard* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 22).

³⁸² "Crafty" (**עִירֹם**) is a wordplay. Naked (**מֵעָרָה**) and cursed (**אָרְזָרֶךְ**) are all phonically similar. The innocence and vulnerability of the humans is juxtaposed with the shrewdness of the serpent. Cf. Good, "The Unfilled Sea," 36.

³⁸³ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James L. Mays and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2010), 47. Blenkinsopp sees the serpent as a voice of temptation, internal to the woman (Blenkinsopp, "Ecclesiastes 3:1-15," 64).

sapiential in nature. The serpent is an alternative purveyor of wisdom for the humans with a different view of what will bring life and death and which trees should be chosen for food.³⁸⁴ The serpent promises the knowledge of good and evil which the woman recognises as wisdom (Gen 3:4). It is in an attempt to actualise this wisdom that humans have gone awry. They chose lady Folly over lady Wisdom (Prov 1:9). Genesis 3 can be considered a polemic against wisdom, for the result of the search for wisdom is a curse. As in Ecclesiastes wisdom can be dangerous (Eccl 1:18) and its acquisition may not lead to advantage (Eccl 9:16).

The consequences of the fall are two fold; they come from eating the fruit (or the choice to do so) and from the subsequent judgement pronounced by God. As noted above, according to the Lord God, eating the fruit of the tree brings certain death. This the serpent strenuously denies. It is uncertain from the text whether it is death or the certainty of death that the serpent denies. Death is already present in the garden, otherwise a second tree that negates its effects would be superfluous. Neither does God need to explain to the humans what death means.³⁸⁵ Eating the fruit of the tree brings knowledge of good and evil, which in some way, the serpent assures Eve, makes those who eat it like God.³⁸⁶ The serpent is correct in this judgement for the Lord God agrees, “the man has become like one of us” (Gen 3:22). This is unexpected, as according to the Priestly source, the humans have already been created in the image of God and we assume are already like God.

This new-found knowledge and new way of being like God displeases Him and brings about the eviction of the humans from the garden. According to God’s statement, this new knowledge and way of being when combined with immortality is dangerous or at least intolerable. God does not inform us whether

384 Reno notes that the serpent’s statement “you will not die” conjures up the prospect of life (Reno, *Genesis*, 90).

385 Source criticism has generally held that the tree of life comes from a secondary source (von Rad, *Genesis*, 78). This is partly because Eve appears to know of only one tree in the centre of the garden (Gen 3:3), and partly from an overly literal reading that only one tree can be at the centre of the garden (cf. 1 Enoch 24:3-9). It is unclear what kind of an area the middle of the garden means. In Gen 2:9 both are described as in the midst of the garden. Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 99.

386 Askenazi suggests that “Elohim” here should be understood as angels (Ashkenazi, *Genesis*, 27).

the danger is posed to Himself, to the humans, or to the earth.³⁸⁷ The fruit also makes one wise and is good for food, a statement already made of all the trees in the garden (Gen 2:9). Choosing this tree over the other trees that God has provided for food implies the woman believed it to be superior, for it will bring her likeness to, perhaps even equality with, God. The desire for wisdom and likeness to God both indicate a sense of inadequacy in Eve. Eden does not wholly meet her needs, for in some way she feels the desire to be more and know more. In a very different world this same sense of lack will be articulated by Qohelet. Despite engaging in every area of life he finds all things to be empty and unsatisfying (Eccl 2:20).

The text informs us that once more the serpent is, in part, correct, for the promise is realised in that having eaten we are told that the humans' "eyes are opened" (cf. Gen 2:19). They immediately recognise they are naked. God acknowledges the permanence and significance of this change by providing clothes for the couple. The consequence of this realisation is shame and a desire to hide from God. In what way the humans find death or the knowledge of good and evil or have their eyes opened and become like God is not immediately clear from the text and will require further consideration below.

The second series of consequences is given in the curse pronouncements announced by God after His interrogation of the humans. The woman's pain in childbirth will be increased,³⁸⁸ she will be subservient to her husband, and her "seed" will live in enmity with that of the serpent.³⁸⁹ The man will experience toil, hard work, and frustration; ultimately, he will be reunited with the ground from which he was made. The human was placed in the garden to till and keep it, but from now on work will be different: it will become a life and death struggle with the soil in order to survive. The final part of God's judgement on the humans is expulsion from the garden into an inferior world.

387 To live forever in alienation from God would be a terrible thing (Herold S. Stern, "Knowledge of Good and Evil," *Vetus Testamentum* 8 (1958): 412; David Z. Niringiye, "In the Garden of Eden – II: Creation-Community Distorted, Torn Apart," *Journal of Latin American Theology* 5 (2010): 39).

388 "Increased" implies that pain already exists in childbirth. We are not told whether this is potential, or realised childbirth.

389 Also Gen 4:25; 24:60. Seed (*עֵדָה*) is a term more often associated with the male gender (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:3; 17:9; 21:3; 38:9). See "עֵדָה" DCH 3:141, 143.

Genesis 3 is etiological and addresses these fundamental questions: where did death come from? Why is life so hard?³⁹⁰ And, as Wenham has it, why does the world no longer exhibit the perfection of creation?³⁹¹ The passage is also anthropological and asks two questions: what is the nature of human beings, and in what way is this nature distinguished from that of other animals? These questions and the consequences of the fall are also the major themes Qohelet explores.

The Prevalence of Evil

Little is said in Genesis about the effects of the fall on creation. We are told that thorns and thistles will now compete with edible plants and pain will be increased in childbirth. There is no indication that thorns and thistles did not already exist and no description of the environment outside the garden is given. Nor are we told that atrophy, disease, and destructive forces of nature occur only after the fall. The garden is contrasted to the world that surrounds it in such a way as to suggest it is an oasis that is superior to the world in which it is found. Famines occur in Genesis (for the earth does not give its strength) but where natural disasters occur, such as the flood and the destruction of Sodom, their origin is divine rather than natural.³⁹² Likewise, Qohelet says nothing of degradation in the environment³⁹³.

Genesis 3 tells us little of the origin of evil, which according to Westermann remains a mystery in Genesis.³⁹⁴ The early chapters of Genesis chart a rise in human evil (Cain, Lamech, the flood, and the tower of Babel) and its origin is articulated in Gen 6:5:

390 Bruce F. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 85; von Rad, *Genesis*, 96; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 265. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 67-68.

391 Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 2:91, 102.

392 This is also true of the plagues in Exodus.

393 Contra Rom 8:22. The word translated “futility” in Rom 8:20, *for the creation was subjected to futility*, ματαιότης is also the word used by the LXX to translate הַבָּל throughout Ecclesiastes. It is possible that Paul has Ecclesiastes in mind (Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books*, 284; J.A. Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, Text and Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 115). Cf. Rom 3:10-Eccl 7:20).

394 Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 239. It would be more accurate to say that although Genesis gives us no answers, it certainly provokes thought and gives a framework to consider the subject. The relationship between God, the humans, and the mysterious snake raises questions about the origin and the nature of evil. Qohelet is adamant (at least in the first place) that it is not God (Eccl 3:11; 7:29).

The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. Genesis 6:5³⁹⁵

This verse indicates that wickedness is an unexpected human defect rather than being part of God's original purpose. Sin is not mentioned in the account of the garden, nor is it a part of the curse oracle. It is first mentioned in Gen 4:7 of Cain's potential murder of his brother. No explanation other than the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil is given for this tendency within humans. Human evil does not stop with the flood (Gen 8:21), nor with God's call to Abraham, for his family are frequently seen doing evil (Gen 34:25; 35:22; 38:7, 26). This is the abiding consequence of the fall in Genesis.

Genesis ends with Joseph's speech in which he declares **וְאַתֶּם חָשׁבְתֶם עַל־רֹעֵה אֱלֹהִים חָשׁבָה לְטוֹבָה** (Gen 50:20). This gives a fitting ending to the book. Humans may make their own choices about good and evil but ultimately God is able to override this by turning evil into good.

In considering what is good Qohelet finds a preponderance of evil. The word **רֹעֵה** occurs 19 times in Ecclesiastes and its usage is diverse. As noted above, the word has a broad range of meanings in biblical Hebrew. It is used of sorrow caused by death (Eccl 7:3), of unpleasant tasks (Eccl 8:3), and of harm caused by human carelessness (Eccl 8:9). It is used of human deeds that displease God (Eccl 4:3; 5:1; 8:11, 12; 12:14), but it is also used of human nature itself, notably the evil that subsists in the fool (Eccl 10:13). Evil may even result from the work of God (Eccl 6:1-2). Evil is all-pervasive (Eccl 4:1) and found even where justice is expected (Eccl 3:16). The human heart commits evil because punishment is often delayed (Eccl 8:11), and the human heart is full of evil (Eccl 9:3). These verses show a similarity in language and thought to Gen 6:5 and 8:21. In both, the source of evil is shown to lie not in some force external to humankind but in their own will and choices. Ecclesiastes preserves the notion of free will from which, however infrequently, good may come.

395 "Wicked" and "evil" here are both English translations of **רֹעֵה**. Cf. Gen 8:21. It is doubtful whether ancient Hebrew distinguished between moral wickedness and ontological evil.

Evil is not confined to humanity but informs every aspect of the world. Qohelet describes the work done under the sun as “grievous” (Eccl 2:17). The world is a place where “misfortune” comes unannounced (Eccl 5:14; 9:12). Qohelet describes a condition in which toil is meaningless and riches bring neither security nor happiness (Eccl 4:8; 6:2). Evil is woven into the very fabric of the world. God is included in Qohelet’s view of evil for He has placed an רַע עֵין (Eccl 1:13) on humans.

The presence of evil in the world is in sharp contrast to God’s original assessment of creation as very good. Ogden states that Qohelet’s problem is the pervasiveness of evil and how to account for it.³⁹⁶ Qohelet makes little attempt to find any explanation for the ubiquity of evil (Eccl 7:29). Qohelet acknowledges that from the beginning God made all things good (Eccl 3:11).

Toil and Frustration

The human is placed in the garden to till (לְעָבֹד) and keep it (לְשִׁמְרָה). Both are infinitives with a third person, feminine singular object suffix making the object of the verbs the garden. Both words have broad meanings: עֲבֹד (Gen 2:5; 3:23; 4:2, 12) is a general word for work but it also means to serve or worship, hence the root is used of Israel’s slavery in Egypt and their subsequent worship of God (Exod 1:13; 3:12). In the context of the garden, “cultivate” would be an appropriate translation.³⁹⁷ The word is used this way in Ezek 36:9 and Eccl 5:8.³⁹⁸ שִׁמְרָה means to “keep watch,” “guard,” “revere,” “to be careful,” “restrain,” or “protect.”³⁹⁹ It can mean to “observe” or “celebrate a festival,” “a religious ceremony” or to “perform a cultic duty or service.”⁴⁰⁰ It is used of the work of a shepherd (1 Sam 17:20); of cognition in the sense of paying attention to, considering, or remembering (Gen 37:11; 31:29); of covenantal faithfulness (Exod 23:13; Jer 17:21; cf. Gen 17:9-10; 18:19). In Gen 3:24 it is used of the cherubim who guard the way to the tree of life and in Cain’s protest that he is not his brother’s keeper (Gen 4:9). Both words are

³⁹⁶ Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 22.

³⁹⁷ A double meaning could also be intended.

³⁹⁸ Till is too narrow a meaning, restricting the work of the human to manipulating soil. This is implied in Gen 2:5 and 3:23 but both verses refer to work outside of the garden and contrast with God’s activity in planting Eden (2:8 עַתָּה).

³⁹⁹ “שִׁמְרָה,” BDB 1036; “שִׁמְרָה,” HALOTSE 1:1581-1586; “שִׁמְרָה,” DCH 8:339-340.

⁴⁰⁰ “שִׁמְרָה,” HALOTSE 1:1583; “שִׁמְרָה,” DCH 8:478.

used in the cultus of both the people and the priest.⁴⁰¹ It is in part because of this close association that the garden is often understood in terms of the cultus. The garden itself is seen as divine sanctuary where God dwells and is served by humans: it is God's garden not Adam's.⁴⁰²

Human work is derivative of that of God, who plants what the humans then care for. This care is for their own benefit for it is from this garden that the humans eat (Gen 2:16). God creates the sacred place and provides food for the humans to live there.⁴⁰³ Work is not seen as onerous for it is good that the human works and is part of the created order. It is also connected to the affirmative command to eat freely of the trees of the garden (Gen 2:16).

Labour brings satisfaction and by cultivating the soil Adam nourishes his body, enabling life. As previously noted, the command to eat extends beyond the nourishment of the body to that of the soul (Prov 1:31; 9:5-6; 24:15-16; 31:24), for the human's body and spirit are fed and he finds actualisation and fulfilment in the garden.

401 שָׁמֶר People: Exod 23:15; 31:13; Lev 18:4; Deut 11:1; Josh 1:8; Eccl 12:12. Priests: Lev 22:9, 31; Num 1:53; 3:7-10, 32; 18:5-7; 2 Kings 12:10; Ezek 40:45-46. דְבָעַת: People Exod 10:26; 13:6. Priests Num 3:7; 8:25.

402 Stordalen notes that temples in the ANE were invariably situated in gardens (Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000). 111-136). As noted above, the interpretation of the garden as a sanctuary dates back at least as far as Ramban. There are a number of points of contact: The tree of life is understood as analogous to the menorah: a stylised tree (Exod 25:31-35; Zech 4:1-10). The garden and tabernacle are guarded by cherubim (Gen 3:24; Exod 25:18-22). A river flows from the garden as it does Ezekiel's temple (Gen 2:10; Ezek 47:1-12; Rev 22:1). See John M. Lundquist, "What is a Temple?," in *The Quest for the Kingdom: Studies in Honour of George E. Mendenhall*, ed. H.B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 209. The presence of God as he walks (*מַחְהָלָת*) is also mentioned of the tabernacle (Gen 3:8; Lev 26:12; 2 Sam 7:6). The garden, like the temple, was entered from the East (Gen 3:24; Exod 38:11). Solomon's temple uses garden decorations (2 Kings 6-7). See Gordon Wenham, "Sanctuary symbolism in the Garden of Eden story," in *'I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood': Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. R. S. Hess and D. A. Tsumura (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994): 399-404; Daniel T. Lioy, "The Garden of Eden as a Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind," *Conspicuous* 10 (2010): 25-57.

403 This is in contrast to Enuma Elish where humans are created to build temples and provide sacrifices as sustenance for the gods (Enuma Elish tab. 6. lines 6-8). The Atra-Hasis also describes humans as created to assume the drudgery of the gods (Atra-Hasis tab. 1. lines 190-199).

It is in violating the command not to eat of the tree that the nature of work is forever changed. God curses the soil and it becomes an antagonist which must be continually subdued if it is to yield food (Adam himself is not directly cursed).

And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:17-19.

The first account of creation ends in blessing and Sabbath rest. The second account ends in curse and the loss of rest.⁴⁰⁴ The soil (**הָאָדָם**), once effortlessly productive, now gives its produce only by toil. Tilling the ground forms an inclusion for J’s account of human origins (Gen 2:5; 3:23). The nature of work has now changed because the ground is cursed. The curse implies a limitation or reduction in the function of earth (Gen 4:11; 5:29). Rather than eating from the abundance of the trees, the human must now work the soil and grow food for himself. It is the addition of **עַצְבֹּן** that is significant. In Gen 3:17 it is translated by the NRSV as “toil” (cf. Gen 5:29). Elsewhere **עַצְבָּה** implies hardship, pain, distress, grief or sorrow (Gen 45:5; 1 Sam 10:34; Eccl 10:9). The same word is used in the judgement of the woman where it is translated “pains” (TNIV) and “pangs” (NRSV).⁴⁰⁵ In the curse oracle (Gen 3:14-19) the word **עֲבָדָה** is no longer used: instead we find the word **עַצְבֹּן**. This change in vocabulary marks the change in the nature of work. No mention is made of eating from any trees. The earth will work against him, not with him. It will produce thorns and thistles (**קֶזֶחׁ וּדְרָדר**) as well as edible plants.⁴⁰⁶

404 According to Reno the Sabbath rest answers the problem of toil in a cursed world (Reno, *Genesis*, 95).

405 Meyers notes that this word is better translated toil than pain. She observes that while childbirth is associated with pain, pregnancy is not and since the word is used elsewhere of either toil or mental anguish (Gen 5:29; Job 10:8; Ps 127:2; Prov 5:10; 14:23) then the meaning of the first use of **עַצְבָּה** in this verse is best understood as hard work during pregnancy. She also connects this both to the risks that pregnancy incurred and the difficulties faced by women in early Israelite history. Toil is the lot of women as well as men (Carol L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 90-91).

406 In Hosea thorns and thistles are indicative of desolation (Hos 10:8; cf. Isa 32:13).

The human now competes with creation rather than cooperating with it.⁴⁰⁷ Here we have the notion of humankind's alienation from creation. Ultimately, the earth will reabsorb the human in death. Hence, work and death are linked.

Until this point God and the human have cooperated in work (Gen 2:8-9),⁴⁰⁸ but now the human must survive by his own efforts. The work will be difficult and physically challenging and Adam will eat by the sweat of his brow (**בזעתי אפיק**). The word נַפְךָ refers to the nose (Gen 24:47; 2 Kgs 19:28; Job 41:2), the flaring of which indicates anger (Gen 30:2; 44:18; Num 22:22). Its use here rather than the more obvious פְנִים may suggest the idea of frustration, anger, or hostility in labour as well as hard work.⁴⁰⁹

Farming can also be a profitable endeavour in Genesis for we are told that Cain and Isaac were successful farmers (Gen 4:3; 26:12): yet at the same time the land may be subject to drought and famine (Gen 12:10; 26:1; 43:1). Abraham, Lot, Abimelech and Isaac will all encounter dissension and division because resources, once abundant, are now limited. Wenham notes that "the preparation of each meal is a reminder of the fall."⁴¹⁰

There is a degree of talion in the curse, for eating is both the crime and the punishment. The man, like the serpent, is condemned to eat the ground (**עפר** Gen 3:14 and **האדמה** Gen 3:17). This struggle with the land is a symbol for all the cares that people encounter during the course of their life and so land, or toil, or cares come to define the very nature of human existence.⁴¹¹ It is by the means of their toil, the one as shepherd and the other as tiller of the soil, that Cain and Abel are first introduced to us (Gen 4:2).⁴¹²

407 Competition is a major theme in Genesis as most characters find themselves in contention with someone else: Cain and Abel for God's blessing, Abraham and Lot's herdsmen for arable pasture, Isaac and Ishmael for the inheritance, Jacob and Esau for the blessing, and Rachel and Leah to see who can produce the most babies and gain their husband's affection.

408 Moberly, *Genesis*, 84.

409 It is difficult to be certain, as sweat (**תְּעֵיט**) is used nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible.

410 Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 82.

411 From this point the Genesis account shows human life as full of difficulties.

412 Eve will also be described in terms of her judgement as the mother of all living.

Toil in Ecclesiastes

The word used for toil in Ecclesiastes is עָמֵל. It is used 35 times in 24 verses.⁴¹³ This is almost as frequently as הַבְּלִי, and like the majority of its usage comes in the first six chapters (x30). Ecclesiastes accounts for over half the biblical uses of עָמֵל (used 29 times elsewhere).⁴¹⁴

Its range of meanings include “distress,” “trouble” (Gen 41:61; Judg 10:16; Job 5:6, 7; Isa 53:11), “misfortune” (Num 23:21; Prov 32:7), and “disaster,” or “evil” (Ps 7:15; 94:20; Isa 59:4; Hab 1:13). It is rare for it to be used of work outside Ecclesiastes (e.g. Judg 5:26; Jonah 4:10). Where it is used of labour, it is paired with negative words “affliction” (עֲנֵי), “oppression” (לְחֹזֶן Deut 26:7), “no help” (אֵין עָזָר) Ps 107:12), “emptiness” (שׁוֹא Ps 127:1), “hunger” (Prov 16:26), “sorrow” (גַּזֵּן) Jer 20:18). The range of meanings of עַצְבָּה is similar to that of עָמֵל, and both are associated with hardship.⁴¹⁵ עָמֵל is more strongly associated with work. Qohelet has chosen a pejorative word for work in contrast to the more neutral לְאַךְ,⁴¹⁶ פָּעֵל, עֲבָד, or עֲשָׂה. It implies work that is oppressive or unpleasant, and implies misery, drudgery, and struggle.⁴¹⁷ Each use of the word is tainted by these negative associations.

עָמֵל catches this idea of sorrow and grief found in עַצְבָּה but brings with it a stronger emphasis on work. Qohelet has chosen a word that describes work in Gen 3 well. Enns states that the choice of the word is evocative of the curse narrative Gen 3.⁴¹⁸ Crenshaw goes further: “עָמֵל “characterises existence in the same way the Yahwist did in the story of the fall.”⁴¹⁹ In Ecclesiastes it is used of labour and that which flows from it (Eccl 2:10-11, 18-19, 24; 3:13; 5:18-19 [17-18 Eng]; 8:15-17; 9:9). It is עָמֵל that keeps people occupied and busy, and wears them out (Eccl 10:15). Murphy

413 As a noun 22 times and a verb 13 times.

414 It is a proper noun in 1 Chr 7:35. עָמֵל is also a significant word in Job where it is used 8 times.

415 Cf. “trouble,” “hardship,” “misfortune,” “harm,” “mischief,” “wrong” (“עַצְבָּה,” DCH 4:481); “grief,” “hurt,” “pain,” “trouble” (“עָמֵל,” DCH 4:525-526). HALOT notes “care,” “grief,” “anxiety,” and “need” alongside “work” (“עָמֵל,” HALOTSE 1:845; 1:865).

416 This root only develops in the Hebrew Bible as a noun מְלָאכָה..

417 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 104; “עָמֵל,” DCH 4:525; “עָמֵל,” HALOTSE 1:845; “עָמֵל,” BDB 765-766.

418 Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 32.

419 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 60.

says, "It suggests the troubled life of humanity in this world against the background of death."⁴²⁰ In Eccl 2:20 the lack of profit from labour leads to despair.⁴²¹

Of the many passages that discuss work, two are significant for this thesis.

Ecclesiastes 1:3

מה-יתרין לאדם בכל-עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש:

What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun? Ecclesiastes 1:3

The question is rhetorical for it implies the absence of gain or profit (יתרין). Toiling under the sun is ubiquitous; it is humankind's lot or portion (חָלֵק) in life and the sum of their existence (Eccl 2:10, 21, 22; 5:18, 19; 9:9; cf. 3:22). While for each person the nature of work differs, whether it be that of powerful king or respected sage or humble labourer, in the end it all comes to nothing (Eccl 2:11, 16; 3:9) for all toil is profitless.⁴²² For Qohelet the frustration of work is not only physical but political and intellectual, for even a wise person who seeks it can never find it (Eccl 8:17).⁴²³ The phrase "under the sun"⁴²⁴ is also universal, meaning life in general. Mills sees the sun as representative of all creation but also as a marker of times and toil.⁴²⁵

420 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 32.

421 עֲמָל is not the only word used for work in Ecclesiastes. מְשַׁה is used of "things done under the sun" (Eccl 1:14). The verb עָשָׂה, to "do" or "make," is predictably frequent in Ecclesiastes where it occurs 64 times. עֵנִין, "business," "venture," or "occupation" is used 10 times in 8 verses, of which half refer to work (Eccl 1:13; 2:23; 3:10; 8:16).

422 This is another of Qohelet's absolute statements, which he will go on to question and temper. Perhaps the intention is to prompt the reader to ask what is profitable in life.

423 Blenkinsopp, "Ecclesiastes 3:1-15," 61.

424 "Under the sun" is used 29 times, "under heaven" 3 times (Eccl 1:13; 2:3; 3:1). Gilgamesh uses a similar phrase. "Only the gods [live] forever under the sun. As for mankind, numbered are their days: whatever they achieve is but wind" (tab. 2 lines 233-34). Crenshaw follows the Assyrian Fragment MS y₁ here. See Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 60; Janzen, "Under the Sun," 474; George, *Gilgamesh*, 357. George's standard edition of the text gives "With your feeble talk you [vex] my heart! As for man, [his days] are numbered, all that ever he did is but [wind]." Fredericks notes Qohelet uses three similar phrases "under the sun," "under heaven," and "on earth:" the totality of visible reality (Daniel C. Fredericks, *Coping With Transience: Ecclesiastes on Brevity in Life*, The Biblical Seminar 18 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 92).

425 Mills, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 38.

For Seow it means “in this world,”⁴²⁶ for Fox the “entire world,”⁴²⁷ and for Murphy “on earth.”⁴²⁸ As verse 4 illustrates, the phrase is not only geographical but spans all time (cf. v. 11). The phrase modifies *toil* when it is used to describe work that takes place under an oppressive heat of the sun (1 Sam 11:9; Ps 121:6; Isa 4:6; 49:10; Jonah 4:8; cf. Gen 3:19: “sweat of your brow”). Under the sun is Qohelet’s shorthand for a disharmony or brokenness that afflicts every aspect of life in this post-Edenic world.

Crenshaw considers this verse to be a rejection of Proverbs, where wisdom brings profit (Prov 12:14; 14:23; 16:3 cf. Eccl 8:17).⁴²⁹ Although the modern Christian reader may contrast things under the sun with heaven or eternity⁴³⁰ it is unlikely Qohelet’s audience would have understood it this way.⁴³¹ Qohelet contrasts “under the sun” not with the eternal but with the grave (Eccl 4:2-3; 9:3, 5-6, 10).⁴³² In Ecclesiastes work has assumed characteristics that flow directly from the events of Gen 3.

The rhetorical question of Eccl 1:3 should not be dismissed too quickly. It is the first statement after the frame editor’s universal הַבְלָה הַכֹּל הַבְלָה declaration. Not only is toil the first thing to be implicitly judged as הַבְלָה, it is also the first reason given that everything is הַבְלָה.⁴³³ It suggests frustration, for one would expect

426 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 105.

427 Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 4.

428 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 32.

429 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 59.

430 This is perhaps inspired by the frequency with which heaven and earth are juxtaposed (Matt 5:18; 16:19; 19:18-19; Mark 13:31; Luke 2:14; John 3:31; 1 Cor 15:47; Col 1:16; Rev 21:1). It may also suggest the success with which apocalyptic thinking has established itself in our minds.

431 Gilgamesh certainly does not make this contrast. The gods are included in what happens under the sun.

432 Qohelet appears to understand eternity in terms of what does occur under the sun: the continual cycles of nature (Eccl 1:4-9) and human progeny (Eccl 2:18; 4:8). Ecclesiastes 12:5 refers to an eternal home (*בֵּית עוֹלָמָן*) which may be contrasted with life under the sun. However, as neither the frame editor nor Qohelet expounds on what this eternal home may be, a contrast is not intended.

433 Everything is futile because there is no profit. It is unclear whether the narrator’s voice ends in verse 3 or 12. The point is moot as the language of this passage and its sentiments are so closely aligned with Qohelet’s views as to be indistinguishable from those of the frame editor. This assumes that the frame editor is an independent author not merely an additional persona of the one author responsible for the whole book. See Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 15.

profit to come from labour,⁴³⁴ and it raises the practical question, which recurs as a second Leitmotif throughout the book: why does work not bring profit? (Eccl 2:22; 3:9; 5:11, 15; 6:8, 11).⁴³⁵ This question at the head of the book should be considered programmatic. In Genesis work is worthwhile in that it produces food and enables life to continue and in Ecclesiastes the possibility that it may bring happiness is accepted (Eccl 2:10, 24; 3:13; 5:18-19 [17-18]; 8:15; 9:9). The question is intended to engage the reader in self-reflection, to ask: what is profitable in life?⁴³⁶

Profit (*יתרונות*) is another of Qohelet's favourite words. He uses it 10 times.⁴³⁷ It means "advantage" or "surplus" and includes that which remains after one ceases labour or that which endures, as one might consider the construction of a road or house as a lasting gain.⁴³⁸ *יתרונות* is an accounting term which Qohelet applies to human existence.⁴³⁹ His purpose is ironic. Rather than arguing that human life is a business, he warns that to do so can only lead to a flawed understanding of life, for physical gain is lost to humans while enjoyment is to be pursued (Eccl 4:8; 6:2-3; 8:15; 9:9). Qohelet does not declare his search to be for a metaphysical meaning of life. By his own confession, his search is decidedly pragmatic and this-worldly for it is concerned with what humans must do now, during the course of their lifetimes (Eccl 2:1, 3; 6:12): but ultimately it is *יתרונות* for which Qohelet searches.

According to this passage, attaining *יתרונות* is thwarted by mortality, for one generation is quickly succeeded by the next. Humankind's condition is unchanging because the dreams and the words of all come to nothing and creation remains affected by them (Eccl 5:7). All things are wearisome because ultimately

434 Qohelet will note several places where profit may be found (Eccl 2:13; 5:19; 7:12; 10:10; cf. 4:9).

435 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 33.

436 Fox gives an example of the kind of solutions that can be given; he states that *עמל* does provide profit but not "enough real value to compensate for the misery" it brings (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 4).

437 Eccl 1:3; 2:11, 13 [x2]; 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10, 11.

438 Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 33. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 46. Perdue argues strongly that "what remains" is the only viable meaning of *יתרונות*. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 235. DCH concurs giving the primary meaning of the *יתר* root as to "exceed," or be "left over," and as a noun "remnant," or "remainder" ("יתר," DCH 4: 399-340); cf. "יתר," HALOTSE 1:450.

439 Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 44.

nothing changes (Eccl 1:4-8). The poem of Eccl 2:6-11 expounds Qohelet's thesis. It makes clear that death is the enemy of profit (Eccl 1:4; 2:15); as in Genesis, toil is linked to mortality.

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְׁוּ עִינֵּי לֹא אָצַלְתִּי מֵהֶם לֹא-מִנְעָתִי אֶת-לְבִי
מִכָּל-שְׁמָחָה בַּיּוֹבִי שָׁמָחַ מִכָּל-עִמָּלִי וְזֹה-הִיא חָלְקִי מִכָּל-עִמָּלִי:

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

Ecclesiastes 2:10

Almost half (15) of the uses of **עִמָּל** occur in chapter 2. The first two of these are found in verse 10. This passage comes at the end of King Qohelet's productive phase which mirrors the creative acts of God in Gen 2 and follows his statement (Eccl 1:16-18) which expresses Qohelet's wisdom and abilities in superlative terms for he has exceeded the wisdom of all others.⁴⁴⁰ His work is unparalleled and beyond the reach of ordinary people.⁴⁴¹ Qohelet undertakes a personal search using his own resources and he makes his own assessment of success or failure.

"Whatever my eyes desired" is reminiscent of Gen 3:6.⁴⁴² Yet despite his success in the projects he undertakes (Eccl 2:9), he still does not achieve the **יְתֻרוֹן** he desires (Eccl 2:17-26). Human effort, no matter how great, cannot recreate Eden or undo the results of the fall.⁴⁴³ In light of this, Gordis contrasts Qohelet's toil in Eccl 2:11 with God's rest in Gen 2:3.⁴⁴⁴ God's rest on the seventh day is the conclusion of creation. Creation is intended to lead to rest. This rest is not God's alone, but rather is shared by the Israelites (Exod 16:27-30; 20:10-11). This rest is absent from Ecclesiastes where work is unending and achieves nothing (Eccl 1:3; 2:9, 20; 3:9; 4:8). It is possible to understand the *carpe diem* passages as aspiring to this rest.

⁴⁴⁰ Verheij notes the similarity of verbs and language used in the kingly experiment of Eccl 2-3 and the creation account of Gen 2 (plant; garden, tree/all/fruit; to drench; to sprout; to work; make (Verheij, "Paradise retried," 115). See page 8 above. In Gen 1 the human being is represented as a kingly figure. In Gen 2 he serves in the *paradeisos* of the divine king.

⁴⁴¹ This is one reason that the kingly persona is engaged.

⁴⁴² Crenshaw notes that this is something warned against in Num 15:39 (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 82).

⁴⁴³ Clemens, "The law of sin and death," 5.

⁴⁴⁴ Gordis, *Koheleth*, 209.

Surprisingly, this use of עמל is not negative (cf. 2:24; 3:13; 5:17 in 8:15 and שמחה can be found in עמל). Work is not a curse in Ecclesiastes, toil is. Labour can give reward and even pleasure in the process but it cannot provide the profit Qohelet seeks. The first use of עמל here is of toil, the second of what toil produces.

**פניתי אני בכל-מעשי שעשו ידי ובعمل שעמלתי לעשות והנה
הכל הבל ורעות רוח ואין יתרון תחת השם ש:**

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun. Ecclesiastes 2:11

Toil, pleasure, and reward have not achieved יתרון. Nothing has been gained under the sun. Qohelet realises that the distractions of pleasure and reward as “bread and circuses” are powerless to conceal the reality of injustice. There is no contradiction here, as pleasure, which Qohelet has already renounced, is of no value (Eccl 2:2), is not יתרון. There is no need, then, to explain the two verses in terms of different kinds of pleasure or pleasure attained by different means. Toil fails to meet Qohelet’s expectation since that which should bring pleasure instead brings despair, as can be seen in Gen 3 where עבדה becomes עצבון. A disconnect between labour and pleasure has occurred.

There is considerable irony, for the pleasure in toil that Qohelet discounts for himself he commends in the *carpe diem* passages for everyone else. In this he opens himself up to the charge of dismissing in advance the only answer he is going to find.

Qohelet describes the problems inherent in work in Eccl 10:8-9, for it often brings danger. Those who cultivate the land are subject to the vagaries of nature. Harvest is similarly unpredictable and while success may be found, it is far from certain (Eccl 11:2, 6; cf. 4:9), and the elements are capricious (Eccl 11:4) and unpredictable (Eccl 10:14b). The verses relating to work in chapters 10-11 are not confined to agriculture but stand as a symbol for all human endeavour. Reading Genesis 3 one might ask the question: is this state of affairs permanent or is there some hope that the hard labour given to the humans might be remitted? The humans who have

sought likeness with God have been forced back to the soil from which they were made and will return. Qohelet answers that this hard labour is permanent. But the frustration expressed in Ecclesiastes demonstrates that humans will continue to aspire for more. Work is still the human lot. Ecclesiastes 10:18 is reminiscent of Proverbs (Prov 10:4; 12:27) and almost ironic; work that will achieve nothing is still the only way to succeed.

Work, with the exception of forced labour, does not generally have negative overtones in either wisdom literature or the Bible as a whole, for it brings reward and blessing (Deut 24:19; 28:12; 30:9; Ruth 2:7-8; Job 1:10; Prov 12:11, 14; 14:23). Qohelet's intertextual use of Genesis here is "aggadic." He is expressing how the curse has found fruition in the world that he observes around him. Toil has consumed all human activity and become a source of despair (Eccl 2:17, 20, 22-23). Yet ironically, satisfaction is still found in toil. Qohelet describes both the oppressive nature of toil and the satisfaction it may bring as "from the hand of God," that is, ordained by God. This implies two things: firstly, that the toilsome nature of work has been decreed by God (Gen 3:17-19). And secondly, that humans have no means of regress and can only find joy by working within God's edict.

In Genesis, toil is an unremitting life-long experience; it encompasses "all the days of your life" (Gen 3:14, 17). Qohelet concurs: work, for humans, fills "all their days" (Eccl 2:23; 5:17; 9:9; cf. 8:15). This is a comparatively rare expression (28 times in total)⁴⁴⁵ and is used only in Deut 28:33 and Prov 15:15 in a similar context. This shared language gives further evidence of the connection between Gen 3 and Ecclesiastes.

Finding delight and enjoyment from labour might be considered sufficient reward in itself. This suggests that Qohelet wishes to make a point beyond everyday human experience and is dealing with larger theological issues. If toil is dismissed under the **הַבְלָ** judgement then this raises two questions: what kind of gain is Qohelet looking for and why is toil unable to provide it?

⁴⁴⁵ Gen 3:14, 17; Deut 4:9; 6:2, 16:3, 17:19; 28:33; Josh 1:5, 4:14; 1 Sam 1:11; 7:15; 1 Kgs 5:1; 11:34; 15:5, 6; 2 Kgs 25:29, 30; Ps 23:6; 27:4; 128:5; Prov 15:15; 31:12; Eccl 9:9 [x2]; Isa 38:20; 63:9; Jer 35:7, 8.

Why Toil Fails

Why does Qohelet paint such a negative view of toil, especially in light of the pleasure he acknowledges it can bring? Firstly, what is gained by toil does not compensate for the effort it requires (Eccl 2:22; 3:9; 4:6).⁴⁴⁶ The ground produces too many “thorns and thistles” and not enough “plants of the field.”

Secondly, toil does not produce what is needed to satisfy human aspirations because “the eyes are never satisfied” with the wealth toil produces (Eccl 4:8; 5:10). Labour supplies bodily needs but it cannot meet higher needs (Eccl 6:7; cf. 1:8).⁴⁴⁷ Qohelet makes a subtle distinction between the things that are themselves הַבְּלָי and the toil required to produce them.⁴⁴⁸ Eve, having all, wants more.

Thirdly, the accumulations of human labour cannot be enjoyed for long since either misfortune or death ends them (Eccl 2:18, 21; 5:14-15). Pleasure produces no lasting results (neither does the toil described in Eccl 2:4-8).⁴⁴⁹ The principle by which the hard-earned gains of one person are left to another (Eccl 2:20-21), which Fox describes as an unfair distribution of wealth, is really just an unavoidable consequence of mortality and in that sense an example of God’s capricious will (Eccl 2:26).

Fourthly, the inscrutable nature of God’s inscrutable times and purposes, which sets at hazard whatever security or control their toil might secure, is the lot (חֲלֵק) to which all people must resign themselves. Humans are unable to gain independent control over their lives (Eccl 2:24-25). Similarly, Eve’s attempt to gain independence and autonomy has achieved nothing.

⁴⁴⁶ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 122; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 47. עִמָּל is a heavy price that must be paid for a goal (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 18).

⁴⁴⁷ נְפָתֵח here is translated as appetite by the AV, NIV, NRSV and TNIV. This is because it refers to a person’s mouth (פה). A contrast is implied. Work provides food for the body but does not satisfy the needs of נְפָתֵח, needs that are beyond the stomach. Cf. Sir 18:30.

⁴⁴⁸ Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 129.

⁴⁴⁹ No lasting reward. Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 94.

Fifthly, in Genesis Adam himself is not cursed, rather it is his relationship with the ground that comes under curse. The priestly source reminds us that humanity is blessed (Gen 1:28; 9:1). No יתרכז is to be achieved from toil because creation itself attains no יתרכז (Eccl 1:3; cf. vv 4-7) and neither the passage of time nor the cycles found in creation can lift the curse.⁴⁵⁰

Qohelet's description of the wearisome nature of the work ordained by God is an echo of Gen 3 and the fall. Danker suggests that the daily drudgery of labour was instituted by God so that humans would look to Him for relief and God's gracious gift of enjoyment.⁴⁵¹ Labour is good (Eccl 5:12; 9:10) but has shortcomings (Eccl 2:18).⁴⁵² Labour has its blessings but at best produces mixed results. If Genesis is an etiological account of the origins of work with its pain and frustration, then this is certainly a theme that Qohelet draws upon. As von Rad states of Gen 3, "everything is threatened by failure and waste of time and often enough comes to nothing."⁴⁵³ Qohelet operates from this same premise.⁴⁵⁴

Ecclesiastes 1:13

נָתַתִּי אֶת־לְבִי לְדֹרֶשׁ וּלְתוֹר בְּחִכְמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נָעֲשָׂה תְּחִתְּ הַשְׁמִים הוּא עַנֵּין רָע נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְבָנֵי הָאָדָם לְעָנוֹת בָּו:

I applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all
that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that
God has given to human beings to be busy with.

Ecclesiastes 1:13

In this passage Qohelet uses the second of his words for work (**עַנֵּין** (the root occurs twice in this verse **עַנֵּין** "business" and **לְעָנוֹת** "to be busy"), which gives us an important insight into Qohelet's theology of toil. The unhappy business that humans are busy with is wholly attributed to God (Eccl 8:16-17; 9:1). Contrary to

450 Weeks considers Eccl 1:4-11 to refer to endless process rather than repeating cycles. Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 56.

451 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 15. Job believes that his nights of misery (לִילּוֹת עָמֵל), which he considers the lot of all humans, are divinely given. (Job 7:1-3; cf. Job 3:20; 5:7).

452 Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 265.

453 von Rad, *Genesis*, 95.

454 McKeown writes of the curse oracle in Gen 3: "Work is not always fully satisfying and sometimes does not yield adequate returns for the amount of effort expended" (McKeown, *Genesis*, 37). This summarises Qohelet's view of work perfectly.

Murphy, it is the subject matter of the search that is an unhappy business,⁴⁵⁵ not the search itself.⁴⁵⁶ The issue rests on whether Eccl 1:13 refers to the task Qohelet sets himself ("I applied my mind to seek")⁴⁵⁷ or the "deeds done under the sun." The word נַחַת is frequently used of God's sovereign actions in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 2:26; 3:10, 11; 5:17, 18; 8:15; 9:9). In Eccl 2:26 God gives wisdom and elsewhere labour: "What gain have the workers from their toil?" (Eccl 3:9-10, also עִזָּן/לְעִזָּנוֹת).

The search for wisdom is a task Qohelet sees as his own, but the unhappy business placed upon humans belongs to all. This is the first thing we are told about God and once more it correlates with Gen 3:17-19. What is more, as has been demonstrated above, Qohelet's understanding of, נַחַת is remarkably close to that of Genesis. Moreover, the search for wisdom is not said in Ecclesiastes to have been given by God. The unhappy business is life itself and as the first part of the verse

455 Longman considers at length the possible meanings of נַחַת (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 80). He rejects Murphy and Crenshaw's preference for "affliction" in favour of "task, situation, occupation, affair." He notes that as a noun, within the Bible, the word only occurs in Ecclesiastes. The word is used in later rabbinic texts and it is from here that he takes his meaning. Cf. Jastrow 2:1095a. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 11; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 72-73. It is quite possible that the similarities to the qal נָהַת "to answer" have coloured the choice of the word here, for the unhappy business is the answer to the questions Qohelet seeks to answer. See "נַחַת" HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 7134.

456 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 13. Krüger understands this verse to mean that God has given humans the impossible task of understanding the world. He connects the task given by God to Qohelet's own task of investigation and notes that God is not mentioned again until 2:24 (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 63). By contrast Fredericks believes that this refers to human toil. He associates the task with the endless cycles within creation and human endeavour (Eccl 1:3-11). Fredericks goes as far as to describe it as "part of the Edenic curse" (Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 77, 79). Ogden plumps for both possibilities: "our life, including the work God gives us, lies in the realm of what cannot be fully comprehended" (Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 40). He connects both to the task that Qohelet undertakes and what God has Himself done. Hence for him the phrase links what precedes and follows. Murphy assumes the wider context of chapter 2 for this verse – I understand the narrower context of verses 14 & 15 which associates the task God has given with the toil humans endure under the sun (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 13).

457 Nowhere in Ecclesiastes does Qohelet suggest that the search for wisdom is a God-given prerogative. Ecclesiastes 3:11 is the closest, but a sense of past and future does not equate to a command by God to search for knowledge, it simply implies that humans by nature desire to understand life.

and the one that follows tell us, it is “all that is done under the sun.”⁴⁵⁸ Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes ענין is used to describe labour not the quest for wisdom.⁴⁵⁹ In verse 14 it is work that is considered הַבְּלִי not the quest.

Verse 1:13 is best understood in light of verse 15, which is widely held to be a pre-existing aphorism (cf. Eccl 7:13).⁴⁶⁰ There is a crookedness (עוֹתָהּ) in the world that cannot be straightened.⁴⁶¹ At the start of his investigation Qohelet informs us that there is something wrong with the world. This is the work of God. (To state this is not the same as to accuse God of doing wrong, something Qohelet avoids: Eccl 7:29). God’s actions are seen as a judgement of humans. While they may be inscrutable (Eccl 3:11), they are not capricious (Eccl 3:17; 11:9; 12:14). Humans cannot change this crookedness, they can only live within it (cf. Job 8:3). The perfect form, taken in conjunction with the context, suggests that this state of

458 In Eccl 3:11 it is past and future that God has placed in human hearts, not the quest to find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. Krüger says it is “all actions in general,” but ultimately agrees with Murphy that it is the task of investigation given to humans (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 62). Fox also believes this refers to the quest: “this cannot refer to ‘all that happens under the sun,’ for God did not ‘give’ that to mankind, nor can humans be said to ‘busy’ themselves with it” (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 9). I disagree, for while Qohelet does describe onerous work as given to humans, he does not describe the quest for wisdom as so given. Therefore, understanding the “business” here as a quest for wisdom runs against the current of the book. Lohfink considers the miserable business to be human enterprise (Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 47). Seow considers the miserable business to be the quest for happiness. He also considers verse 15 in this context: “Qohelet accepts that there are distortions in the world for which God must ultimately be responsible” (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 146-7). Crenshaw states that God has placed a heavy yoke on humans but does not specify what this yoke is (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 72).

459 In Eccl 2:26 God gives the work (ענין) of gathering and heaping. In Eccl 2:23 it is the labourers’ work (ענינו) that is vexation and allows no rest. In Eccl 3:9-10 it is the workers’ toil that is described by syntax identical to 1:13 (ענין לענוות). In Eccl 4:8-10 it is the work of gathering possessions that is an unhappy business (ענין רע). In 5:2 [Eng 5:3] it is many cares (ברב ענין) - “the multitude of business” (AV). In Eccl 5:13 it is wealth lost through misfortune (בעניין רע). Ecclesiastes 8:16 comes closest to associating ענין with the quest for wisdom; however, it comes immediately after the “joy” exhortation that states that God gives humans labour. The business (הענין) that is done on earth, how one’s eyes see sleep neither day nor night, fits the description of a labourer better than a sage (hence the TNIV’s choice of “Labor”).

460 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 82; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 13; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 40; Fox *Ecclesiastes*, 9. The synthetic parallelism of this verse sets it apart from the verses surrounding it and marks it as an aphorism.

461 See page 67 above. Lohfink sees the crookedness as the back of the worker and the lack as a poor harvest. He explains these in terms of the economic background to the book (Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 50).

affairs occurred in the past and continues into the present.⁴⁶² God does not set out to frustrate human affairs on an ongoing basis; rather, the frustration exists because of His response to the events of Gen 3, a past event that has an ongoing significance. God is at the centre of the quest for understanding because by His curse the world has become what it is. In this Qohelet sees the curse as ongoing and the cause of frustration in life. This is to an extent an “aggadic” reading of Gen 3.

This approach to the world is consistent with Gen 3. Fox cites (and rejects) Rashi and Rashbam as holding that human corruption is implied here,⁴⁶³ and he is surely right, for humans remain ontologically good but have acquired the habit of sin. This habit of sinning is universal (Eccl 7:20).

What He is Searching For

Verse 1:3 asks the question: what do people gain from their toil? What then does Qohelet hope to gain? With the exception of the *carpe diem* passages⁴⁶⁴ and Eccl 4:9, the emphasis is always on what toil does not or cannot achieve. Verse 16 informs us that Qohelet hoped to achieve more than his predecessors but this he discovers is impossible. Ecclesiastes 2:19 suggests that Qohelet hoped his toil would showcase his great wisdom but this too is negated by the lottery of inheritance (Eccl 2:21) and the possibility of bad fortune (Eccl 5:14-15). Qohelet’s concern with the brevity of life and what is lost in death indicates that Qohelet is still looking for earthly immortality or at least control beyond death. These are themes Gen 3 addresses.⁴⁶⁵

462 Hebrew is an aspectual language. Therefore, the perfect form verbs should be interpreted as having a past, present, and continuing aspect. It is clear from the context of the book that Qohelet strongly suggests that he sees the burdens placed on humans as ongoing and as having past and future implications. See Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 464. GKC § 127.

463 Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 9. Rashi states, “What is crooked: during his lifetime, will not be able to be straightened after he dies.” *The complete Tanach with Rashi’s commentary*.

http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/16462 (10 March 2015). Rashi goes on to note: “He that is perverted when alive cannot correct himself when dead; and he who absented himself from the righteous, cannot be numbered with them when they receive reward.” Rashbam, commenting on the same verse, refers to it as the “inability of man who has once perverted his deeds to appear right in the presence of God as before.” See Christian D. Ginsburg, *Coheleth: Commonly called the Book of Ecclesiastes* (London: Longman, 1861), 41, 45.

464 Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:18-19 [5:17-18 Eng]; 8:15-17; 9:9.

465 Gilgamesh also addresses these issues (Tab I lines 41, 47-48; IX lines 77-78; X line 321-322; XI

What a person produces invites the envy of others and introduces competition (Eccl 4:4). This for Qohelet manifests itself in his concern for recognition (cf. Eccl 6:7). (This helps to explain why Qohelet is so concerned that the dead are no longer remembered). The word envy here is קָנָה, cf. 2:7 (קָנָה is the root from which Eve derives Cain's name [Gen 4:1]). It is envy that is the driving force in the Gen 4 narrative (cf. Num 24:21-22). As noted above, sibling rivalry is a major theme across Genesis (Gen 15:7; 16:4; 30:1).

Death

בְּזִיעַת אֲפֵיךְ תִּאכְלֶל לְחֵם עַד שׁוֹבֵךְ אֶל־הָאָדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לְקַחְתָּ
כִּי־עַפֵּר אַתָּה וְאֶל־עַפֵּר תִּשׁוֹב:

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Genesis 3:19

In Genesis death is a result of eating from the tree, but it is consequential only of the curse upon the ground and the prohibition of eating from the tree of life.⁴⁶⁶ In the curse oracle God defines death as the physical death that comes at the end of a hard life. That is the return to **אָדָמָה**: Adam's pre-creational state. The juxtaposition of death and toil suggests that life is shortened by working the unresponsive ground (cf. Gen 12:10; 26:1; 41:36; 42:4). Adam comes from the soil, works the soil and returns to the soil.

Both he and the serpent receive a "dust" judgement. The serpent eats dust (Gen 3:14). The man is condemned to eat the ground from which he came (Gen 3:17, 19 – "you shall eat of it all the days of your life" – and to return to it in death – "and to dust you shall return." The ground governs human origin, life and death. The serpent also eats dust, which is descriptive of its locomotion. This is (rightly) taken by most commentators to imply humiliation,⁴⁶⁷ but as with the human condition, may also be associated with death. It is this death that is referred to in verse 15

lines 7, 208, 295-300

466 The fruit is not poisonous and eating of it does not in itself cause death.

467 Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 79; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 197.

(which is sometimes called the proto-evangelium).⁴⁶⁸ As von Rad comments, every encounter between a human and a snake is an encounter of life and death.⁴⁶⁹ Serpents and humans are set forever at enmity.⁴⁷⁰

As noted above, Gen 3 certainly can be viewed once again as etiological, explaining how and why death is part of the human lot.⁴⁷¹ The account goes on to tell us that humans only lose the possibility of immortality when they are barred from the tree of life; humans have no inherent immortality. God acknowledges Adam and Eve are capable of eternal life should they eat or continue to eat from the tree of life. Revelation 22 uses the image of the tree of life in this way. Exile from the garden means slow, inevitable death. It is this finality that haunts Ecclesiastes.

If, in Gen 3, we learn that death is now humankind's inevitable end, then almost immediately, in the murder of Abel by Cain, we learn that it can also be a violent end. Violence begets fear and Cain lives in fear of those who might take revenge upon him.⁴⁷² Violence begets violence and Lamech, who in Jewish tradition killed Cain, boasts of killing a young man for striking him (Gen 4:23).⁴⁷³ In the following chapter, death is the unremitting destiny of all human life as generations come and go. This is encapsulated in the word **נֶמֶת** (used eight times in the priestly

468 Wood, *Genesis*, 35; Kissling, *Genesis*, 202; Kidner, *Genesis*, 70. That is the first declaration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, i.e., the understanding that it is only in the birth and crucifixion of Jesus that the serpent will be defeated and the effects of the "Fall" negated.

469 von Rad, *Genesis*, 92. This gives an additional reason why a serpent is chosen. Of the limited number of Levantine animals capable of inflicting mortal wounds on a human the serpent is the one people are most likely to encounter unexpectedly.

470 In the frequency with which snakes attack humans by surprise one can see a connection with the description in 3:1 of their cunning.

471 Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 100.

472 McEntire sees violence as the central concern of the passage. It is the most obvious result of the curse of chapter 3: it changes creation, breaks relationships, and crowds out the presence of God. Violence is the creature crouching at the door, Gen 4:7 (Mark McEntire, *The Blood of Abel: The Violent Plot in the Hebrew Bible* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 25-27).

473 Didymus the Blind, *On Genesis* 4:25; Gen 4:23-24; cf. Ben Askenazi, *On Genesis* 37; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 167. Other traditions suggest he was killed in the flood (*Genesis Rabbah* 22:12).

genealogy of Gen 5). Enoch is the sole exception but he does not receive the kind of immortality that Genesis 3:22 tells us humans are capable of and to which Adam could have aspired: he is simply taken by God.

וְמֵעַז הַדָּעַת טוֹב וֶרֶעׁ לֹא תִאכְלֶנּוּ מִמְּנָנוּ מוֹת:
תְּמוֹת:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.
Genesis 2:17

Here death is not a punishment but a consequence of human choice. The humans do not die on the day they eat nor are we told they become mortal (that is, subject to atrophy) but from this point their deaths are inevitable. God will not permit them to live forever having attained the knowledge of good and evil. Nothing is said here of spiritual death, though the loss of innocence and a changed relationship with each other and God are emphasised and may be described as a kind of spiritual death.⁴⁷⁴ The undertone of human maturation is never far from this account.⁴⁷⁵ Death was always present but in the garden the humans were shielded from it rather as little children are shielded from unpleasantness by their parents.

Death in Ecclesiastes

Death is an unavoidable part of human existence and as such is addressed across the pages of the First Testament. In the First Testament death is always to be avoided but it is an accepted part of the human experience. Ecclesiastes is the one exception.⁴⁷⁶ It is only Ecclesiastes that laments the wrongness of death and treats it as the central fact of human existence. “For death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.” Eccl 7:2 (TNIV).

474 Moberly, *Genesis*, 70-87. Moberly considers alienation from God to be the “real issue” behind the use of death in Genesis 2-3 (idem, “Did the serpent get it right?” 17; idem, “Did the interpreters get it right?,” 37). For consideration of his argument see footnote 377 above. Barr considers death here to be physical death which God steps back from imposing. “It is a story of how human immortality was gained, but in fact was lost” (James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 8; idem, “Is God a liar?” 4, 19, 21).

475 See: Lyn M. Bechtel, “Adam and Eve: A Myth About Maturation,” *Continuum* 3 (1994): 152-173; Jonathan Magonet, *A Rabbi Reads the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 125.

476 Enns describes Qohelet as the only Old Testament author to question death (Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 130).

Death includes all humans and animals (Eccl 4:20),⁴⁷⁷ the wise and the foolish (Eccl 2:14, 17; cf. 7:2; 9:4), and nullifies every distinction of poor and rich (Eccl 3:19-20; 4:2). The equality of all in death offends Qohelet and provides a sceptical rejoinder to the claim in Proverbs that the acquisition of wisdom defers death (Prov 7:25-27; 8:36; 10:2; 11:4; 12:28; 13:14; 14:27). However, Qohelet's concern, as that of Genesis, is not primarily with untimely death, but with the fact of death that all face and none may escape.

Death means that any advantage gained in life, whether it be material or immaterial, whether of goods, wisdom, reputation or righteousness, is ephemeral. Death is indifferent to justice, for a good person may perish young and an evil person may enjoy a long life. Death does not obey the rules of retribution (Eccl 7:15). Death is הַבָּل.⁴⁷⁸

Another injustice, it seems, is that death causes both the wise and foolish to be forgotten (Eccl 1:11; 2:16), therefore no generation can achieve more than the proceeding one. Qohelet considers this a great wrong, for posterity was important to him (Eccl 2:12).⁴⁷⁹ No one knows the time of his or her death or has control over it (Eccl 3:2; 8:8). Death may come unexpectedly, or through carelessness (Eccl 9:4; 10:8), and there is little point in striving after great wickedness or great righteousness since neither will have any bearing on the time of the possessor's death. Premature death is to be avoided: "Why die before your time?" (Eccl 7:17). Death is likened to a war which spares no soldiers (Eccl 8:8), a fate that strips us of everything so that we leave this world as we entered it (Eccl 5:15), a destiny that in depriving us of the fruits of our labours renders all labour grievous (Eccl 2:17-18).

All creation is undone by death and only the Creator is left (Eccl 12:1, 7). Death is the ultimate expression of the curse in Ecclesiastes for in it God revokes the gift of life.⁴⁸⁰

477 Humans are the only animals that know they will die (cf. Eccl 9:5).

478 As Andrews notes, it is also death that causes everything else to be הַבָּל (Andrews, "Ecclesiastes 7:1-19," 300. cf. Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 20).

479 This is another of Qohelet's conclusions that is stated in order to be questioned.

480 Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 101.

Qohelet has more radical things to say about death.

The dead who have already died⁴⁸¹ are more fortunate than the living, for they are free of the evil done under the sun, but better still are those who have never lived.

Ecclesiastes 4:2.

If a stillborn child is better than someone who lives 2000 years then everything in life is **הבל**.⁴⁸² This is because it is only the living who know misery (Eccl 8:6).

Statements such as “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting” and the “day of death is better than the day of birth” (Eccl 7:1-2) force the reader to confront the question of the nature of life.⁴⁸³ Humans must find meaning in the knowledge of their own death (Eccl 6:11; 9:5). Death measures the meaning of life. A wise person will think through the meaning and implications of death (Eccl 7:1-2).⁴⁸⁴ This consideration will enable a person to live life more fully. The book concludes with a poem (Eccl 12:1-8) describing a slow degeneration towards death.⁴⁸⁵ Qohelet gives a considered response to the existence of death and its implications for humans. In doing so he evokes the content of Genesis (Eccl 3:20; 12:7). By referencing the Genesis passage exclusively (he references no other known passages about death), Qohelet indicates that his views on death are to be understood against the background of Gen 3 and are intended as a comment upon it.

481 As opposed to the dead who have not already died? Title for my next book “Zombies in the First Testament.”

482 Job expresses similar emotions in his soliloquy, declaring it would have been better for him to have been stillborn than to have faced the grief of life in this world (Job 3:10-13, 16). However, here the similarity ends, for within the import of the book Job speaks out of his own infirmity, whereas for Qohelet this is a philosophical argument.

483 These are statements that Qohelet will modify elsewhere (Eccl 5:18; 7:12; 8:15; 9:9; 10:19). They represent a provocative extreme. Not only does Qohelet investigate death, he also encourages his audience to do the same.

484 Davis agrees with this understanding of the role of death: “Studying death can help you live life to the fullest.” Davis, “Death: An Impetus for life,” 229.

485 The description of death here counters the creation passage at the start of the book (note the inclusio: Eccl 1:2; 12:8) and has strong eschatological overtones as it refers to an act of uncreation in which the sun and moon go dark (Eccl 12:2; cf. Isa 13:10; 60:19; Joel 3:15). It is a cosmic death: that is the uncreation of the world. See Sharp, “Ironic Representation,” 90; Davis, “Death: An Impetus for life,” 306. Longman likewise compares sun, moon, stars and lights with Gen 1:3-5 (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 268); cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 353.

Unlike **עמל** and **הבל**, which occur predominantly in the first half of the book, references to death can be found throughout.⁴⁸⁶ Enns says that if we could summarise Qohelet's problem, including the problem he has with God, it would be that people die.⁴⁸⁷ It is not only death that concerns Qohelet but the fact that people know it awaits them (Eccl 2:14, 18; 5:18; 9:5). It is this that renders life tragic or futile (Eccl 2:17). This is the sentence under which Adam lives, for he knows that with the tree of life proscribed to him he too awaits death (Gen 3:17; Eccl 9:5).

Qohelet's Theology of Death

In Genesis and Ecclesiastes death is represented not as God's punishment for disobedience but as a consequence of human action that is then enforced by God. It is only in this regard that it is divine judgement. God ordains the scope of each person's life (Eccl 3:2; 7:1; 8:6, 8, 15) but His ordinances are unknowable (Eccl 8:6-8).⁴⁸⁸ In Ecclesiastes 2:14, 3:19 and 9:2-3 the NRSV translates (**מקרה**) ("happening" or "occurrence") as "fate," emphasising the fixed and divine nature of death.⁴⁸⁹ Life is a gift from God (Eccl 5:18; 8:15; 9:9) and its duration is part of the lot (**חלה**) prescribed for each person (Eccl 5:17, 19). The God who gives breath in Gen 1:30 and 2:7 receives it back in Eccl 12:7. By contrast, the dead have no **חלה** (Eccl 9:10). **חלה** is used with a tone of resignation. In Eccl 9:9 **חלה** is used to convey the paradoxical injunction that we must live joyfully while life itself remains vain (**חיה הבלים**).⁴⁹⁰ It implies that life under the sun is brief and restricted by God (**אשר נתן לך**). This echoes Gen 3:17: it is *the toil you shall eat of all the days of your life*. In Eccl 9:7 and Gen 3:19 we find the same preoccupations with divine judgement, toil, the transitoriness of life, and enjoying the moment. Every aspect of the life lived under the sun described by Qohelet is a product of the curse of Genesis.

486 It is also implied in the use of the phrases "after them" (Eccl 1:11; 2:12; 6:12; 7:14) and "after me" (Eccl 2:18).

487 Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 130.

488 Ecclesiastes 7:17 suggests life can be shortened but not extended (cf. Eccl 8:13).

489 DCH gives the meaning as "accident," "chance," "fate" or "fortune" ("**מקרה**," DCH 5:471).

"Fate" is a perfectly acceptable translation here, but, allowing for the dangers of illegitimate totality transfer, the broader meaning of the word which connects the meaning to an "incident" or "occurrence" must be considered in its meaning.

490 Vain here is better translated "transient" or "brief."

In Genesis, death is introduced to limit human existence (Gen 6:3-7). Death prevents the humans from living forever with their new-found knowledge of good and evil. The verse implies that God wishes to prevent humans from “being like one of us,” that is, possessing the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 3 is only concerned with the effects of the knowledge of good and evil and the imposition of death.⁴⁹¹ However, in Ecclesiastes its effects are felt in every part of life because death affects all things. Knowledge, memory, possessions are all lost because of death. One of the core meanings of הַבָּל is to denote something as temporal.⁴⁹² Death and הַבָּל are linked strongly in the book. All things are הַבָּל because death makes them so. In this, Ecclesiastes is a dramatic expansion of Gen 3.⁴⁹³

In Ecclesiastes, mortality cuts humans short of ever reaching their potential (Eccl 3:22; 6:12) and robs them not only of all that they have worked for but also of any ultimate meaning in life. The temporariness of life is a grievous evil (Eccl 5:16). To attempt to achieve anything that will survive death is a chasing after the wind, an impossible goal (Eccl 5:15). By contrast, God is eternal (Eccl 3:14). Death reminds people that their fate is the same as the animals’ (Eccl 3:18) and that they are dissimilar to God.

The First Testament, in general, sees death as inevitable. Eventually, all die. Ecclesiastes concurs but it also sees death as a great wrong. Death is unjust.⁴⁹⁴ This is especially evident in the way Qohelet juxtaposes the brevity of human life with a never-changing creation (Eccl 1:3), the eternity of God (Eccl 3:14), the eternity that He has place in the human heart (Eccl 3:11), and the eternal nature of death itself (Eccl 12:5). As noted, this is quite different from the rest of the First Testament. Death for Qohelet has a wrongness about it. This raises the question of why Qohelet has such a different view of death? How can he treat something so

491 Krüger understands Eccl 3:11 in the light of Genesis: “the paradise story would then be understood here in the sense that people cannot go beyond the boundaries of knowledge set for them by God” (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 87).

492 “Transitory” (“הַבָּל,” HALOTSE, 1:237); “Fleeting” (“הַבָּל,” DCH 2:485).

493 This is in line with Hays’ understanding of intertextuality which he states must say more than the original text: it must reinterpret (Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 10). For further consideration of this see page 31 above.

494 Matthew S. Rindge, “Mortality and Enjoyment: the Interplay of Death and Possessions in Qoheleth,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 73 (2011): 267.

universal as though it were alien? Why should he be offended by the idea of others inheriting his wealth? Or, that somehow his wisdom should exempt him from the fate of the fool? Or, that human destiny should be different from that of animals? God has placed a sense of past and future within humans that they are unable to actualise.

The meaning of **העלם** here is debated but could imply a long period (perhaps eternity).⁴⁹⁵ Here it probably means temporal perspective, a “sense of past and future” (the NRSV’s translation). An unattainable future stretches beyond human grasp and this limits the human ability to understand God’s purpose. The verse is an expression of lament.⁴⁹⁶ For Qohelet this is a tension: death is an unavoidable part of human existence but ought not to be so. It is an imposition. The only other place in the First Testament where death is not considered to be inherent to human existence is Gen 3, but when Adam and Eve are barred from the tree of life, death becomes their unquestioned fate. That the First Testament, and most noticeably Genesis, contains no quest for immortality, such as that undertaken by Gilgamesh, is surprising. Genesis introduces this tantalising possibility of immortality without then exploring whether it may in some way be regained.⁴⁹⁷ The gradual ebb of human immortality in the pages of Genesis as longevity slowly decreases⁴⁹⁸ is never questioned until Qohelet’s expression of loss (Eccl 2:3; 5:18; 6:12; 11:9). Such a lament implies an expectation that life could be longer.

495 Ronald F. Youngblood, “Qoheleth’s ‘dark house’ (Eccl 12:5),” *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (1986): 397-410; Seow, Ecclesiastes, 364. For further consideration of **טַלְעָם** see page 57 above.

496 That is in general terms rather than in its technical meaning as a classification of a psalm or even within Brueggemann’s wider theology of lament.

497 As Barr points out correctly, the account of Enoch does address human mortality. He also points out that Genesis presents the possibility of life without death rather than life after death (Barr, *The Hope of Immortality*, 19).

498 Genesis charts the reduction in the length of human life from potentially infinite (Gen 3:22) through the long lives of the antediluvians (Gen 5), and the reduced lifespans of Noah’s descendants (Gen 9:19-24), to the shorter lives of the patriarchs: Abraham 175 (Gen 25:7), Ishmael 137 (Gen 25:17), Isaac 180 (Gen 35:28), Jacob 147 (Gen 47:28; cf. 47:9), and Joseph 110 (Gen 50:26).

Life should be more fulfilling than it is and everything should not be **הַבָּל**. Death imposes limits on all human activity (Eccl 9:10). There is a sense within the book that life is less than it should be. In addition to this, death is a mystery. Lohfink comments, “what death is is hidden from humans.”⁴⁹⁹ It is an insoluble problem that leads to despair (Eccl 2:20). Qohelet is a critic of death. This criticism implies that at least at one point there was an alternative (Eccl 3:2).⁵⁰⁰

In the context of Genesis, Qohelet is saying that God was right: death is the inevitable result of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). This death is not immediately physical or even spiritual. It is one that affects every area of human life and destroys all. Death is the ultimate reality of human existence. Nowhere in Ecclesiastes does Qohelet hold God responsible for the existence of death. Death is seen as inevitable and from a human perspective a wrongness but Qohelet does not describe it as a divine punishment or as unjust. In Eccl 2:21 it is not death that is evil but rather the results it brings.⁵⁰¹ However, in this Qohelet establishes death as humanity’s greatest enemy.⁵⁰²

For Qohelet the wrongness of death is not wholly negative. If the purpose of life cannot be found in the things that death annihilates – fame, wisdom, possessions and wealth - then it must be looked for elsewhere (Eccl 5:10). (Toil also fails to fulfil human aspirations). Qohelet uses death to bring his audience, ancient and modern, to the point of crisis.⁵⁰³ Qohelet uses death to deconstruct life but he also reconstructs it, most notably in the passages calling for the enjoyment of life.

Though life has no meaning, it can still be lived well and in this lies the challenge.⁵⁰⁴ Qohelet’s fundamental question is this: “What is good to do with life?” (Eccl 2:1, 3; 3:12; 6:12).

499 Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 2.

500 How can the wise die just like fools? (Eccl 2:16 NRSV). (Like the fool, the wise too must die! Eccl 2:16 TNIV). This suggests that in Qohelet’s mind there should be a different destiny for the wise. As this is in direct contrast to his statements on the unavoidable nature of death (Eccl 3:2; 7:2; 8:8; 9:5) we must assume he has a reason for such a hope. This verse contains nothing that would suggest Qohelet expected that the wise should avoid only premature death, as the context is posterity.

501 This is also true of Eccl 4:8 and 8:10, where death is implied.

502 Cf. 1 Cor 15:26.

503 Mills, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 88.

504 Dor-Shav, “Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I,” 218.

The book ends in death. The poem of Eccl 12 describes a slow and inevitable decent into old age and oblivion. This is Qohelet's final word, for it is death that renders the human endeavour futile. Yet it is found in the context of the last and longest of the *carpe diem* passages to which it is linked by the charge to remember (Eccl 11:8; 12:1), clouds, darkness, and rain (Eccl 11:4, 8; 12:2, 3), sowing, reaping and grinding (Eccl 11:4; 12:4), birth and death (Eccl 11:5; 12:5), and the inception and expiration of breath (Eccl 11:5; 12:7). Chapter 11 is a charge to enjoy and to make the most of life. Impending death is a call to live life to the full. It is also a reminder of our subservience to God. Life, then, must be pursued in the face of death.

Knowledge of Good and Evil

The acquisition of knowledge and wisdom are themes found in Gen 3 and Ecclesiastes. In Genesis there are two trees, the one of immortality and the other of the knowledge of good and evil⁵⁰⁵ but should humans choose knowledge then they must lose immortality and become subject to death. The trees are mutually exclusive. Eating from the tree of life requires abstinence from the tree of knowledge and eating from the tree of knowledge proscribes eating from the tree of life.⁵⁰⁶ It is for this reason that God prohibits eating from the tree of knowledge. Danger exists within the garden. Yet this tree appears to hold out the promise of wisdom and of that which is good, delightful, and desirable (Gen 3:6). This wisdom is ambiguous, for neither the form it takes, what the knowledge of good and evil is, nor how they make a person like God, are explained to us directly. Understanding the meaning of this tree is a critical element in understanding the passage.⁵⁰⁷ Frequently the tree is regarded as the tree of knowledge but Genesis is careful to explain that it confers the specific knowledge of good and evil, not general knowledge.⁵⁰⁸ There is a strong likelihood that good and evil represent a

505 The word evil is retained here as the traditional translation of *עַל* in this context (AV, NRSV, NASV, and TNIV). “Bad” (JPS) is arguably a better translation as evil is not a concept the First Testament emphasises or perhaps even knows (cf. Gen 24:50).

506 This, it would appear, is a deliberate narrative device which is intended to set the trees in opposition to each other.

507 Lester J. Kuyper, “To Know Good and Evil,” *Interpretation* 1 (1947): 492.

508 Stern connects this new-found ability with the list of technologies invented by Cain’s descendant (Gen 4:17, 20-22) (Stern, “Knowledge of Good and Evil,” 413). Cf. 1 Enoch 7:10; 8:1. Gene M. Tucker, “Creation and the fall: A reconsideration,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 13

merism.⁵⁰⁹ Both good and evil are relative terms in Hebrew. Good, when used in wisdom aphorisms, frequently means better (Eccl 7:1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10; cf. Gen 16:6; 29:19; 45:18). Both **בָּטִיחָה** and **עַרְעָךְ** have broader meanings than their English counterparts.⁵¹⁰ A merism refers only to what is delimited by its parts, in this case good and evil. These words would be an odd choice were the tree of knowledge intended to refer to physical or technological knowledge.⁵¹¹

If the tree promises complete knowledge then the reality seriously disappoints. Humans in Genesis are not portrayed as having advanced knowledge, and certainly not possessing knowledge in a way that would make them comparable with God (Gen 3:22).⁵¹² God's provision of skins in place of fig leaves suggests the inadequacy of human technology.

Good and evil juxtaposed with knowledge are used together elsewhere in the First Testament.⁵¹³ In 1 Kgs 3:9 King Solomon prays for an understanding mind (**לֶב שׁמֹעַ** a listening heart) so he can govern God's people by discerning good from evil.⁵¹⁴ This request is associated with wisdom (1 Kgs 3:12) and then illustrated by the wisdom story of the two prostitutes (1 Kgs 3:16-28). Solomon demonstrates the

(1978): 118; Kuyper, "Good and Evil," 492; Eduard Nielsen, "Creation and the Fall of Man: A Cross-Disciplinary Investigation," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 43 (1972): 16.

509 Arguably, a synecdoche as good and evil are contrasting pairs.

510 As nouns **טוֹב** and **רַע** are used in Gen 24:50; 31:24 and 29 to express extremes of good and bad, in Gen 24:50 the NRSV translates **בָּטִיחָה אוֹתוֹבָה** as "one way or another." As an adjective the root **בָּטִיחָה** is translated "attractive" or "beautiful" (Gen 6:2; 24:16; 26:7); "healthy" (Gen 41:5, 35); "favourable" (Gen 40:16); and as a noun an "appropriate choice" (Gen 19:8; 20:15). As an adjective **עַרְעָךְ** is translated "wicked" (Gen 6:5; 38:7); "displeasing" (Gen 28:8); "harmful" (Gen 31:29); "wild" or "dangerous" (Gen 37:20); "downcast" (Gen 40:7); "ugly" or "thin" (Gen 41:3); "hard" (Gen 47:9); and as an abstract noun "suffering" (Gen 44:34); and

511 The first use of technology by the humans, clothing fashioned from fig leaves, is surely a narrative comment on the humans' lack of technological prowess. Clark suggests that had general knowledge been intended here, "heaven and earth" or "large and small" would have been more appropriate delimiters (Malcolm W. Clark, "Legal Background to the Yahwist's use of 'Good and Evil' in Genesis 2-3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 270).

512 According to Clark, the serpent, whom he identifies as Satan, portrays the knowledge of good and evil as the knowledge of everything. In doing this, the serpent claims more for the tree than he knows it to possess and Eve perhaps expects more than she receives (Clark, "Good and Evil," 222).

513 2 Sam 13:22; 1 Kgs 22:8, 18; Job 30:26; Ps 36:5; Prov 27:10; 31:12; Eccl 8:12; Amos 5:14-15; Mic 3:2.

514 Clark suggests that in context (verse 11) govern (**עֲבֵדָה**) means judge. The two ideas are certainly closely related elsewhere in the First Testament (Gen 16:5; 31:53; 49:16; Exod 2:14; Judg 2:18) (Clark, "Good and Evil," 267).

skills a sage should aspire to, the ability to observe and understand the ways of the world and then to judge accordingly. In this passage good and evil have to do with the ability to make correct moral decisions.⁵¹⁵

In Deut 1:39 the phrase is used of children who are not yet capable of knowing good from evil (**לא ידעו היום טוב ורע**) and are therefore not responsible for their parents' rebellious wilderness choices. A similar phrase is found in Isaiah's "Immanuel" passage where it is used of a child maturing to moral accountability (**יאכל לדעתו מאוס ברע ובחר בטוב**) (Isa 7:15-16)). Not to know good and evil means not to be morally, or perhaps legally, responsible for your actions.

In Deut 30:15, good is associated with life and evil with death (cf. Job 30:26).⁵¹⁶ This association is also found in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 2:3; 3:12; 7:15). The children of Israel must choose between them. Psalm 37:27 also uses the two words to describe a choice between righteousness and evil (cf. Ps 52:5[3]; Prov 14:22; Isa 5:20). In 2 Sam 14:17 (as in Genesis) the ability to discern good and evil (**לשמע הטוב והרע**) is seen as a quasi-divine attribute that makes its bearer like an angel of God (2 Sam 14:17). The implication is that such an ability comes from God. In 2 Sam 19:35 Barzillai bemoans that at 80 years of age he can no longer discern between good and bad (**אנכى היום האדע בז'טוב לרע**). By this he means recognising qualitative sensory differences in taste and pleasure.

In Gen 24:50 the phrase **רע או טוב** is used where God's will cannot be gainsaid.⁵¹⁷ Genesis 31:24 and 29 the same phrase is used in a different context. In Laban's dealings with Jacob Laban is not free to choose for himself how he should act but must follow the divinely revealed will. In Leviticus it is used of a priest judging an

515 The adoption of the Solomon persona by Qohelet makes this passage important to the reader of Ecclesiastes. The references to good and evil in Ecclesiastes should then be understood as part of the kingly persona and another reason that this persona is used. Solomon has the ability to discern good and evil given to him by God as a kingly prerogative. Qohelet is the ultimate wise man and knows good from evil.

516 Cf. Moberly, *Genesis*, 70-87.

517 Abraham's servant is explaining his encounter with Rebekah and proposing her marriage to Isaac Laban and Bethuel recognise this as from the Lord and as a result refuse to "speak to you anything bad or good" (Gen 24:50). **דבר אליו רע או טוב** (Gen 24:50).

offering made to God (Lev 27:10-14, 33). Clark notes that these words are not used of casual conversation but were authoritative utterances made by authoritative people.⁵¹⁸

In summary, where good and evil are found together they are consistently used of moral, ethical, or qualitative choices. Occasionally, they are used of something that is physically good or evil (Gen 41:3-5). Other biblical usage is consistent with Genesis. Never is good and evil used of general, intellectual, or technological knowledge.

The knowledge of good and evil is not sexual knowledge. According to the priestly account the humans have already been commanded to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28).⁵¹⁹ The prohibition is given before the woman is separated from the human, which militates against a sexual understanding of good and evil. Furthermore, God is not described as sexual; consequently, it is hard to see how eating the fruit and attaining sexual maturity makes the humans like God.⁵²⁰ Adam is described as clinging to his wife, which suggests sexual connection, prior to the consumption of the fruit.

The root יְדַעַת can mean to experience, as well as to know (Deut 7:15; Judg 3:1-2) and is used of sexual connection (Gen 4:1),⁵²¹ although there is no indication that this is how it is used here.⁵²² The humans have already experienced good (Gen 2:9a) and, if not evil, at least in God's evaluation, what is not good (Gen 2:18). Ironically, in

518 Clark, "Good and Evil," 275. He sees Barzillai's statement as an abdication from his role as the head of the family. Stern notes that in "The Rules of the Congregation" found at Qumran (1QSa 1:10) the knowledge of good and evil is used to describe the age at which people can make communal decisions (Stern, "Knowledge of Good and Evil," 416).

519 Gordis sees the knowledge of good and evil as sexual knowledge, noting that the verb יְדַעַת is used as a euphemism for sexual relations (Gen 4:1, 17, 25). He suggests that יְדַעַת means normal sexual behaviour and יְרָא abnormal sexual behaviour. However, neither יְדַעַת nor יְרָא can be shown to have this meaning elsewhere and יְדַעַת as a euphemism for sex represents a minority of its uses (Gen 4:9; 8:11; 12:11; 15:8, 13) (Robert Gordis, "The knowledge of good and evil in the Old Testament and the Qumran Scrolls," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957): 131).

520 Stern, "Knowledge of Good and Evil," 406.

521 "יְדַעַת," HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 3570:3. It is probably from the meaning "to experience" that its use as a euphemism for sex arises (Gen 4:1; 19:33).

522 Vogels take the view that יְדַעַת here means "to experience". Although he does not give a reason, he seems to equate the act of eating with the concept of experiencing (Walter Vogels, "Like One of Us, Knowing tôb and ra'" (Gen 3:22)," *Semeia* 81 (1998): 150).

pursuing what they believe to be good (Gen 3:6) they instead experience evil, firstly in terms of the curse and then through the actions of their son. Sensory experience seems to be an intended outcome of life in the garden, for the trees are good for food and visually pleasing, rather than healthy and strengthening. After eating the fruit the couple's eyes are opened and they experience shame, fear, and blame. These are new sensations for them. Open eyes implies a new way of seeing something (cf. Gen 13:14-15; 21:19; 22:13; 30:41).

Knowledge is not the only consequence of eating the fruit, for Eve sees that the tree is desirable for making one wise. Within the context of this passage wisdom is the ability to discern good from evil.⁵²³ We are not told that humans become wise but that they learn what good and evil are. Since knowledge is attained by eating, it is safe to assume that so is the anticipated wisdom. Eve's assessment of the tree as desirable for making one wise appears to parallel God's (Gen 3:22) and the serpent's (Gen 3:5) description of the tree as imparting knowledge.⁵²⁴ She is already capable of recognising, at least in her opinion, what is good.

As noted above, the knowledge of good and evil is associated with maturation and the ability to make moral choices for oneself. This can be observed in Genesis. Until Gen 3 God has been the sole arbiter of what is good. He has looked at creation and described it as good (Gen 1:31) and at Adam and decided it is not good for him to be alone (Gen 2:18). God ordains where humans should live and what they should do (God instructs Adam to name all the animals) and what they should eat. God is portrayed in these early chapters of the Bible as a benevolent dictator making choices for the humans.⁵²⁵ Eating of the tree should not be primarily understood as an act of disobedience but rather as firstly, a choice of moral independence and secondly, an act of maturation. It remains an act of disobedience, for it breaks a divine prohibition and incurs punishment.⁵²⁶

523 Good, "The Unfilled Sea," 38.

524 In Gen 3:22 God is stated as having the knowledge of good and evil. Whether the serpent possesses such knowledge is not directly stated. His counterclaim against divine knowledge and his explanation of the tree (Gen 3:4-5) would suggest that at least he wishes to lay claim to such knowledge.

525 See page 87 above.

526 I would maintain that it was a necessary act of disobedience.

Ultimately, God agrees with the serpent, that the humans have become like “one of us” (Gen 3:22).⁵²⁷ This is seen as the foremost reason that the humans must be prohibited from eating of the tree of life. This suggests that whatever change has taken place is real and effective. Humans from this point in Genesis are not portrayed as being like God in intellect or power, but like Him they do have the capacity for making moral choices. This freedom is nowhere more evident than in Gen 4 where Cain grapples with the rejection of his sacrifice.⁵²⁸

The touchstone of this change is the realisation that they are naked.⁵²⁹ God immediately recognises that the human knowledge of their nakedness is evidence that they have eaten from the tree of knowledge. They do not discover they are naked: this they already know. Rather, they see this nakedness in a different light. As frequently noted, infants are unashamed of nakedness,⁵³⁰ but as they grow in maturity so they come to realise that nakedness is immodest.⁵³¹ The humans conclude that it is wrong of them to be naked and they sew fig leaves into garments. Nakedness is the only reason given by Adam for hiding from the divine presence.⁵³² The belief that nakedness is wrong (and according to Gen 2:25, shameful) comes not from God but from their own conscience, a point emphasised when God asks Adam, “Who told you that you were naked?” (Gen 3:11). The point being made is that the humans have made a moral evaluation of their own volition. God, who previously appears to have no opinion on the issue of nakedness, now endorses this new morality when He provides the humans with tunics of skin.⁵³³ In doing so, He also acknowledges this change as permanent.

527 The role of the serpent is ambiguous. He possesses accurate information about God that is unknown to the woman, drawing into question God’s commands and motives.

528 Genesis 4 is certainly the consummation of the fall if not itself the true fall narrative.

529 This occurs before God’s pronouncement of curse. The change in the humans from eating of the tree is separate from the changed relationship with their environment resultant from God’s pronouncement of punishment.

530 Gordis, “The Knowledge of Good and Evil,” 136.

531 This is a cultural norm within aspects of Middle Eastern, Western and Asian cultures. Other cultures have different approaches to clothing. Vogels takes this nakedness as symbolic of weakness, poverty, and human limitations. According to him, in this passage Adam and Eve discover what it means to be human, the negative side of which God has shielded them from until now (Vogels, “Like One of Us,” 153).

532 It is from here that Adam becomes a proper noun rather than a collective noun.

533 Genesis 9:22-23 does establish nakedness as a taboo. Other legal texts include the prohibition of nakedness (Exod 20:26; 28:42). In each case ערוה is used (סָרֵעַ is used in Gen 2:25 and 3:1). Lev

In the next chapter when Cain wrestles with his anger and murderous thoughts, God warns Cain but does not prevent him from choosing to murder his brother. Cain must make his own choice. The law will later proscribe such acts (Exod 20:13; Num 35:30; Lev 24:17; Deut 5:17). God will provide a moral framework for the children of Israel but He will not force them to keep it. The provision of sacrifice and reparation demonstrate an acknowledgement by God of human moral failure.

God's absence when the serpent is talking to Eve and presence when Cain is contemplating murder suggests what happens in the garden of Eden was necessary. God permits the challenge to His command to go uncontested.⁵³⁴ God creates a garden in which the tree is present and places the tree within human reach.⁵³⁵ If this tree represents moral autonomy from God then the tree is a necessary element in a world where humans have free will. Further, if we agree with Luis de Molina that God could have created anyone of an infinite number of worlds yet chose to create the world described in Gen 1-3, then we may surmise that the placement of the tree and the choice it presents to the humans was an important element in His work of creation.⁵³⁶ God will not create a world without free will.⁵³⁷ Qohelet agrees for he describes the post-garden world as beautiful in every way (Eccl 3:11) while accepting the presence of wickedness (Eccl 3:16).⁵³⁸ Judith McKinlay is correct in supposing that living outside of the garden requires this knowledge of good and evil.⁵³⁹

18:6-23; 20:11-21, as in Gen 9:22-23, nakedness implies sexual impropriety.

534 Brueggemann sees this from the opposite perspective. God is excluded from the debate by the participants rather than absenting Himself (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 48).

535 It is possible the proscription is temporary and that God intends the humans to eat from the tree at an unprescribed future time.

536 Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the Concordia*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2004); Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

537 I do not think I would want to live in such a world.

538 Murphy suggests that beautiful (*נָטָף*) here means good and is a reference back to Gen 1 (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 57).

539 Judith E. McKinlay, "To Eat or not to Eat: Where is Wisdom in this Choice?" *Semeia* (1999): 77.

Gordis states that if the tree represents the acquisition of morality, then humans cannot be condemned for eating from it if prior to eating they have no power to make moral judgements.⁵⁴⁰ This misses the point. The decision to eat the fruit is a decision to actualise a potential ability already existent within them, and to do so in disobedience to God. Eve can already recognise the tree as good for food and desirable for gaining wisdom (Gen 3:6). Adam's naming of the animals seems to imply at least a modicum of moral ability for it implies the summation of a creature's nature and its appropriateness to him as a partner (Gen 2:19). The fruit does not give the ability to make moral choices: eating it is the moral choice. In this way the two trees differ, for the fruit of the tree of life is portrayed as imparting the power of longevity.⁵⁴¹ There is a danger of interpreting this incredibly rich passage of Scripture too narrowly for it is a parable, a short story explaining the nature of the human condition, and should be interpreted as such. The human is capable of deciding that none of the animals brought to him is appropriate as a partner, albeit under God's supervision. Eve's conversation with the serpent assumes independent rational ability as does God's presentation of a choice in the first place (Gen 2:17). In eating the fruit the humans are declaring their moral autonomy from God. They will now decide for themselves what is good, what is enjoyable, profitable, and worthwhile.

The serpent overstates the benefits that will ensue from eating the fruit and God respects Eve's right to make her own decision even though He knows that its consequences will be momentous. The issue before Adam and Eve is whether to live by God's rule or by their own, whether to live within the garden, where everything is good, or outside it, where free will encompasses envy, violence, and competition. Yet eating the fruit does not exclude good for the tree represents knowledge of this too, and therefore humans always retain the capacity to choose, experience, and do good. The world after Gen 3 is one in which evil and good are forever in tension with each other within the human heart.⁵⁴²

540 Gordis, "The Knowledge of Good and Evil," 125.

541 We are not informed whether, like the tree of knowledge, eating once suffices or whether living forever (חַי לְעוֹלָם) Gen 3:22) required ongoing consumption.

542 Edmund A. Steimle, "Preaching and the Biblical Story of Good and Evil," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 31 (1976): 203.

This is a choice which is then consistently remade in Genesis (most clearly in the accounts that contain similar elements to Gen 3 (Gen 4:1-15; 9:18-27; 19:30-36). To achieve this moral autonomy is not an end, for now humans must exercise this new freedom. Every situation is now a choice requiring the exercise of knowledge and the weighing of good and evil, self-interest, and divine command, and in this reckoning humans establish their identity.

The humans' relationship with God is now changed. Humans are no longer dependent upon God and can chart their own course through life. God can no longer take human obedience for granted. The crime and punishment narratives of the first 11 chapters of Genesis (Abel's murder, the Nephilim, the flood, and the tower of Babel)⁵⁴³ all show God responding to humans choices.⁵⁴⁴ (The account of the cities of the plains should be included with these crime and punishment narratives (Gen 19)). Conversely, the account of Abraham and his descendants demonstrates God taking the initiative and reforming His relationship with humans. Abraham and his sons will be seen making a series of moral choices (Gen 12:13; 13:8; 14:22; 16:2; 18:24; 22:2; 27:8; 37:20). Some decisions are good and some bad but each carries consequences. Rarely does Genesis pass direct moral judgement on these choices (Gen 13:13 and 38:7 are exceptions). The reader must evaluate these choices for him or her self, especially by noting their outcomes. This connects the reader with the text and requires of us the same weighing of good and evil as is made by the characters in the Genesis narratives.⁵⁴⁵ The choices made

543 Not all accept Gen 6:1-4 as a crime and punishment narrative that is independent of the flood account. See Brevard Childs, *Myth and reality in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1960), 58; contra Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 370. Hiebert rejects this as a crime and punishment narrative as he finds no crime in the account. He notes: "God's response is not an act of punishment or judgement, but an intervention to introduce cultural difference" (Theodore Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel and the origin of the World's Cultures," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2007): 42).

544 In the case of Gen 6:1-4 God's response is to the initiative of the sons of God. However, God's judgement is against humans (Gen 6:3). It is partly for this reason that Calvin identified the sons of God are with the line of Cain (John Calvin, *Genesis* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 67.). Cf. Lyle. Eslinger, "Contextual Identification of the bene ha'elohim and benoth ha'adam in Genesis 6:1-4," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 4 (1976): 65-73. See Kidner, *Genesis*, 84; Kissling, *Genesis*, 263.

545 For example, we are not told whether Abraham claiming his wife as his sister is a good or evil practice. The narrator leaves us draw our own conclusions from the story. The reader is engaged by the author to make moral decisions along with the characters of the book.

reveal character and determine the future. Life outside of the garden and under the sun is one where knowledge of good and evil exists and where moral choices must continually be made.

Good and Evil and the Pursuit of Wisdom in Ecclesiastes

Good and evil are also frequently addressed in Ecclesiastes. The self-proclaimed purpose of the book is to discover what is good for mortals to do under heaven (Eccl 2:3; 6:12).⁵⁴⁶ Qohelet begins his work with the moral framework established by Genesis. In the act of independence (Gen 3:6) humans assumed the responsibility of acting as independent moral thinkers and have attained the wisdom required to do so. Qohelet sees himself as the ultimate expression of this wisdom (Eccl 1:16) and sets himself the task of discovering what is good, profitable and worthwhile for humans under the sun.⁵⁴⁷ This is what humans sought in Eden and what they continue to seek (Eccl 1:17; 7:25; 8:16). As in the garden, the pursuit of wisdom is dangerous (Eccl 1:18). As McKinlay notes, the tree has the power to kill.⁵⁴⁸

In the context of Ecclesiastes Danker sees life on earth as a test. God has given humans the ability to make moral choices. Therefore, in this life a person “decided forever his eternal destiny.”

546 Mills sees this as the purpose of the book (Mills, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 19). Loader agrees and goes on to note that this fits with the Eden theme (Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 34). Childs sees good and evil as eschatological motifs connected to the undoing and remaking of creation (Eccl 3:17; 8:11; 11:9) (Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 586). Schoors understands good and evil not as moral elements but as happiness and adversity (Antoon Schoors, “Theodicy in Qohelet,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ed. Antti Laato and Johannes C. De Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 390).

547 The phrase “under the sun” has been variously interpreted. It has a creational and temporal aspect to it: referring to the world as it is currently experienced by humans. It also implies toil (Gen 3:19). In Eccl 7:11 to see the sun is to be alive. In Eccl 12:2 the darkening of the sun is death. In Eccl 11:7 to see the sun is to enjoy life. As I have noted above (page 100) I understand “under the sun” to be Qohelet’s shorthand for a post-Edenic world. For further comment also see footnote 424 above.

548 “There is something sinister in the garden” (McKinlay, “To Eat or not to Eat,” 74). Kissling regards the continual references to good and evil as a warning against the misuse of wisdom (Kissling, *Genesis*, 182).

In Ecclesiastes, Qohelet, independent of God, seeks to discover what is good and to identify evil (Eccl 2:3, 20; 5:1, 18; 6:12; 10:5).⁵⁴⁹ This is an extraordinary task for it runs counter to major threads of biblical thought which see good and evil as established solely by God. Human choices exist only in responding to God's precepts with obedience or disobedience (Lev 26:3-8; Deut 10:12; 30:19; Josh 1:7; Ps 119:4; Mic 6:8). Wisdom is an objective revelation found in the nature of God's creation, not a subjective value; one which humans discover by observation, not one which they evolve from their own shifting preferences. The role of the sage is not to create his or her own moral or practical rules but to discover what God has already placed within creation through observation and then to impart this knowledge to others, be they foolish or wise (Prov 1:2-7). Similarly, the law is a revelation from God to humans in which He defines what He considers as good and evil, which humans are then free to accept, question, reinterpret or reject but not change. A protest tradition exists within scripture: Abraham, Job and Jeremiah will each question God regarding His justice (Gen 18:25; Job 19:6; Jer 12:1).⁵⁵⁰ To an extent Qohelet fits the traditional role of a sage for he explores creation to unlock wisdom.⁵⁵¹ In his writings we see the process of trial, error, discovery, and evaluation whereas in Proverbs we have the final distillation of this process.⁵⁵² The exceptions to this are the *carpe diem* passages where Qohelet presents objective solutions. For Qohelet all that is under the sun must furnish the raw material from which people fashion their own understanding of vanity and profit. The wisdom that comes from a God who discloses Himself to people is now replaced by a wisdom attained through human rationality, leaving humankind with the unenviable task of trying to reach beyond the "vanity of vanities" to a reality that is fitfully glimpsed but never apprehended. This is a task set by the actions of Adam and Eve in Gen 3.

549 Clark, "Good and Evil," 277.

550 In the case of Abraham he may even hold God to an external standard of justice.

551 At least to the extent that such a role can be established. See Perdue, *Sword and Stylus*, 9-15. The frame editor understands Qohelet as a sage and describes him as imparting knowledge to humankind (Eccl 12:9).

552 Qohelet's technique of presenting two extremes before finding a mediating point fits this paradigm. As noted this appears to be an invitation for us to find our own mediating position. See page 45 above.

The Search

תרתי בלבִי למשׁוך בין אַתְּ-בָשֵׂר וּלְבִי נֶגֶב חֲכֹמָה וְלְאַחֲזָה
בְּסֶכֶלּוֹת עַד אֲשֶׁר-אֶרְאָה אֵיזָה טֹוב לְבָנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תְּחִתָּה
הַשְׁמִים מִסְפַּר יְמִי חַיָּם:

I searched with my mind how to cheer my body with wine--
my mind still guiding me with wisdom-- and how to lay
hold on folly, until I might see what was good for mortals to
do under heaven during the few days of their life.

Ecclesiastes 2:3

כִּי מִי-יָדַע מַה-טֹּוב לְאָדָם בְּחִיּוֹת מִיחַיִּים הַבָּלוּ וַיַּעֲשֵׂם
כַּצֵּל אֲשֶׁר מִי-גִּיד לְאָדָם מַה-יְהִי אַחֲרֵיו תְּחִתַּה שְׁמַשׁ:

For who knows what is good for mortals while they live the
few days of their vain life, which they pass like a shadow?
For who can tell them what will be after them under the
sun? Ecclesiastes 6:12

These verses contain the questions that the wise must seek. The questions are open ones to which the answers have not been established. All must seek to find this answer for themselves.⁵⁵³ The first verse is optimistic, the second less so (for ultimately this quest unravels). For the answers Qohelet relies upon the lucubrations of his own mind, in observation, comparison, and assessment. Qohelet rules out nothing, for in a world where the divine signposts of Proverbs and the Law have disappeared and with them the prospect of moral coherence, goodness, profit, and happiness may perhaps be found in folly, madness, and hedonism. Part of the motivation of this quest is the apparent failure of the traditional understanding of good to bring reward to its adherents (Eccl 9:2-3).⁵⁵⁴

553 This is evidenced by Qohelet's frequent use of questions. The NRSV and the AV translate 33 sentences as questions (Eccl 1:1, 10; 2:2, 12, 15, 16, 19, 22, 25; 3:9, 21, 22; 4:7, 11; 5:6, 11, 16; 6:6, 8 [x2], 11, 12 [x2]; 7:10, 13, 16, 17, 24; 8:2 [x2], 4, 7; 10:14). The TNIV identifies 32 questions. It treats Eccl 2:16 as a statement. A number of these questions are rhetorical (Eccl 1:10; 2:19, 25; 3:22; 4:8; 8:4) or indicate exasperation (Eccl 2:16) but even here they are addressed to Qohelet's audience and require thought, and potentially a response, from them. The use of questions suggests that Qohelet sees his audience as engaged on the same quest as he is. Occasionally, he places these questions on the lips of people other than himself (Eccl 4:8; 7:10; 8:7). Qohelet's language of search is also general and assumes others are searching for the same answers that he is (Eccl 2:24; 3:11; 5:18-20; 6:12; 7:14, 24; 8:7, 17).

554 The failure of the retribution principle is one with which the book of Job also grapples.

Like Genesis, Ecclesiastes juxtaposes knowledge and wisdom; the phrase חכמָה תַּعֲדֵל and its variants occur frequently (Eccl 1:16, 17; 2:21, 26; 9:10; cf. 1:18; 6:8). The phrase is usually a hendiadys, though Eccl 7:12 treats the two words as synonyms. Differentiation between the words does exist in some passages such as Eccl 1:17, 7:25 and 8:16 where wisdom is that which is known and Eccl 8:1, 5 and 12:9 where wisdom is that which enables a person to know. Ecclesiastes, like Genesis, reveals a world that is full of good and evil and everything is in the hand of a sovereign God.⁵⁵⁵

Qohelet seeks to understand the world through wisdom (Eccl 1:13, 17; 7:23, 25). He initially describes wisdom as achievable (Eccl 1:16). He describes his task in optimistic terms. Qohelet sees himself as wise and able to apply wisdom. It is through wisdom that sense can be made of the world and humans can find profit and a worthwhile life. It is better to understand the world than to be in ignorance but neither wisdom nor folly will change the ultimate outcome for the individual or the world, for there is nothing new (Eccl 1:9).

In the kingly experiment begun in chapter 2 and found in parts across the first half of the book, Qohelet acts on his stated desire to find what is good (Eccl 2:1, 3). He embraces laughter and folly. He considers productive labours by undertaking great projects; he builds houses and plants gardens and vineyards (Eccl 2:4-6, 19). He amasses wealth, property and experiences; he indulges his desires for hedonism, entertainment, and luxury.⁵⁵⁶ He discusses posterity in various forms (Eccl 2:12; 4:8, 13-16), fame (Eccl 4:15), and riches (Eccl 5:10-16). He considers being a productive member of society (Eccl 2:10b; 3:9; 4:16; 5:12) and a less productive member of society (Eccl 2:3; 4:5). He considers tyranny (Eccl 4:1), justice (Eccl 5:8-9), and progeny (Eccl 2:18; 4:8; 6:3), the last often considered the greatest blessing (Gen 15:1-5; 24:60; Ruth 4:11; Ps 128:6). Some of these experiences are negative, some positive (as Proverbs and the Law would define them) but taken together they encompass all the aspirations of Israelite society, at least as far as the Bible

555 Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books*, 286.

556 While Qohelet considers sex as meaningless (Eccl 5:8) he considers partnership as of value (Eccl 4:9-12). It is not until Eccl 9:9, the penultimate “joy” passage, that he considers and endorses love (cf. Eccl 3:8).

describes them. From Qohelet's list of potential sources of יתרון he omits, perhaps surprisingly considering its importance as a royal prerogative, military conquest (cf. 1 Kgs 9:19, 22; 10:26; 2 Chr 1:14; 9:25).⁵⁵⁷ All are evaluated by the הַבְלָה judgement and found wanting.⁵⁵⁸ None provides a lasting advantage.

Qohelet never questions that God is good and must be served and that He is also to be feared (Eccl 5:1-7). In the service of God one must avoid rash vows (Eccl 5:2, 4) and wrong sacrifices (Eccl 5:1) lest God become angry (Eccl 5:6). Qohelet concludes that God must be worshipped but not in rash words for "He has no pleasure in fools" (Eccl 5:4).

As in Proverbs, wisdom is the possession of knowledge and the ability to apply it to a given situation (Eccl 1:16-17), but more importantly it is both moral and practical. The choice between good and evil is a moral activity and it is given practical expression in guidance (Eccl 2:3), action (Eccl 10:2, 10) and rules to govern behaviour (Eccl 6:8). As in Genesis, God is the source of wisdom and knowledge (Eccl 2:26), for the tree was planted by God (Gen 2:9). When given by God to those who please Him, wisdom can be accompanied by joy (cf. Eccl 1:18). Wisdom is good for it provides an inheritance superior to money and strength. It even gives (limited) יתרון (Eccl 7:11-12; 8:1). It gives strength better than kingly power (Eccl 7:19; 9:17) and is stronger than military might (Eccl 9:13-16,18). Qohelet never considers an alternative to wisdom for it is the only possibility (Eccl 7:5; cf. 10:2).

From the very first chapter Qohelet concludes that the efficacy of wisdom is limited and frustrated. The twisted nature of the world prevents wisdom from achieving the ends Qohelet desires (Eccl 1:15). Wisdom is unable to effect change in such a world: it cannot count what is lacking. As in the garden, instead of bringing joy, wisdom brings sorrow and grief (Eccl 1:16). Qohelet does not explain

⁵⁵⁷ This is only considered in Eccl 9:13-18 but the emphasis here is on defence against aggression not conquest. This is perhaps because of Solomon's reputation for peace or because during the Persian period in which the book is most likely set (I agree with Lohfink, the socio-economic argument is persuasive) amassing soldiers, chariots, and ships was inconceivable.

⁵⁵⁸ It should be noted that while in Ecclesiastes everything is הַבְלָה, not everything is so equally or for the same reason. The number of phrases used to modify הַבְלָה is evidence of this (Eccl 1:14; 2:21; 4:8; 6:2).

why this is so. It could be because of the inability of wisdom to correct what is wearisome and crooked in the world, as what precedes verse 15 would suggest. Alternatively, it could be because the discoveries that wisdom makes are unpalatable, as what follows suggests, for nothing is achieved (Eccl 2:11) and the wise still die and are ultimately forgotten (Eccl 1:11; 2:15-16; 8:7). Goods must be left to a successor (Eccl 2:17). Knowledge only reveals the dark side of life and leads to despair for all even the wise may achieve has no lasting benefit (Eccl 1:17-23).

Knowledge can only be partial. The past is forgotten and the future unknown (Eccl 1:11; 2:16; 6:12; 7:14; 8:7; 9:5). The unknowability of the future is a theme that Qohelet returns to. This is one of the great evils of mortality. It is not only that people are forgotten but also that the knowledge they have accumulated is lost (Eccl 9:5, 10). Therefore, knowledge, like the streams that flow into the sea, is cyclical. There is no knowledge or wisdom in Sheol (Eccl 9:10). Even during life, time works against wisdom for wise acts are quickly forgotten (Eccl 9:16).

Qohelet's knowledge is first of all creational. He understands the world around him with its rhythms and limitation (Eccl 1:5-9).⁵⁵⁹ What God describes in Genesis as very good, Qohelet describes as wearisome and unsatisfying (Eccl 1:8). Creation no longer imparts the joy to humanity it once did (Gen 2:9). Humans are unable to grasp the work of God in creation (Eccl 11:5), that is, why God has made the world as it is, and what He intends to achieve through it. Without this fairly basic knowledge, humans will always struggle to make right choices and find satisfaction.⁵⁶⁰ For a sage wisdom is found in creation, but in Genesis access to this wisdom has been marred by the repercussions of eating from the tree of knowledge. Proverbs still seeks to access creational wisdom and it knows no fall. In Proverbs the tree of life is accessible through its teaching (Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12;

559 In Genesis, creation is linked to the quest for knowledge (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 245).

560 My understanding of the final chapters of Job (38-41) follows this approach. In His answer God is telling Job that the world has to be exactly as it is in order for His purposes to be achieved. Job's failure is that he does not, or perhaps cannot, understand God's wisdom in establishing the world as it is. While identifying the purpose of God in creation is beyond the scope of this thesis at its most obvious it is that people will respond to God exactly the way Job has.

15:4). This is in marked contrast to Gen 3 where the quest for wisdom causes the tree of life to be proscribed.⁵⁶¹ Qohelet sides with Genesis against Proverbs, for wisdom is corrupt because the garden is inaccessible.

Qohelet seeks to find what is good for humans to do under the sun (Eccl 2:3). He finds that both the search, and the tools he uses to search with, fail. Wisdom is limited: there are simply too many things that humans are unable to know.

Qohelet sees this as a restriction imposed by God. Wisdom can bring success but this is not guaranteed and it may be short-lived. Though humans are free to make their own choice about how life is to be lived and what they consider to be good or evil, ultimately they are frustrated by God's sovereignty (Eccl 3:14). The "better" statements (Eccl 4:3, 6, 9, 13; 6:3, 9, 11; 7:1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10; 9:4, 15, 18) are evidence of how humans evaluate good and evil. God establishes times for all human endeavour and even decrees whether happiness may be found in a given activity (Eccl 2:26; 3:13). Human choice is illusory – we think we can make choices but those choices are subject to divine order (Eccl 3:11; 8:17). Knowledge of God's ways is inaccessible (Eccl 11:5). God has frustrated the intellectual quest for knowledge (Eccl 8:16-17).

The extent of wisdom is also seen as limited and frustrated, for humans cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end (Eccl 3:11).⁵⁶² The end in Eccl 3:11 is death, both personal and cosmic (Eccl 12:1-8).⁵⁶³ Ultimately, Qohelet concludes that wisdom is beyond him (Eccl 7:23).

וראיתי את-כל-מעשה האלים כי לא יכול האדם למצוא
את-המעשה אשר נעשה תחת-השמש בשל אשר יعمل האדם
לבקש ולא ימצא וגם אם-יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצוא:

Then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out
what is happening under the sun. However much they may
toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though those
who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out.

Ecclesiastes 8:17

561 It is possible that Gen 3 is a response to the use of the Tree of Life motif in Proverbs. However as the provenance of these sections of both books remains uncertain such a claim must be approached tentatively.

562 The reference to beginning here is interesting and may be another allusion to Genesis.

563 That is the end of the created world as it currently exists. See Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 76.

In saying this Qohelet grapples with another of his contradictions. Wisdom is valuable and necessary for life but is powerless to change the work of God, which includes death and toil. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil has failed to bring advantage to humans for Wisdom is insufficient to make sense of the world, to provide a successful life, or to alleviate human suffering. The acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil has not enabled human beings to control the world.

Qohelet's pursuit for wisdom, like that of Adam and Eve, ultimately fails (Eccl 7:23-25). His endeavour to find what is good finds only **הַבָּל**. Humans are simply not very good at assessing good and evil and the consequences of a choice that seems good often bring misfortune. Qohelet, like Eve, is disappointed that the result of a quest that promised so much only brings grief (Gen 3:13, 16; Eccl 1:18; 2:20). We should not be surprised that this is the outcome of the quest, for Solomon's wisdom ends the same way (1 Kgs 11:3-14, 23, 31-39). This failure is seen in the prevalence of evil (**עַר**), evident in every part of Qohelet's world.⁵⁶⁴ Wickedness, weariness, crookedness, unhappiness, despair, pain, folly, vexation, oppression, envy, injustice, corruption, avarice, sickness, darkness, resentment, grief, sorrow, bribery, madness, adversity, destruction, entrapment, troubles, hurt, calamity, drunkenness, sloth, indolence, disaster, anxiety, and unfair power structures are all a part of human experience (Eccl 1:13, 15, 18; 2:20, 23; 3:16; 4:1, 4; 5:13, 16, 17; 7:7, 14, 22, 25; 8:6, 9; 9:11; 10:1, 17, 18, 23; 11:2, 10).⁵⁶⁵ Like Adam and Eve, Qohelet searches for good and finds evil.

Carpe Diem

Qohelet's search for what is good is not entirely in vain. Life for all its evil contains good. God has ordained that there is a time to enjoy good, to laugh and to dance (Eccl 3:4). He has also ordained a time to do good, to heal and build up (Eccl 3:3). In a series of seven passages across the book he identifies what is good for humans to do despite their mortality (Eccl 2:24; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:7-10). These passages show a marked consistency, for all encourage the pursuit of enjoyment and all, with the exception of Eccl 3:22, endorse eating and drinking as

564 See page 92 above.

565 The list includes things over which humans have no control. While disaster, calamity, sickness and destruction may come from divine or human sources (Eccl 5:6; 7:16; cf. 7:14), the balance of this list is composed of human ills.

a source of joy. Likewise, all endorse finding enjoyment in toil even though work may also be hard, and suggest that joy is a gift from God. Qohelet does not change his view on toil in these passages: it remains something onerous, yet despite this, it may still bring joy. Joy is only found where God permits it (Eccl 3:13; 5:19; 6:2), “For apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?” (Eccl 2:24). It is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil (Eccl 3:12), for that is their lot (Eccl 3:22). This is the gift of God (Eccl 5:18), for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun (Eccl 8:15), for God has long ago approved what you do (Eccl 9:7).

In these passages reference is often made to the shortness of life (Eccl 3:12, 20-21; 5:18; 8:15; 9:10), which adds poignancy to people’s joys as הַבֵּל is seen as the antithesis of good, especially in the kingly experiment. Death brings all things to a close, including joy (Eccl 9:6). These passages are not immune from the הַבֵּל judgement (Eccl 2:26; 11:8, 10). This is not to say that enjoyment is meaningless, for pleasure in Ecclesiastes has inherent value, rather that pleasure and enjoyment are fleeting. Transience is a substantive part of the meaning of הַבֵּל.⁵⁶⁶

The ability to enjoy life is from the hand of God (Eccl 2:24; 3:13). This enjoyment comes to the one who pleases God (Eccl 2:26) and can only be achieved with His help (Eccl 2:25). God affords humans the opportunity to enjoy life but this must be seized (Eccl 9:10). Enjoying life is described as a person’s חֶלְקָה (Eccl 3:22; 5:18), in Eccl 9:7 the enjoyment of life is God approved, and in Eccl 11:9 it is given as an imperative. The enjoyment of life is a divine mandate for humans. God will be displeased if you fail to enjoy life.⁵⁶⁷ Qohelet concludes that whatever we do it must be done wholeheartedly and without fear (Eccl 11:9-10). In four of the *carpe diem* passages Qohelet uses the phrase אִיזְטוֹב, *there is nothing better* (Eccl 2:24; 3:12, 22; 8:15). As one of the goals of the book is to find what is good (Eccl 2:1, 3; 6:12), the use of the superlative suggests these passages should be given considerable weight when evaluating the message of the book. It is for this reason that the book

566 It is in the *carpe diem* passages where Fredericks’ preference for “transience” as a translation for הַבֵּל (Fredericks, *Coping with Transience*, 23) provides a clearer meaning than Fox’s “absurd” (Fox, “The Meaning of Hebel,” 411) for it explains why things Qohelet views positively can be described as הַבֵּל.

567 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 184; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 326.

can be read in a positive light.⁵⁶⁸ For Qohelet the value and meaning of life are found in enjoyment. When Qohelet commends enjoyment (Eccl 8:15) he does so as the only solution for the lack of meaning found in the world.⁵⁶⁹

In the penultimate of these *carpe diem* passages (Eccl 9:7-9), humans are told to eat bread, drink wine and to marry: *Enjoy life with the wife whom you love* (Eccl 9:9). People should be dressed in white and anoint their heads with oil. This refers to enjoying life rather than to piety. They must accept work as their lot in life by doing whatever their hands find to do. Qohelet's call is to make the most of what you have rather than pursuing what is out of your reach.

Mortality and toil are at the heart of Genesis account but eating and drinking receive little attention (Gen 2:16; 3:19). For Qohelet joy is still to be found but only by resigning oneself to the way the world is and submitting to God's sovereignty. According to Ecclesiastes, joy is to be found in the same things after the curse as beforehand.

Qohelet gives a very simple solution to the perplexities of human life: find joy in the simple things of life, in what you have rather than what you do not have. This simple answer deconstructs Qohelet's and Eve's search for what is good. Joy is found where God ordains it and enables it. It is only found here (Eccl 2:25). Each of these passages sees joy as dependent on God. Human wisdom and human choice fail to achieve happiness, which can only be found in dependence on, and obedience to God. This is equally true of the good things promised in the time poem, for each time is fixed by God and humans can only respond appropriately. In Eccl 11:9 humans are free to follow their hearts but God remains the judge of what is good and evil (cf. Eccl 3:16). In Eccl 2:20 Qohelet pleases his own heart and finds nothing. In Eccl 2:26 he pleases God and finds wisdom, knowledge, and joy.

Qohelet has used his wisdom to investigate what is good for humans to do. He has investigated a wide variety of opportunities and risks that face humans but in the end he is forced back to God. In a broken world joy can still be found but only

568 See Whybray, *Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy*, 87-90; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 17; Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric*, 172.

569 Even righteousness fails to achieve satisfaction for its advocates (Eccl 7:15-16; 8:14).

where God gives it and it is found where people please God (Eccl 2:26). This opens the way for the frame editor to call for obedience to God, for it is the only way forward. Together these passages call for a reliance upon God. Ogden says correctly: "These calls to enjoyment are actually theological statements of faith in a just and loving God."⁵⁷⁰

Conclusion

Ecclesiastes ends by telling us that God will judge all human deeds whether good or evil (Eccl 11:9; 12:14). This acknowledges that humans can know and choose good and evil for themselves, but the standards by which God measures human conduct are ultimately unknowable. Humans must submit to divine sovereignty, for ultimately God alone judges what is good and evil (Eccl 12:14).

The acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil is a pyrrhic victory. Good can be partially known but only by God's will. In contrast evil is everywhere manifest. The freedom that humans have sought has proven to be illusory for the fundamental condition of the human nature cannot be altered. Human freedom is exercised within the framework of God's sovereignty.

Qohelet's search for wisdom leads to frustration. It is significant that the presence towards the end of the book of lists of conventional aphorisms suggests a journey towards orthodoxy and the confident wisdom of Proverbs.⁵⁷¹ Death frustrates Qohelet's search for meaning and the curse of Gen 3 cannot be undone.

Ultimately, the book arrives at an orthodox conclusion. God's commands (**מִצְוָה**) (Eccl 12:13), the only time the word is used) must be adhered to. God's judgement of good and evil is the same as that found in the Torah and presented in Proverbs. Ecclesiastes 12:13 is not a gloss intended to sanitise Qohelet's teaching, it is the

570 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 26.

571 Perdue suggests a date for the current form of Proverbs as possibly as late as the 3rd Century BCE but also notes that this was the end of a process stretching across the period of the monarch (Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs*, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching, ed. James L. Mays and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000), 1; idem, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 86-90). Murphy concurs: (*The Tree of Life*, 18-19).

conclusion the book has always been heading towards. It is in harmony with the *carpe diem* passages and the natural outcome of the failure to find what is good independently from God.

6. Abel, הַבֵּל and the Problem of Retribution

The Meaning of הַבֵּל

Without doubt הַבֵּל is the most important word in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is against this word that every aspect of life that Qohelet examines will be evaluated.⁵⁷² It is correctly called the book's Leitmotif.⁵⁷³ The phrase הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים הַכָּל (Eccl 1:2; 12:8) is an inclusio, forming an introduction and conclusion to Ecclesiastes. It has been noted that the way a commentator translates הַבֵּל will be determinative of the overall meaning they find in the book.⁵⁷⁴ Those who follow the Latin and AV in translating this word as "vanity" are likely to adopt a pessimistic reading of the book.⁵⁷⁵ Alternatively, if the word is translated as "breath-like" or "transitory" then the book is open to more positive interpretations. As Fredericks notes, the history of interpretation of Ecclesiastes is the history of the meaning of הַבֵּל.⁵⁷⁶

While consensus exists on the range of meanings found for הַבֵּל in the First Testament, no such agreement exists on how it should be understood in

572 What Fox describes as the "hebel-Judgement" (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 27) and Murphy the "hebel pronouncements" (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 164).

573 Fox, "The meaning of Hebel," 413.

574 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 46.

575 This translation should be rejected as it fails to capture the breadth of meaning of הַבֵּל that is found in the First Testament. In current usage vanity is strongly coloured by the idea of pride, a strength of emphasis neither found in the Hebrew word nor in the 17th century English of the Authorised Version of the Bible. The OED gives the primary meaning as "that which is vain, futile, or worthless; that which is of no value or profit" and makes no reference to pride ("Vanity," <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.otago.ac.nz/view/Entry/221396?redirectedFrom=Vanity&> (25/08/2015)). *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* agrees with OED, but adds pride as its third meaning ("Vanity," SOED, 2:3498). In marked contrast the *New Zealand Oxford Dictionary* gives the "concept about one's appearance or attainments" and "things concerning which a person is vain" and only then notes futility as a meaning ("vanity," NZOED, 2:1248). *Collins English Dictionary* gives "excessive pride or conceit" as the primary meaning of "vanity". ("Vanity," <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/vanity> (25-08-2015)). This indicates a significant change between the OED entry dated at 1916 and more contemporary dictionaries. Dor-Shav notes that not only is the translation "vanity" misleading, there are places it creates a very strained reading. He notes Eccl 9:9 as an example of this: life is to be enjoyed but is also הַבֵּל. "Transient" here provides a better translation: life is to be enjoyed but it is also fleeting (Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part II," 17). Cf. Eccl 11:10.

576 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 46; Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 143; Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of HBL," 437.

Ecclesiastes. The list of suggestions is daunting: disappointment of expectations;⁵⁷⁷ transient;⁵⁷⁸ insubstantial;⁵⁷⁹ uncertainty of outcome, beyond comprehension;⁵⁸⁰ unpredictable, uncontrollable, unexpected;⁵⁸¹ senseless, nonsensical, foolishness,⁵⁸² futile, empty, amounting to nothing, ridiculous, incongruous, illusionary, insignificant, incomprehensible, illusive;⁵⁸³ ironic, ephemeral.⁵⁸⁴ Or as Ogden comments, a situation to which a sage has no answer.⁵⁸⁵

Fox has a preference for “absurd”,⁵⁸⁶ Farmer for “transitory”,⁵⁸⁷ Fredericks for “temporary”,⁵⁸⁸ and Ogden for “enigmatic”.⁵⁸⁹ Each of these is like the TNIV in translating הַבְלָן as an adjective. הַבְלָן itself is a noun: the NRSV, AV and NASV each translate it as such (“vanity”). Miller rejects this in keeping with his thesis and simply transliterates הַבְלָן as *hebel*. Miller notes that no single English term is satisfactory.⁵⁹⁰ Both Fox and Farmer note that the word’s primary meaning is “vapour” or “breath,” therefore adjectives must correspond to these, thus “breath-like” or “vaporous.” Using an adjective in place of a noun certainly makes for an easily understandable translation. It is important to remember that it is a noun and the context must be allowed to indicate the meaning.

A difference also exists in the manner of usage. Miller believes the word is multivalent and not intended to be used consistently across the book. He describes it as an open metaphor⁵⁹¹ and advocates that the word should be translated to fit

577 Danker, “The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes,” 16.

578 Dor-Shav, “Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part II,” 18.

579 Also “transient” (Miller, “Qohelet’s Symbolic use of HBL,” 445).

580 Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books*, 287.

581 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 104, 190.

582 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 29.

583 Leithart, *Solomon Among the Postmoderns*, 67. Leithart describes the definition of the word as elusive.

584 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 53.

585 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 25.

586 This makes הַבְלָן a judgement rather than a description (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 29; idem, “The Meaning of Hebel,” 409).

587 Farmer also describes the word as “fundamentally ambiguous” (Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 146).

588 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 50.

589 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 17.

590 Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 7.

591 As opposed to a “stock metaphor” where common usage is well established and fixed to a

the most likely meaning of a passage.⁵⁹² Farmer agrees that הַבְלָה is a metaphor (a provocative figure of speech) and rather than having a single meaning across the book, she believes the word requires the reader to consider the context and make a decision about how the word is used in each instance. For Farmer, any word provided by a translator in place of הַבְלָה that takes the decision of meaning away from the reader harms the book.⁵⁹³ She suggests that the best translation is “breath,” for the range of meanings of the English word conveniently overlaps הַבְלָה.⁵⁹⁴ Breath can imply transience, insubstantiality or emptiness, but breath is also what is needed for life (Eccl 9:9). Readers should not assume that Qohelet wishes to condemn all of life with a single judgement. Rather, they should consider in what way Qohelet applies his judgement. Farmer believes that fundamentally the word implies lack of permanence rather than lack of value.⁵⁹⁵

I concur: the range of meanings, both positive and negative, found in הַבְלָה defies its translation using an English word that only represents a restrictive part of the Hebrew. To translate it using several English words, however, is to rob the word and the book of their cohesion. The best way to translate הַבְלָה in Ecclesiastes is the same way the NRSV translates it in the Psalms, as “breath”, leaving the reader to examine the context and determine what this might mean in a given situation (Ps 39:5, 11; 62:9; 78:33; 144:4).

While Fox acknowledges that no meaning fits all uses of the word in Ecclesiastes perfectly (“fleeting” and “absurd” are the best translations), he rejects multiple translations and a metaphoric approach because these would rob the book of its inner coherence.⁵⁹⁶ As הַבְלָה is the theme of the book and best captures the nature of the world “under the sun” which it describes, it follows that the meaning ascribed to it must be consistent.⁵⁹⁷ To this end he suggests “absurd.” There is a problem

narrow meaning, e.g. “heart” as used for a person’s identity and thoughts.

592 Miller, “Qohelet’s Symbolic use of HBL,” 441.

593 Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 143. This is not to say translation is impossible only that the choice of translation should avoid restricting meaning, hence her preference for “breath” or “breathlike,” which allow for a degree of latitude in the translation.

594 Weeks suggests “hot air” as an equivalent modern idiom (*Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, 106).

595 Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 145. Fredericks concurs (*Coping with Transience*, 23).

596 Fox, “The Meaning of Hebel,” 414.

597 Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 35; idem, “The Meaning of Hebel,” 411.

with this. Although on one level the book applies the word to everything, the degree of absurdity varies considerably, according to which human experience or behaviour is being considered.⁵⁹⁸ Interpretation always is, in part at least, a function of context. Qohelet's practice of using the same phrase or word across a broad range of contexts enables these words to acquire different shades of meaning, a subtle art, rather than to change their meaning altogether.

To understand the word **הבל** requires three considerations: first, the lexical meanings of the Hebrew word; second, how its translation into English as an adjective seems to work best within the poetic books of the First Testament; third, how it is used across different books of the Bible. It is then possible to consider which translation best fits the multiple uses of the word in Ecclesiastes.

There exists a consensus that the meaning of the root **הבל** is "breath," "mist," or "vapour."⁵⁹⁹ The way Ecclesiastes pairs the word with **רוּח** (Eccl 1:14; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9 cf. Isa 57:13) supports this view. Fredericks suggests the word is onomatopoeic, sounding like the exhaling of breath. Articulating the word forces an expiration of breath;⁶⁰⁰ however, **הבל** is never used unequivocally in the First Testament for breath or vapour.⁶⁰¹ It is only used figuratively for the qualities of breath or vapour, for that which is breath-like, an exhalation, the breath's momentary visibility on a cold day.⁶⁰²

This is not true of the later rabbinic writings, where in addition to the same figurative usage we find in the First Testament, **הבל** is also used in a literal sense for breath, foul air, steam, and asphyxiation through toxic vapour.⁶⁰³ Miller

598 In some way all elements of life may be described as absurd. This creates the danger that *absurd* becomes no more than a truism, which then masks the subtlety of Qohelet's message.

599 Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 217; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 27; Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 143; Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 54; "הבל," BDB 210; "הבל," HALOTSE 1:236. Job 7:16; Ps 62:10; 63:9; 144:4; Prov 13:11; 21:6; Isa 57:13. In Ecclesiastes the LXX translates it using *ματαιότης*.

600 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 56.

601 "Fleeting vapour" (Prov 21:6). Here it is translated using a noun (**הבל** is a noun) with the addition of an adjective. However, even here it is used descriptively of a lying tongue.

602 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 27.

603 Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 54-58. E.g. b. *Sanh.* 77a-b; b. *B. Bat* 73a; b. *Git* 69a; b. *Šabb* 41a, 47b; b. *B. Qam* 50b, 51a, b; b. *B. Mešià* 36a. Jastrow concurs. He gives "breath, vapour, air and heat." He notes its use as "bad air," i.e. noxious air, and "vain things" or "falsehood." He also gives more

examines the rabbinic texts extensively. It is unusual for the late usage of a word to be more concrete than its earlier usage. A metaphoric meaning is reliant upon and formed from a word's substantive meaning. Consequently, we would expect a meaning like *breath* to change with time to mean *transient*. We would not expect a word meaning "transient" to later come to mean "breath." Miller himself notes this.⁶⁰⁴ This suggests that the Bible's metaphorical usage derives from an unattested concrete usage of הַבֵּל known to the rabbis. Care must be taken that this later rabbinic usage should not be allowed to distort its meaning when used in the scriptures. Having said this, it is possible that in the case of הַבֵּל the Talmud provides an insight into the vernacular Hebrew of biblical times.

The word הַבֵּל is used 76 times in the First Testament. Of these, half (38) are used in Ecclesiastes in 31 different verses.⁶⁰⁵ Of the remaining occurrences, 29 are found in poetic literature, most noticeably in Psalms (8), Jeremiah (7), Job (5), Proverbs (3), and Isaiah (3). Eight times הַבֵּל appears in Genesis as the name of Eve's second child. This is the only place it is used as a proper noun in the First Testament. It appears in only one narrative text within the First Testament (2 Kgs 17:15) where it is used of idolatry. In this verse it occurs alongside its verb form: וַיָּלְכוּ אֶחָרִי הַבֵּל וַיַּהֲבֹלוּ, "They went after false idols and became false." This limited narrative usage restricts our understanding of the word.

Although BDB and DCH cite הַבֵּל as a masculine noun it is usually translated as an adjective.⁶⁰⁶ English versions of the Bible have found it difficult to translate הַבֵּל as a noun without the addition of an adjective. This is because of the way הַבֵּל functions in Hebrew. Fox states, "Although a noun, *hebel* can be adjectival in

positive meanings, including "sinless breath" and the "breath of school children." He notes its use in cooking: the aroma given off by bread or wine (Jastrow, 1:329b-330a). Krupnik and Silbermann give "to begin to steam" and "vapour" (Baruch Krupnik and A. M. Silbermann, "הַבֵּל," *A Dictionary of the Talmud, the Midrash and the Targum – with Quotations from the Sources* (Tel Aviv: Am Olam, 1970), 231a).

604 Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 32.

605 The MT has 39 uses of the word in Ecclesiastes. The LXX appears to read הַבֵּל for הַכְלֵל in 9:2. The NIV/TNIV and AV follow this reading, whereas the NRSV follows the MT. The second use of הַבֵּל in 9:9 is a likely candidate for a scribal error. The NIV/TNIV and AV include both these variations. The NRSV only translates the first of these. I have followed the textual criticism of the NRSV's translators in arriving at 38.

606 E.g. "Worthless," "evanescent," or "unsubstantial." הַבֵּל BDB 211; DCH 2:485.

function.”⁶⁰⁷ The prominent exception is where the NRSV translates **הבל** as a “breath,” or “mere breath” (cf. Job 7:16; Ps 39:5, 6, 11; 62:9; 78:33; 94:11; 144:4; Isa 57:13). In Ps 62:9 it is the weight of a breath weighed in a balance. Other than this, “breath” is used to emphasise the shortness and transitory nature of life.

In two other places the NRSV translates **הבל** as a noun and in both instances as a modifier.⁶⁰⁸ In the above instance (2 Kgs 17:15) a **הבל** is an idol.⁶⁰⁹ The translators take *false* or *worthless* to mean a false or worthless idol. Even though no word for idol occurs in the text, there can be little doubt that the Hebrew uses **הבל** in place of one of the more common words for idol.⁶¹⁰ Perhaps its use is euphemistic,⁶¹¹ but even here it is difficult to judge if an idol is being described as worthless, taking **הבל** as adjectival, or as a vapour, taking **הבל** nominally. This illustrates both the range of ways **הבל** is used and the difficulty found in translating it. **הבל** is used to qualify “idol” particularly when used by the prophets (Isa 30:7; Jer 10:3, 8, 15; 16:19; Zech 10:2). Even where it is used as a noun an adjective is retained and it is translated as a *worthless idol*, not just an *idol* (Ps 31:7; Jer 2:5).

The second instance is in Prov 21:6 where the NRSV translates **הבל** as *fleeting vapour*. It is paralleled with **לשון שקר**, a “lying tongue.” Again, it is to be understood as a modifier acting as both an adjective and a noun. In Prov 31:30 it is adjectival: beauty is fleeting (**הבל היפי**). In Ps 144:4 people are like breath (**אדם להבל דמה**), but they are not breath. Again the noun is used descriptively. The root **הבל** occurs infrequently as a verb where it means to become false, worthless or futile.⁶¹² It is therefore impossible to think of **הבל** as a simple noun as its primary use is descriptive. We should then understand its use in Ecclesiastes as breath-like rather than breath.

Outside Ecclesiastes the word is always used in a negative sense. Invariably, something is being condemned or assessed unfavourably. As a rule, in Job, it

607 Fox, “The Meaning of Hebel,” 409.

608 It is also used as a modifier elsewhere (Job 7:16; Jer 51:18; Jonah 2:9).

609 On two additional occasions the NIV/TNIV translate **הבל** directly as “idol” (Jer 2:6; 16:19).

610 Such as **צלם, פסל, תמונה, תרפים סמל**.

611 This is similar to the way **עצב** is used in Isa 48:5. An idol is a grief.

612 The five occurrences as a verb: 2 Kgs 17:15; Job 37:12; Ps 62:11; Jer 2:5 (qal) and 23:16 (hif).

means false or worthless speech; in Psalms, shortness of life; and in the Prophets, idols. It is used to designate toil without reward (Job 9:29; Ps 39:6; Isa 49:4);⁶¹³ consumption of goods (Ps 39:12; Prov 13:11); human thoughts or plans (Ps 94:11); physical beauty (Prov 31:30); Egyptian military aid (Lam 4:17; Isa 30:7 [paralleled with Rahab]), and false prophets (Jer 51:18; Zech 10:2). The primary use of the word is to describe that which is “insubstantial,” “unreliable,” and “transient.” The association with idols, which occurs 14 times, tends to give the word a pejorative edge. The NRSV translates הַבְלָה using 10 different English words.⁶¹⁴

Fredericks argues that in the majority of uses outside of Ecclesiastes, transience is the primary connotation of הַבְלָה.⁶¹⁵ Thus in Prov 31:30, beauty is fleeting rather than worthless. This is clearly the intended connotation in passages such as Ps 39:4, 5, 12; 144:4; Job 7:16 (cf. 7:6-7); and Prov 13:11 where הַבְלָה is juxtaposed with either synonyms or antonyms of “transient.” In other passages he cites as indicating transience, the contexts give little indication whether short-lived or worthless is the intended connotation (Ps 78:33; 94:11). That these passages can be read equally well given either meaning illustrates the breadth of meaning in the word. In support of his case Fredericks notes that Psalms, Job and Isaiah, along with Qohelet link רוח הַבְלָה with, used in each case to indicate transience (Ps 78:33, 39; Job 7:6, 7; Isa 57:13).⁶¹⁶ He also notes that Ecclesiastes has a preponderance of words for “time” and an aversion to words for “empty” (e.g. Eccl 1:4; 3:14).

How then does the usage of הַבְלָה in Ecclesiastes compare with the rest of the First Testament? Divergent opinions exist. Fox claims its usage is quite different from

613 The context Isa 49:4 is “ineffectual divine service,” the worship of God as if he were an idol.

614 Breath (Job 7:16; Ps 39:6, 12; 62:10; 78:33; 94:11; 144:4; Isa 57:13), vapour (Prov 21:6), vain or vanity (Job 9:29; 27:12; Prov 31:30; Isa 49:4; Lam 4:17; Jonah 2:8), empty (Job 21:34; 35:16; Ps 94:11; Zech 10:2), worthless (2 Kgs 17:15; Ps 31:7; Isa 30:7; Jer 2:5; 16:19; 51:18), nothing (Ps 39:7), false (Jer 10:3), and no better (Jer 10:15), in addition to Abel. When translated the word is sometimes accompanied by an additional English adverb, e.g. “empty nothings,” Job 21:34; “empty breath,” Ps 94:11. Also: false idols, 2 Kgs 17:15 (used as a noun); dwindle, Prov 13:11; fleeting vapour, Prov 21:6 (used as a noun). (For each of the these examples the Hebrew is simply הַבְלָה).

615 Fredericks, *Coping with Transience*, 23.

616 “The wind will carry them off” (Isa 57:13); “A wind that passes and does not come again” (Ps 78:39); “My life (רוח) is a breath” (Job 7:7). See Fredericks, *Coping with Transience*, 22. Farmer goes as far as to suggest that רוח הַבְלָה are synonymous although DCH does not support this (Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 11).

that within the rest of the First Testament.⁶¹⁷ Farmer also believes the word is used differently in Ecclesiastes from the rest of the First Testament.⁶¹⁸ Ogden claims Qohelet's use of הַבָּל is peculiar to Ecclesiastes.⁶¹⁹ In each case this assertion is made because the authors wish to argue for a specific meaning of הַבָּל in Ecclesiastes, (in the case of Fox and Farmer, absurd and transient).⁶²⁰ On the other hand, Miller states that Qohelet gives no indication that he is using הַבָּל in a new or novel way. He states, "Qohelet does not use הַבָּל in any way not found elsewhere."⁶²¹ Fredericks believes no difference can be observed.⁶²²

I concur: the range of meanings found for הַבָּל within Ecclesiastes corresponds with those found in the rest of the Bible. It is clear from the summary above that similarities abound. Ecclesiastes uses הַבָּל for false or worthless speech (Job 35:16; Eccl 6:11; 7:6); shortness of life (Ps 62:9; Eccl 6:12); toil without reward (Job 9:29; Ps 39:6; Isa 49:4; Eccl 6:12); consumption of goods (Ps 39:12; Prov 13:11; Eccl 4:8; 5:10); human thoughts or plans (Ps 94:11; Eccl 2:15); physical beauty (Prov 31:30; Eccl 11:10). הַבָּל, then, is used by Ecclesiastes in much the same way as it is throughout the other books of the First Testament. Psalm 39 also has a high frequency of the word. It is shortness of life (Ps 39:5), ineffective labour (Ps 39:6) and the futility of wealth (Ps 39:11). The themes found in this Psalm are also similar to Ecclesiastes: understanding the future, the shortness of life and the inscrutability of God's will, especially in regard to the wicked. Like Job, the Psalm 39 considers God's ways to be inscrutable and oppressive. Where Ecclesiastes ascribes הַבָּל to things generally considered positive (Eccl 2:11, 26; 6:9; 9:9; cf. Job 37:12) the Psalms do not. In this the Psalter's use of הַבָּל is somewhat darker than that of Ecclesiastes.

617 "A new way" (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 27).

618 Farmer, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 145.

619 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 21.

620 As has been noted, Miller has a preference for leaving the word untranslated (Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 7) (see page 141 above). In Fox's case "absurd" is a use of the word not found in the rest of either biblical or rabbinic literature.

621 Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 157. This would suggest that Qohelet's use of הַבָּל reflects its usage in ancient Hebrew.

622 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 26.

The most obvious difference is the absence of any reference to idols in Ecclesiastes or any judgement upon them.⁶²³ That many of the things Qohelet designates as הַבָּל are described the same way elsewhere in Scripture is true,⁶²⁴ but it is the astonishing frequency with which the word is used and the all-pervasive atmosphere of futility which it evokes, that distinguishes its use in Ecclesiastes from other books. The judgement extended to every aspect of human life is the most obvious example of Qohelet's idiosyncratic use of the word. If elsewhere הַבָּל is frequently associated with shortness of life, in Ecclesiastes it is associated with death and the inadequacy of the retribution principle. Even in Job, where the inadequacy of the retribution principle is most apparent, Job never applies הַבָּל to the retribution principle itself but to his treatment by God (Job 27:12) and to the arguments advanced by his friends. Qohelet describes the inadequacy of the retribution principle as הַבָּל (Eccl 7:15; 8:14), but in a stark divergence from Hebrew wisdom literature, he applies it even to circumstances where the retribution principle is described as working (Eccl 2:26).

Qohelet frequently amplifies הַבָּל by adding such phrases as "a chasing after wind," a "great evil," "an unhappy business," and "a grievous ill." Clearly, these are part of Qohelet's literary style but they also confer upon the word an imaginative extension which better helps the reader understand the subtle variations in its meaning that the complexities of the human condition require. This suggests that הַבָּל is an open metaphor, which his readers need assistance to understand.⁶²⁵ These statements also indicate the breadth of meaning with which Qohelet uses the word.⁶²⁶ His favourite seems to refer back to the inclusio, גם זה הַבָּל "this also is vanity," of which there are 14 occurrences (Eccl 2:1, 15, 19, 21, 23, 26; 4:4, 8, 16; 5:10; 6:9; 7:6; 8:10, 14). This usage suggests that for Qohelet הַבָּל is a category more than a descriptive term. Qohelet uses הַבָּל in a comparative sense to

623 Miller notes the use of הַבָּל to describe foreign gods as a stock metaphor (Miller *Ecclesiastes*, 69). This is certainly true within the prophets.

624 Shortness of life (Job 7:16; Ps 39:5), toil (Job 9:29), empty speech (Job 35:16), wealth (Prov 13:21; 21:6), beauty and youth (Prov 31:30).

625 Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic use of HBL," 439.

626 Miller notes that "chasing after wind" and "a great evil" are quite different things. Chasing after wind is futile while a great evil is a source of grief (Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 5).

evaluate different aspects of life. This is the so called “hebel judgement.”⁶²⁷ The universal sense in which Qohelet uses הַבֵּל, that is “**הָכֹל הַבֵּל**” all is vanity,” is supported by reference to specific examples (Eccl 5:10; 7:6; 8:14): not only is something fundamentally amiss with the world but God, as its Creator, is necessarily implicated in this. The optimistic pronouncements of sages are shown to be in error.

Outside of Ecclesiastes הַבֵּל is always used negatively. הַבֵּל is never a good thing, but Qohelet identifies some concepts normally considered positive as הַבֵּל, for example: the retribution principle working correctly (Eccl 2:26), good relationships (Eccl 9:9), a long life (Eccl 11:8), youth and vigour (Eccl 11:10). In these cases Qohelet suggests that whatever is good in the things of life is also transient, that the accidents of fortune which we enjoy are snatched from us and with them any enduring benefit. The most unequivocal of these positive assessments is also the strangest. In Eccl 6:4 a stillborn child is described as הַבֵּל. Qohelet then goes on to describe the child as more fortunate than a man who lives for 1,000 years twice over yet fails to enjoy his wealth. הַבֵּל here may connote ironic or absurd. Qohelet is using it in a counter-intuitive way. Even if this is so, he has still described a situation he evaluates positively as הַבֵּל.

It is clear that Qohelet does not believe all aspects of life are futile for he still finds much to commend in life. Even if we accept הַבֵּל as always negative we may recognise a degree of irony and provocation. Qohelet knows that not everything is meaningless. He knows that his audience knows that not everything is meaningless. Qohelet also knows that his audience knows that he knows that not everything is meaningless. Effectively, Qohelet is challenging his audience to determine which things in life are meaningful.⁶²⁸ A second possibility exists which allows for a positive reading despite הַבֵּל being a wholly negative word. For Qohelet the ultimate הַבֵּל is death in which all temporal profit, value or enjoyment

627 Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 27. הַבֵּל in Ecclesiastes tends to point to an injustice.

628 Qohelet assumes that his audience is free to draw their own conclusions and find their own answers. It is because of this kind of dynamic and the relationship between Qohelet and his audience that it implies, that Ecclesiastes is considered to contain elements that today we associate with post-modernism. See Ingram, *Ecclesiastes*; Leithart, *Solomon Among the Postmoderns*.

will eventually become meaningless. Therefore, something may be positive in itself but become הַבְּלָם because it is lost in death.

We must now ask to what extent Genesis influences his use of הַבְּלָם.

Names in Genesis

An important link between Ecclesiastes and Genesis is that Eve gives הַבְּלָם as the name for her second son. As von Rad and Dor-Shav note, for those reading Genesis and Ecclesiastes in Hebrew the connection between the two uses would have been hard to avoid.⁶²⁹ How this would have influenced their understanding of Ecclesiastes is harder to ascertain.

Most commentaries acknowledge that the proper noun “Abel” and the noun “vanity” or the adjectival “meaningless” are the same Hebrew word but refuse to be drawn on what implications this may have for interpreting the text. Fox, Miller, and Farmer each fail to consider the use of this word in Genesis in their comprehensive analyses of the word in the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature.⁶³⁰ Two reasons are given for this: First, the word is only used in Genesis as a proper noun and can have little bearing on its quite different use in Ecclesiastes. Second, the context in which the word is used in Genesis is quite different to its more poetic and expressive use in Ecclesiastes.⁶³¹

However, the use of הַבְּלָם as a proper noun in Genesis is reliant on its meaning as a noun. Names in the First Testament are frequently overlaid with meaning (Noah (Gen 5:29), Moses (Exod 2:10), Samuel (1 Sam 1:20), Abraham (Gen 17:5), Isaac (Gen 21:6), Jacob (Gen 25:26)), especially in the creation account. Eve is called Eve because she is the mother of all living things (Gen 3:20). The names for Eve, Cain, and Seth have a defining quality, whereas elsewhere in Genesis the significance of

629 von Rad, *Genesis*, 104; Dor-Shav, “Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I,” 215.

630 Miller notes that Abel probably refers to shortness of life – he then admits that this is difficult to substantiate and abruptly ends his discussion with the concluding remark: “the text will not be discussed further in this study” (Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 62).

631 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 62; Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 62.

names is only implied (Enoch (Gen 5:18-24),⁶³² Melchizedek (Gen 14:18),⁶³³ David (1 Sam 16:13),⁶³⁴ Solomon (1 Kgs 5:12)⁶³⁵).

The connection between the name Eve and the meaning of the word חַיָּה is clear. חַיָּה means “living.” Had the author’s intention not been made clear to us by the gloss given in the text, it is unlikely that we would have understood the name in this way. This sounds a note of caution when attempting to understand names that are not explained to us. The usage of biblical names would suggest that they were chosen with care and often reflect an authorial choice (cf. 1 Sam 25:25).

Adam’s name is not explained to us. We are simply told that הָאָדָם is עַפְرָמֶן (Gen 2:7) and we are left to draw our own conclusions as to what this might mean for Adam’s identity. Adam is from the ground (Gen 2:7), works the ground (Gen 2:5), returns to the ground (Gen 3:19), and it is the ground that is cursed because of him (Gen 3:17). Arguably, it is not until Gen 4:25 that Adam is used as a proper noun since prior to this it is given as הָאָדָם, *the adam*. In Genesis 1:26 אָדָם is used, but even here it is accompanied by the plural וַיַּרְא, hence אָדָם is translated as “humankind” by the NRSV, “human beings” by the TNIV and “mankind” by the NIV (2011).

When the mother of all the living gives birth to her three sons she names them: a role she assumes from Adam (Gen 2:20; 3:20). For two of her sons an explanation of the name is given. Cain is called קִנְعָן because Eve declares that she has acquired (קָנָה) him. Genesis 4:1 connects the name קִנְעָן with the verb קָנָה to “acquire,” “possess,” or “buy.”⁶³⁶ Even with this help from the author the meaning is unclear.

632 Enoch means “dedicated”. HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 3016 ; BDB 335b. Wenham suggests “learned” or “clever.” Wenham, *Genesis*, 111.

633 “My king is Zedek” or “Malki is righteous.” HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 5251, cf. Heb 7:2.
634 “Beloved.” HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 1994.

635 From שָׁלֵם. Perhaps “David’s peace” HALOT, Bibleworks, loc. 9682b.

636 The connection between the words is an example of what Wenham calls “a poetic etymology” (Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 101). It has alternatively been suggested that the name means metalworker or even arrow as it is used in 2 Sam 21:16 this way (Speiser, *Genesis*, 30; von Rad, *Genesis*, 103). While this fits the context of Gen 4:22 it is certainly at odds with the narrator’s assessment of the name as placed on Eve’s lips Gen 4:1. To “acquire,” “buy,” “purchase,” “gain,” “get” or “redeem,” DCH gives a secondary possible means as to “create” (“קָנָה,” DCH 7:267-268. “קָנָה,” HALOTSE 2:1111-1112).

Is Eve expressing the idea that she has bought or acquired Cain from God? Or, as Westermann would have it, is this an expression of triumph over, or rebellion against, God?⁶³⁷ Or is it thrown out as a challenge to God's formerly exclusive right to bring forth life? For like God she too has created a man. Seth is so named because he is תְּשִׁ, he replaces Abel (Gen 4:25). תְּשִׁ means, to "put," "set," "lay," "make" or "order." Again, it is doubtful that we would have arrived at this precise meaning without the author's explanatory comment. For Abel no explanation is given, but as Adam, Eve, Cain and Seth are all names with meanings, and because in all other places הַבֵּל is used as a noun or adverb, it is reasonable to expect there might be some significance in the author's choice of name.

In what way does the meaning of הַבֵּל express agency in Abel? In the early chapters of Genesis two naming protocols exist – that the name represents the origin of the person or that it refers to the person's destiny. The meaning of Eve is inherent to her identity and her function, she is Eve, the mother of the living, for this is how the story will portray her.⁶³⁸ Adam's name by contrast is both a statement of origin, for he is formed from the earth, of function, for he is a tiller of the earth, and destiny, for ultimately he returns to the earth. Abel, Cain and Seth's names are derived from Eve's response to giving birth: "I have acquired" and "I have replaced." While it could be argued that Cain lives up to his name in the way he competes with Abel for God's blessing, and that Seth replaces Abel, these are not elements the text emphasises.

For each of the names, Adam, Eve, Cain, and Seth, the proper noun is related to a noun or a verb from which, according to the author, it derives meaning. Although the four names are intended by the author to convey meanings that supplement

637 "I too have brought forth life despite God's opposition" (Skinner, *Genesis*, 290), cf. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 118; Westermann, *Genesis*, 290; Kugel notes an early rabbinic tradition that Cain was the product of a demonic union between Sammael and Eve. *Tg Ps.-J.* Gen 4:1; *Pirqe R. El.* 21. He also notes that this is found in early Gnostic and Christian sources (Tertullian, *On Patience* 5:15; *Gospel of Philip* 61:5-10; cf. 1 John 3:10-12; Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 147, 167). McEntire understands this as a marker of the presence of God at the start of the Cain narrative (McEntire, *The Blood of Abel*, 17). Conversely, Brueggemann considers it an act of praise toward God (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 56).

638 Kidner suggests the name is a response to the promise of Gen 3:15 (Kidner, *Genesis*, 72). Interestingly, the account makes no reference to the promised pain of childbirth (Gen 3:16)

the individual's characterisation in the narrative, the connections are not direct and it is unclear, for instance, how מַדָּא as a proper noun derives from **הָאָדָם**.⁶³⁹ The same is true for Cain and Seth. In the case of Eve the connection is less clear. Eve is called חַוָּה but for this to reflect her status as the mother of the living we would expect a root containing a *yod* rather than a *waw*.⁶⁴⁰ It is possible that in Eve's case we have an ancient alternative spelling or meaning.⁶⁴¹ It is also possible that it is a vernacular etymology.⁶⁴² A more common explanation is that no direct etymology is intended by the author but rather a wordplay or a phonic allusion.⁶⁴³ For the connection to be unambiguous an authorial indication is needed.

In the case of Abel, no meaning for his name is given and no word is offered as a source for it.⁶⁴⁴ **הָבֵל** as a proper noun is dependent on its use as a noun. Since no explanation is offered we are left to assume that the author intended that we understand the name as we would the noun. Had this not been the case some explanation would presumably have been given. von Rad compares Abel with the "other Hebrew word" **הָבֵל**.⁶⁴⁵ It is hard to maintain that there are in fact two Hebrew words at all, just one word used in two contexts.

There are two possible contexts within Gen 4 that may give rise for the meaning of Abel's name. It could be an expression of Eve's frustration. Kidner suggests that Eve had expected the birth of Cain to fulfil the promise given by God in Gen 3:15, but her expectations are dashed and the reality of God's curse of toil and suffering cannot be eluded. **הָבֵל** is therefore an expression of what it means to give birth, to

⁶³⁹ Wenham doubts any genuine etymological connection between Adam and its feminine form **הָאָדָם** (Wenham, *Genesis* 16-50, 59).

⁶⁴⁰ Marcus notes that in Ugaritic some confusion exists between the roots *hwv* and *hyv* (D. Marcus, "The Verb 'to Live' in Ugaritic," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 17 (1972): 76). He cites the following examples: KTU 1.17 vi 27-28; 1.16 i 14; 1.4 iv 40-43. Nicolas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 100, 222, 273.

⁶⁴¹ Hamilton, *Genesis*, 205. See Marcus, "The Verb 'to Live' in Ugaritic," 76-82.

⁶⁴² Hamilton, *Genesis*, 220. "Surely *qana* is used here more for its sound than its precise meaning" (Hamilton, *Genesis*, 221).

⁶⁴³ Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 62; McKeown, *Genesis*, 31. Wenham calls this "a poetic etymology" (Wenham, *Genesis* 1-15, 101). Eve may be intended to sound like the word for living, in the same way the crafty sound like the word for naked. Kidner describes these names as "wordplays overlaid with meaning" (Kidner, *Genesis*, 74).

⁶⁴⁴ Skinner describes this omission as remarkable (Skinner, *Genesis*, 103).

⁶⁴⁵ von Rad, *Genesis*, 104.

be a mother or perhaps even to be human. If this is the case, Eve is making a הַבְלָן judgement in much the way Qohelet might. Both of the names Cain and Seth, while they certainly have a bearing on the lives of the characters to whom they are given, find their meaning in the immediate context of Eve's experience of childbirth. Against this view we have the possibility that as Adam's knowing his wife is only mentioned once, Cain and Abel could be twins.⁶⁴⁶

The main problem with this theory is that other than the name and our supposition that Eve is experiencing frustration, the narrator does not give us insight into her state of mind. The name is our major clue in order to fill this narrative gap. As the meaning of הַבְלָן appears originally to be "breath," we have an interesting contrast with Gen 2:7 (cf. 1:30), where breath brings life (נִשְׁמָת חַיִם).⁶⁴⁷ This also links to Eve's act of giving birth: she breathes life into Abel as God breathed life into Adam.⁶⁴⁸ If so, the use of הַבְלָן, which is associated with death and brevity, is ironic for Abel is the vapour of death.

The other possibility is that like Eve's own name, הַבְלָן is descriptive of Abel's life: brief, transitory, mist-like and from the perspective of history, since he has no progeny, irrelevant. In life Abel never speaks. He follows Cain's lead in bringing sacrifice and exists only as Cain's victim,⁶⁴⁹ whereas Cain, like Adam, is a man in his own right (disconcertingly he is born a man).⁶⁵⁰ Abel is more like a prop than a character, Cain's *brother*, a *breathling*, a *breath*: this points to his marginal role.⁶⁵¹

646 Moberly, *Genesis*, 92.

647 Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 105.

648 As noted above, both Skinner and Cassuto consider the naming of Cain to be an act of defiance against God.

649 For Qohelet this may be a virtue, for Abel is slow to sacrifice, while Cain is precipitous (Eccl 5:1-6). McEntire notes that Abel is mentioned by his name, "Abel," and his title, "brother." Both are used 7 times. Each is used 3 times by itself and 4 times with the other. The last three references to Abel use his title not his name (Gen 4:9b, 10, 11). McEntire takes this to mean that Abel the victim loses his name and is forgotten even by God (McEntire, *The Blood of Abel*, 24, 28). McEntire does connect the name "Abel" with Qohelet's use of הַבְלָן, which he translates "meaningless." He notes, "meaningless carries rather dire theological implications for the first murder victim" (McEntire, *The Blood of Abel*, 27).

650 Kugel notes that the rabbinic tradition takes this to mean that Cain was born evil (*Pirqe R. El. 21; Tg.Ps.-J. Gen 4:1*) He also notes that the *Life of Adam and Eve* 21:3 takes this to mean that Cain showed adult-like abilities from birth (Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 147).

651 Hamilton, *Genesis*, 222. Dor-Shav writes that Abel "walked without leaving footprints" (Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 216).

Nearly all the meanings of הַבָּל used elsewhere in Scripture may be found in this passage.⁶⁵²

As a shepherd, it would not be unreasonable to assume that a descendent of Abraham, Moses or David would identify with Abel rather than Cain.⁶⁵³ From God's perspective, Abel's life is not futile because God looks kindly upon both him and his sacrifice. As Dor-Shav notes: "Abel was the first human whom God clearly likes."⁶⁵⁴ It is possible to be a spiritual success but a physical failure. The majority of scholars associate the name with Abel's life, which is brief.⁶⁵⁵ Fortunately, we are not required to choose whether the meaning of Abel derives from his life or his origin, as הַבָּל could express both.

The primary reason that the person of Abel cannot be ignored when studying Ecclesiastes is that both Eve's frustration and Abel's brief life can be seen as descriptive of Qohelet's world. הַבָּל is not a frequently used word. Qohelet's choice of this word suggests an acceptance of the baggage it brings. Miller is wrong, therefore, to neglect it. Qohelet knows Eve's frustration, and as the themes of the text suggest, feels himself to be like Abel. Miller is also wrong in suggesting that it is impossible to recover what Eve intended by naming her son Abel,⁶⁵⁶ for we know the word's meaning. It is not our task to recover Eve's state of mind when she named her child, but the writer(s) of Genesis' intention in recording this act. This intention is accessible to the active reader as an inseparable part of the narrative, for the reader is inevitably a gap filler.⁶⁵⁷ Considering the presence in Ecclesiastes of the themes found in Genesis it is very hard to maintain that Qohelet

652 Antic, "Cain, Abel, Seth," 209.

653 An Israelite exiled in Babylon may well have read Abel's experiences as their own. A modern example of this would be the way Dan Pagis reads Gen 4 into the experience of the Holocaust in his poem "Written in pencil in a sealed box car" (Dan Pagis, *Points of Departure* (Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1982), 41).

654 Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 216.

655 Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 216; Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 105; Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 27; Miller, *Ecclesiastes*, 157.

656 Miller, "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of HBL," 35.

657 That is Iser's implied reader. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 34.

considered the use of הַבָּל in Genesis as irrelevant. Dor-Shav goes as far as to state that Genesis 4 must control the meaning of הַבָּל in Ecclesiastes.⁶⁵⁸

Qohelet firmly believes that the past is a source of instruction to the living (Eccl 3:15), even though human understanding of the past may be imperfect and frustrated by God (Eccl 3:10; 7:10). Many of the themes found in Ecclesiastes resonate with Gen 4. Such themes are the brevity of life and the unforeseen or sudden death (Eccl 2:18; 5:15; 9:12); the unsatisfying nature of life (Eccl 1:7; 4:2); the futility of toil and the inadequacy of sacrifice (Eccl 5:1; 9:2); and the inscrutable nature of God's purposes (Eccl 9:1). The life of Abel provides an historical narrative against which Qohelet expresses his world-view. The ghost of Abel haunts the book.

Genesis 4 as a Wisdom Text and the Failure of Retribution

It has been suggested that Gen 3 can be considered a wisdom narrative.⁶⁵⁹ Genesis 3 seems to show that the divinely established boundaries in creation have in some way been breached.⁶⁶⁰ This is not to say that Gen 3 was written as a wisdom narrative. We cannot be sure this was the intention of the author and as Coats and Fox note, identifying wisdom narratives is not simple and the existence of elements associated with wisdom is not in itself sufficient proof.⁶⁶¹ The account also fits Westermann's crime and punishment structural form.⁶⁶² While it may not have been written as a wisdom narrative it is certainly capable of being read as one. Reference to the tree of life suggests that Proverbs reads Genesis 3 this way.

658 Dor-Shav, "Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless Part I," 215.

659 See Nik Ansell, "The Call of Wisdom/the Voice of the Serpent: A Canonical Approach to the Tree of Knowledge," *Christian Scholar's Review* 31 (2001): 31-57.

660 Note references to separation and reproduction according to kind (Gen 1:4, 6, 7, 12, 14, 18).

661 George W. Coats, "Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35 (1973): 285-297; Michael V. Fox, "Wisdom in the Joseph story," *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001): 26-41. The difficulty in establishing what does comprise a wisdom narrative may in part be because more subjective elements, such as intended message and authorial intent, need to be weighed alongside the indentation of wisdom motifs. Contra James L. Crenshaw, "Method in determining wisdom influence upon historical literature." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 132. Crenshaw states that a wisdom narrative may be identified where the "stylistic or ideological particulars" found in the wisdom corpus are found in a narrative.

662 Westermann, *Genesis*, 47, 53. Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 152.

The retribution principle, sometimes referred to as “common theology,”⁶⁶³ or the deed-result connection, is found widely in wisdom literature and in the theology of the Deuteronomist. At its simplest, it describes a causative link between deeds and rewards, the good person who receives divine blessing and the evil person who receives divine punishment (Prov 10:2-3, 25, 30; 11:8, 21; 12:7, 21; 16:4, Ps 1; 37:28; 58:10; 92:7; Job 4:7-8). Along with this is the assumed corollary that wealth, poverty or misfortune are indicative of character. Therefore, an action can be judged as right or wrong by the result it receives. Wisdom literature insists that God’s behaviour is rational, perceivable and consistent. In particular, this theology promises long life to the righteous (Prov 10:27; Deut 4:40; 5:16; 6:2; 22:7; 25:15; 30:18; 32:47). Yet neither wisdom literature nor the Deuteronomist claims that this principle governs the human condition in totality, for Proverbs and Psalms question its validity and the speeches of Job effectively reject it (Ps 13; 15:4-5, 30; 34:19, 44:9-26; 49:5-8; Prov 11:16; 13:23; 28:15-16; 15:16-17; Job 21:7).⁶⁶⁴ As Fredericks notes, wisdom is not naïve. Ultimately, then or now, all theology must be able to stand the reality test of the experience of its adherents.⁶⁶⁵

Koch goes as far as to deny that either Psalms or Proverbs teach a principle of retribution at all.⁶⁶⁶ This radical statement needs qualification. Koch rejects judicial

663 Morton Smith, “The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952): 135-147.

664 Psalms 37 and 73 should also be considered in this regard for while both ultimately endorse retribution, they only do so by extending the time frame for its fulfilment into the future. Both acknowledge that the wicked do prosper. That the psalmist needs to defend retribution in such a way that acknowledges the problems attached to it suggests that it is questioned by those who are supposed to hear or read the Psalm. That as a sage Qohelet will embrace pleasure and folly in his investigation suggests that he questions the retribution principle from the start (Eccl 2:1).

665 Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 174.

666 He considers Deuteronomy separately as it concerns transgressions of the Law: an issue he considers distinct from retribution. He does include the prophets in his thesis as holding the same view as Proverbs and Psalms (Klaus Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?” in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw (London: SPCK, 1983), 75). Within the prophets, Koch understands retribution as “prophetic” and predictive in nature. The pursuit of good now ensures reception of good in the future. (This he considers as consequential retribution). He notes that when this fails to eventualise and a “discrepancy between moral behaviour and what happens in the world” occurs, people, (presumably *only good people*), are perturbed. Koch goes on to note that this expectation is on the wane in contemporary western society. He notes that for the early prophets (notably Amos and Hosea) the concern was that those who did evil were too affluent rather than that the righteous might

retribution: the idea that good deeds are judged by God, who then intervenes to reward the person who performs the deed. He notes the lack of both judicial and causative language in these books. God is not said to judge, punish or reward. Koch believes that what Proverbs and Psalms teach is that all “human actions have built-in consequences.”⁶⁶⁷ God may affirm, speed, delay, or mitigate these consequences but they do not come from Him as direct interventions. They are simply the consequence of how the world is. Koch then redefines retribution as a natural function of the world. He believes that both Job and Ecclesiastes reject both the judicial and the consequential forms of retribution. He notes that neither book seeks to replace the principle with another. He acknowledges that by rejecting judicial retribution at such length, Job and Ecclesiastes demonstrate that this view was in fact held within the spectrum of Israelite theology.⁶⁶⁸ While the distinction Koch makes is important and his argument, at least as far as Proverbs and Psalms goes, is compelling, differentiating between judicial and causal retribution does not absolve God of responsibility for the failures of retribution. For God is still found to have a created system perceived by critics of retribution as unjust.

Speiser identifies a wisdom theme in Gen 4. God’s instruction to Cain is to “do well” אֶם תִּתְּבֹּא (Gen 4:7) and if he acts accordingly he will find acceptance. In this he finds the retribution principle at work.⁶⁶⁹ While Gen 4:7 may be read as

suffer unjustly. Hebrew prophecy, like wisdom, is rooted in the observation of the now (Klaus Koch, *The Prophets, Vol. 1: The Assyrian Period*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1982), 2-6). Fox’s approach here is interesting. He describes functional retribution as immediate, individual, recognisable, constant and final. As in Ecclesiastes this is not found to be the case, life is absurd (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 139). As the Bible does not support such a constrictive view of retribution, Fox appears to have presented Qohelet with a straw man. Perhaps Brueggemann expresses this most helpfully by describing a God who is free to work outside of retribution (Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, 96).

⁶⁶⁷ Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution,” 64. Proverbs are after all observations of nature and refer to the likely outcome of given actions rather than divine promises.

⁶⁶⁸ Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution,” 80. Koch’s argument is at its weakest in Job where retribution is seen as judicial and divinely instituted (Job 9:24; 14:3; 19:29; 22:4; 23:7; 34:23). Care must be taken here for Koch does allow for different stages in the historical development of the idea of retribution.

⁶⁶⁹ Speiser, *Genesis*, 33. The need to do good is a wisdom motif. Targum Neofiti has Cain and Abel debating the efficacy of the retribution principle as the subject of Cain’s unrecorded (at least in the MT) speech to Abel in Gen 4:8 (*Tg. Neof. Gen 4:8*).

supporting the retribution principle, if the whole narrative is read as a wisdom text then the outcome is quite different.

The Cain and Abel story has proven difficult to interpret due to the existence of gaps in the narrative. We are not told why Cain and Abel brought sacrifices, what they hoped to achieve through them or how they knew their sacrifice pleased or displeased God. We are told that Abel and his sacrifice are accepted by God while Cain and his sacrifice are rejected but in neither case are God's reasons given. This fact has given rise to considerable debate among scholars.⁶⁷⁰ Brueggemann, in a careful exegesis of Gen 4:7, rejects the *prima facie* reading that the verse attributes blame to Cain at all. God's preference for Abel over Cain is as capricious as his preference for Esau over Jacob.⁶⁷¹

It is a truism that one cannot construct the intention of a passage from what it does not say. Therefore the meaning of this passage is not to be found in the nature of the sacrifices or the reason for their acceptance or rejection for on both counts the text is silent. As diverse scholars as Skinner and Wood have argued that this passage is about the rise of evil. This fits well with Westermann's crime and punishment structural analysis of the stories of Genesis.⁶⁷² Read from a wisdom perspective Gen 4 is not an example of contractual theology but a subversion of it, for although God favours Abel and his sacrifice, Abel is not preserved from the jealousy and violence which lead to his murder (cf. Eccl 4:4; 9:2). Not only that but God's warning to Cain that He is aware that he is a danger to Abel does not prompt God to forewarn Abel even though, following the murder, He promises to protect Cain from the vengeance of an unexpectedly populous world.⁶⁷³ God's favour cannot be comprehended (cf. Eccl 9:1-3). It is the competition for God's favour that initiates the violence. If Brueggemann is correct and it is not Abel's

670 Kissling summarises six different approaches to the rejection of Cain's sacrifice: 1) God prefers shepherds to gardeners; 2) Animal offerings are more acceptable than vegetables; 3) The choice of the younger over the older; 4) Abel acted in faith while Cain did not; 5) Cain's offering came from the cursed ground; and 6) Abel offered firstfruits, while Cain was less careful (Kissling, *Genesis*, 220). See Rose, *Genesis, Creation and Early Man*, 291-295 for patristic references.

671 Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 57-64.

672 Skinner, *Genesis*, 98; Wood, *Genesis*, 32; Reno, *Genesis*, 38; cf. Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 105.

673 Borgman, *Genesis*, 33.

actions that set him apart but God's inscrutable election, then God is directly culpable for Abel's death.

Even though Cain refuses to heed God's warning and comes under God's punishment, ultimately it is Cain whom God favours and Cain with whom God has two conversations. Cain receives the same punishment as Adam and the story follows largely the same pattern. This suggests that along with the account of Noah, the Cain and Abel story should be considered one of a series of fall stories in Genesis. Cain prospers: he has a family, builds a city, and fathers a dynasty. Although Genesis does not tell us when he died there seems no reason not to assume he lived a life comparable in length to that of other notable figures within the narrative world the author creates. By contrast, Abel is unable to enjoy God's blessing (Eccl 6:2) and goes in darkness (Eccl 6:4). This is a world in which evil appears to prosper and the retribution principle has no authority. This is not to say that Qohelet believes wickedness always triumphs. Retribution is always unpredictable. God's inaction is a kind of action, a permission given to evil to have its way and to a bad person to enjoy success and long life; this is the sovereignty not of God's will but of humankind's, the acceptance by God that divine justice must recede before the consequences of the free play of human will (Gen 6:5; 8:21). But God remains free to act outside of retribution, free to judge and show mercy as He sees fit (cf. Job 42:7-17).⁶⁷⁴

For Qohelet the fall and its aftermath are not seen in the growth of sin but in the reversal of expectations, for the wicked sometimes flourish while the good suffer. However, Qohelet does not establish this as a fixed rule around which a theology can be formed in order to promote righteous acts despite the lack of reward they accrue. For sometimes the righteous do receive a reward: the vanity of life resides in the fact that no underlying moral principle, certainly no retribution principle, can be found to operate consistently.

674 God's debate with Abraham in Gen 18, His judgement upon Sodom, and His mercy towards Zoar illustrate this (cf. Exod 33:19). See Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology: Structure Legitimation," In *Old Testament Theology*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 1-21.

For Qohelet:

שְׁבַתִּי וַיָּרַא תְּחִתַּה שְׁמֵשׂ כִּי לֹא לְקָלִים הַמְּרוֹץ וְלֹא לְגָבוֹרִים
הַמְּלֻחָמָה וְגַם לֹא לְחַכְמִים לְחַם וְגַם לֹא לְנֶבֶנִים עַשֶּׂר וְגַם לֹא
לִדְעָם חַן כִּיּוֹת וְפָגָע יִקְרָה אֲתִיכָּלִים:

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift,
nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches
to the intelligent, nor favour to the skilful; but time and
chance happen to them all. Ecclesiastes 9:11

Abel's short life and tragic end exemplifies the **הַבָּل**, the riddle that Qohelet cannot solve.⁶⁷⁵ Issues with the retribution principle are at the core of the book. It is the inability to predict outcomes from behaviour that is above all problematic for Qohelet. The whole of the human experience is compressed into Eccl 9:11, and in none of it can any presiding moral principle be detected.

Qohelet's statements about the lack of profit in life are not confined exclusively to his understanding of the retribution principle; they are a part of it. Neither a righteous nor an unrighteous life brings profit (Eccl 5:8), and even the hope of profit is false (Eccl 4:2). Where profit can be attained, it is always negated by death (Eccl 2:18; 5:15). Life is fundamentally unpredictable (Eccl 7:14; 8:6; 9:16; 11:6), and the wrong people receive honour (Eccl 10:5).

From the outset Qohelet questions retribution. In chapter 2 he tests himself by evaluating whether good comes from a life of pleasure and indulgence. For the sages good things come to people who display restraint, diligence and conformity to the natural order of creation. Qohelet can experiment with luxury and indulgence because his is a world where a radical scepticism has replaced the settled and consoling apothegms of the wise. In contrast to the established order of the sages, for Qohelet what is good and evil, and the outcomes they may bring, remain unsettled. For all this Qohelet continues to see himself as a sage, as one rooted in the wisdom tradition where knowledge and wisdom are the antithesis of death (Eccl 9:10). His indulgence in hedonism is a literary device designed to show that pleasure does not bring satisfaction.⁶⁷⁶

675 Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 105.

676 The indulgences of Eccl 2:1-9 are an integral part of the kingly persona created in the book. We

Wisdom literature does not claim to create a perfect system. Proverbs simply predict a likely outcome from what has been observed by the sages. That children brought up correctly will not stray when they age is based on observation and experience but it does not preclude the possibility of failure; it simply implies the possibility of failure is less likely (Prov 22:6). Many factors may interfere with this desired outcome, not least the free will of the child. Wisdom acknowledges that all human endeavours are subject to divine will (Prov 21:30). The end results are therefore a product of human will as well as divine will. Qohelet's vision is much bleaker because it does not acknowledge the possibility that human temporal fortunes can be influenced by the acquisition of virtue. Two passages are worthy of consideration here.

Ecclesiastes 7:15-17

את-הכל רأיתי בימי הבלי יש צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע
מאריך ברעתו: אל-תהי צדיק הרבה ואל-תתחכם יותר למה
תשומם: אל-תרשע הרבה ואל-תהי סכל למה תמות بلا עתך:

In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people⁶⁷⁷ who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evildoing. Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself? Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time? Ecclesiastes 7:15-17

Qohelet bases his wisdom on observation (Eccl 12:10). His observations have led him not to a total rejection of the retribution principle but to the belief that it seldom operates. Fox and Krüger consider that in this passage the principle is generally true but subject to exceptions.⁶⁷⁸ Lohfink considers this verse as an overall rejection of a principle that was adequate in Israel's ancient rural setting but can no longer address the complex moral issues of the modern world of the Persian empire.⁶⁷⁹ However, there is no suggestion in Eccl 7:15-17 that Qohelet

can be no more certain that Qohelet indulged in hedonism than we can that he was Solomon. Such hedonism would require extensive wealth and power. The Solomonic persona is evoked specifically so that a sage can make such claims.

⁶⁷⁷ The Hebrew give the singular for both the righteous צדיק and the wicked רשע.

⁶⁷⁸ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 48; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 140. Krüger explains this anomaly not in terms of divine failure but as a result of human inability to practise righteousness (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 140).

⁶⁷⁹ Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 98.

thinks his examples are exceptions to the retribution principle.⁶⁸⁰ The link between deed and reward, while it may exist, is seldom experienced by humans “under the sun.” The warning in verses 16-17 is strictly prudential, suggesting that this is a situation common enough to require avoidance and prevalent enough as to justify a warning.

The meaning of the prefix ב, “in their righteousness” (**בצדקו**) is unclear. It could also be translated as “because of their righteousness.”⁶⁸¹ This accounts for the warning against being very righteous (**צדיק הרבה**) in verse 16. If this is the case, then not only is retribution defective, it may be counterproductive. This is a radical suggestion to make. Whybray suggests that “too righteous” implies hypocrisy or falsely righteous.⁶⁸² This is unlikely as the hitpael (**תתחכם**) that is paralleled with **צדיק הרבה** cannot be shown to bear this meaning.⁶⁸³ Qohelet could be warning against flaunting your righteousness or the expectation that blessing can be achieved through righteousness.⁶⁸⁴ In all likelihood, to be over-righteous is defined in verse 20 where it means being sinless – a state no one can attain. It therefore means to be overconfident that perfect righteousness is attainable. Seow writes, “contrary to conventional wisdom, the righteous and the wise are not shielded from destruction (v 15b), and any attempt to be overly right and wise could, in fact, be destructive (v 16).”⁶⁸⁵ He takes destruction here to be psychological, the internal pressure of attempting to be perfect.⁶⁸⁶ Crenshaw suggests that it is not divine retribution that is being brought into question here but rather it is the human failure to ensure justice that causes the righteous to die before their time.⁶⁸⁷ In either case, justice is not attained through righteousness or wisdom.

680 Crenshaw considers this a rejection of retribution (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 140).

681 Krüger suggests, “in spite of his righteousness” (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 140).

682 See: R. Norman Whybray, “Qoheleth the Immoralist (Qoh 7:16-17),” in *Israelite Wisdom*, ed. John G. Gammie (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 191-204.

683 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 267. Even accepting that a parallel is not a precise grammatical equivalent.

684 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 253.

685 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 267.

686 Also Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 261.

687 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 140.

Reading Gen 3 we discover that Abel died because of his righteousness.⁶⁸⁸ Abel the righteous perishes. Cain the murderer lives. In his introduction, Qohelet claims that the past dictates the present, that all things are cyclical and that what has been will be again (Eccl 1:9). Not only does this passage tie Ecclesiastes into the creation account, it also explains Qohelet's world view and epistemology. As this is Abel's experience at the very beginning of the human story it becomes the controlling experience for all of humanity and introduces the idea that one can die in a state of righteousness. This is the reality Qohelet seizes upon. Genesis provides a framework to interpret Qohelet's ideas.

Abel is open to the charge expressed in Qohelet's warning of being too righteous and destroying himself (Eccl 7:16). A moderate pursuit of righteousness is less likely to lead to disaster. However, Qohelet holds God responsible for this state of affairs.

Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them. Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

Ecclesiastes 8:10-14

ובכן רأיתי רשעים קברים ובאו ומקום קדוש יהלכו וישתבחו בעיר אשר צנעו גסזה הבל אשר אין-נעשה פתגם מעשה הרעה מהרה על-כן מלא לב בני-האדם בהם לעשות רע אשר חטא עשה רע מאת ומאריך לו כי גס-יודע אני אשר היה-טוב ליראי האלים אשר ידראו מלפני וטוב לא-יהיה לרשע ולא-יאריך ימים כצל אשר איןנו ירא מלפני אליהם יש-הבל אשר נעשה על-הארץ אשר יש-צדיקים אשר מגיע אליהם במעשה הרשעים ויש רשעים שמניע אליהם במעשה הצדיקים אמרתי שגסזה הבל:

Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil. Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him, but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God. There is a vanity that

688 Fredericks makes this connection (Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 174).

takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. Ecclesiastes 8:10-14

Verse 10 is one of the more difficult verses in Ecclesiastes to exegete. Longman notes that the smoothness of the English translation belies the difficulty of the Hebrew.⁶⁸⁹ The NRSV, following the LXX, reads “praised” (*ἐπηγέθησαν*) for the Hebrew *וַיִּשְׁתַּבְחוּ* (forgotten), assuming a textual corruption (cf. Job 21:32). However, it is equally likely that the original text included both the righteous and the wicked, the wicked receive burial while the righteous are forgotten. This suggests “the righteous” have been lost from the text with both burial and loss of remembrance now being ascribed to the wicked.⁶⁹⁰ In either case (i.e. the LXX *Vorlage* or the MT corruption), the meaning is clear: retribution has in some way failed.⁶⁹¹ As the verse concerns burial, the issue is not one of justice delayed.

The reason given for the *הבל* of verse 10 is the slowness with which justice is executed. The assumption here is that the retribution principle is needed to restrain the wicked. It is easy to think of this as human justice but in verse 12 and 13 it is God who prolongs and cuts short the life of the righteous and the wicked.⁶⁹² This takes us back to Genesis where, in both chapter 3 and 4, God is open to the accusation of delaying justice.⁶⁹³ The death with which God threatened Adam and Eve does not occur and Adam lives to be 930 (Gen 5:5). Cain’s punishment is severely mitigated and falls short of that established for humans (Gen 9:6). Thus, the rise of evil in the early chapters of Genesis could be interpreted as a function of punishment too long delayed and of wrongs too lightly censured.

689 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 218.

690 Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 154; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 85.

691 This opens the possibility that the MT has been amended to claim the wicked are indeed forgotten. However, as this is far from the only place where the retribution principle is questioned in Ecclesiastes, it would seem unlikely that this reference alone should show signs of correction.

692 Longman suggests it is deliberately left vague as to whether divine or human justice is envisaged here (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 219).

693 Krüger makes this link, noting especially Gen 6:5 and 8:21 (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 159).

Verses 12-13 express the received wisdom of common theology and anticipate the conclusion of the book (Eccl 12:13), for God will ultimately establish justice. Verse 14 strongly rejects this: the righteous are treated according to the conduct of the wicked. Gordis and Lohfink consider verses 12 and 13 as a gloss.⁶⁹⁴ It is unclear why such a gloss should precede the verse it was intended to correct. Others seek to resolve this tension by claiming that verses 12-13 refer to divine justice and verse 14 to the failure of human justice,⁶⁹⁵ or that verses 12-13 are the norm and verse 14 an aberration.⁶⁹⁶ Qohelet does not wish to reject the substance of verses 12-13 in favour of verse 14. Qohelet knows that evil does not always triumph (Eccl 3:17; 7:17, 25; 8:8).⁶⁹⁷ He also knows that at times it does (Eccl 3:16; 4:1).

Qohelet believes both assertions to be true to some degree. As has been noted already, Qohelet's conscious juxtaposition of extreme views containing partial truths forces the reader to find a balance.⁶⁹⁸ Qohelet gives no judgement (Eccl 3:22). My reading of Ecclesiastes would suggest that Qohelet wishes his audience to resolve the dichotomy for themselves.

Chapter 9 expresses this point well:

הכל כאשר כל מקרה אחד לצדיק ולרשע לטוב ולטהור ולטמא
ולזבח ולאשר איננו זבח כטוב בחתא הנשבע כאשר שבואה ירא
זה רע בכל אשר געשה תחת השמש כי-מקרה אחד לכל

The same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath. This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone.
Ecclesiastes 9:2-3

⁶⁹⁴ Gordis, *Koheleth*, 283; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 107. Lohfink translates this passage: "Of course you will recall the saying: Those who fear God will prosper." Longman suggests that the retribution principle is being established here as a straw man (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 220).

⁶⁹⁵ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 154; Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 196. Krüger removes the promise element of this verse: "It is good for the God-fearing to do good." His assumption is that those described in this passage as being "God-fearing" may not truly be so (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 287).

⁶⁹⁶ Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 149.

⁶⁹⁷ Crenshaw believes this is a "crushing blow" to the principle of retribution (Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 156).

⁶⁹⁸ Enns and Fox both see the tension here as deliberate (Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 92; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 286).

By fate (**מִקְרָה**) Qohelet has death in mind. The long life of the righteous and the short life of the wicked are substantial tenets of the retribution principle. In this verse they are found to be wanting. Reference to sacrifice may be significant as it is against this background that Cain and Abel play out their short drama. Both sacrifice but Cain's sacrifice is not accepted. Cain is the sacrificer who does not know how to keep from doing evil (Eccl 5:1).

Conclusion

Qohelet has a difficulty reconciling the positivist view of the world encapsulated in traditional wisdom teaching (as preserved in Proverbs) with a world he considers to be seriously flawed. At the same time he considers himself to be a part of this wisdom tradition. He searches for wisdom and uses wisdom as the tool of his investigation. This creates a tension for Qohelet who finds not **יתרין** but a world of ceaseless toil in which the acquisitions of time are swept away by death and all human hopes and ambitions are **הבל**. He turns to Genesis because in the story of Abel's brief life and tragic end, he finds an image of that curse which besets the world.⁶⁹⁹

Abel has proven to be a very good example of his argument. His short life and ineffective sacrifice find expression in Qohelet's world. As in Ecclesiastes the righteous die prematurely while the wicked live to prosper. The retribution principle is defective and God is found to be complicit in its failure. The sin crouching at the door has become an all-pervasive wickedness that will not discharge those who practise it. Qohelet's world is one where the forces at play in Genesis have found their full expression. The life of Abel has proven far from irrelevant to Qohelet's use of **הבל**. We may go as far as to say that it is in part because of this connection that Qohelet uses the word, for it has enabled him to build on the themes presented in the story of Abel's short life.

Qohelet has found the retribution principle to be an inadequate explanation of the world he observes. He finds support for this view in Genesis 4. This leaves wisdom teaching and Israelite faith as a whole with something of a theological vacuum. How can humanity be induced to eschew evil and pursue good when

699 Anderson, "The Curse of Work," 105.

neither human nor divine justice can be relied upon to punish the former and reward the latter (Eccl 3:16-17; 5:8; 8:10-14)? This is particularly poignant, as the failure of the retribution principle to teach what is right and wrong appears to be the deliberate design of God (Eccl 7:13). Qohelet's partial resolution is to suggest that both good and evil come from the hand of God (Eccl 7:14; 9:1-3) and that the blessing of the righteous is not earned but is in fact a gift from God, given that people might enjoy life (Eccl 2:24; 5:19-20). People must embrace this gift rather than trying to find happiness through their own endeavours.

Danker believes that God deliberately refuses to impose retribution consistently to "remove moral bargaining" and force people to obey God simply though faith.⁷⁰⁰ Humans must not judge their actions on the basis of temporal success, but God's commands (Eccl 12:13). The failure of retribution forces a different approach: humans should not seek to find what brings blessing but rather what pleases God (Eccl 2:26; 5:4; 7:26).

For Qohelet, humans are left to identify what is good and evil through the application of wisdom, folly and even wickedness, should it prove helpful (Eccl 7:25), to embrace the challenge of the tree of knowledge and become independent moral thinkers. Not only is this the only option in a post-curse world, it is also a person's duty (Eccl 1:13, 17; 2:1, 3; 5:18; 8:16). This is a task that ultimately fails (Eccl 2:20; 6:12; 7:23-24), for it is subverted by lack of knowledge and human wickedness (Eccl 3:16; 7:15; 8:8). Neither the past (Eccl 1:11; 2:15; 9:5, 15), nor the present (Eccl 3:11; 7:14, 24; 8:17; 9:3), nor the future (Eccl 3:22; 6:12; 8:7; 9:1, 12; 10:14; 11:2, 5, 6) can be known.⁷⁰¹ If this is the case, how can judgements be made if outcomes are unpredictable? If neither the retribution principle nor human wisdom can be relied upon to identify what is good and enable a life that brings profit, what then, is left?

In Eccl 3:17 we are told that God will judge human affairs (cf. Eccl 11:9). In Eccl 5:18, in the context of obedience and worship of God, we are told to fear Him. This

700 Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 15.

701 It is retribution that gives surety for the future; therefore, in its absence there can be no knowledge of the future.

is repeated in a positive vein in Eccl 7:18, where fearing God brings success (cf. 3:14; 5:7; 8:12-13), and in Eccl 7:29 where pleasing God enables right living (cf. Eccl 8:13-14). Without God, enjoyment cannot be found (Eccl 2:25). Ultimately, Qohelet comes to an orthodox conclusion: humans must do what is right, not because the retribution principle is operative but simply because God is the final adjudicator of what is good and evil. He alone will judge and His control of the world is total. It is only right for humans to acknowledge God's sovereignty and accept His designation of good and evil. Wisdom cannot be established by human ratiocination but only by submission to the divine will insofar as that will is apparent to the human mind. Humans are called to lay aside their quest for what is good in favour of submission to God, because opposition to the will of God is futile. A life of righteousness is its own reward, whether it be accompanied by misery or joy.⁷⁰² Righteousness pleases God but He is not compelled to reward it. In Eccl 8:12 Qohelet says that evildoers will not fare as well as the virtuous in the eyes of God although he gives no indication of what form God's pleasure, or for that matter, displeasure might take. On the other hand, the warnings about God's judgement (Eccl 3:17; cf. 11:9; 12:14) provide a motive for righteous behaviour. However, in a world where the principle of retribution does not follow the contours of human behaviour and the search to find good and evil through human wisdom has failed, the task of justifying a righteous life remains and Qohelet's answers are inconclusive. One possibility lies in Qohelet's presentation of the many contradictions that are found at the heart of the book and that are also found in the human condition. If humans can distinguish good from evil, if they can apply knowledge and discernment, if they can account for God's sovereignty, then they will discover what is good. For Qohelet doing good is its own reward.

702 As Danker notes, the absence of retribution removes bargaining from the behaviour of the righteous (Danker, "The Pessimism of Ecclesiastes," 26).

Conclusion

Reading Genesis

It has been established that Qohelet probably knows and cites Genesis, in Eccl 3:20 and 12:7. The major themes he explores are those found in Genesis 3: death, toil, human nature, the propensity to evil, the availability of knowledge, finding and choosing what is good, and free will. He chooses the word **הַבָּל**, taken from Genesis, as the Leitmotif of his work. Qohelet's extensive consideration and rejection of the retribution principle reflects the experience of Abel.

What we find in Ecclesiastes is a clear case of intertextuality: an implicit citation, a convergence of diction, and extensive thematic parallels. Taken together these demonstrate an example of what Fishbane calls an "analogous context."⁷⁰³ From this, Qohelet's purpose becomes clear. The citation and common language he uses are intended to draw parallels between the texts and to encourage his audience to consider Ecclesiastes against the backdrop of Genesis.

This is not to suggest, with the exception of Eccl 3:20, that Qohelet intends to present an interpretation of the fall narrative such as that found in Sirach. Had this been his goal he would certainly have made more direct citations of the Genesis text. His concern is the explanation of the world around him rather than a desire to interpret Genesis. His epistemology is not exegetical but empirical.

Consequently, Genesis is not the source of this teaching nor does he cite it as proof that his teaching is correct. His proof is based simply on the observation of the way the world is. Qohelet cites Genesis because it enables him to express his somewhat radical views within an orthodox framework and without being unfaithful either to Israelite faith or the Israelite God.

It is inevitable that his interpretation of Genesis will be evident in his work. How then does he understand Gen 2-4? In Adam and Eve's acquisition of moral knowledge and the judgement that followed he sees a real change from the world described in Genesis 2 to the present reality of **הַבָּל**. The account of the fall and its consequences is entirely consistent with Qohelet's world "under the sun," a world characterised by toil, adversity, separation from God, baffling moral choices,

⁷⁰³ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 287.

illusory gains, thwarted hope and death. Qohelet's world is one where there is an awareness of what once was and can no longer be, a world where people were **רְשָׁא** and where what is crooked was once straight (Eccl 1:15; 7:13), where the cycles of creation are life-giving rather than wearisome (Eccl 1:8). For Qohelet the frustrations of life are the outworking of the curse.

He considers the events of the garden to be universal. The pronouncement of death, toil and pain made upon Adam and Eve has become the experience of all humankind and is irreversible. They are humanity's new reality. The attempt to recreate Eden through the kingly experiment fails, for what is crooked cannot be straightened. The fall is the source of the human condition. While he expects the audience to recognise the Genesis account, and considers it authoritative enough to support his own view of the world, he gives us no indication of the degree of authority the Genesis text holds for his audience.

Failed Experiments

Ecclesiastes represents a series of failed experiments: firstly, there is the experiment in Genesis (which informs the whole of Ecclesiastes), in which Adam and Eve attempt to gain a knowledge which lies beyond the limits God has set them, the knowledge of good and evil. Humans achieve a moral independence, in which they alone determine what is good and evil, profitable and pleasurable and, in so doing, become the authors of their own destiny. The humans now enter a world where they may live independently of God, making choices for themselves and experiencing the results. This world is very different from the garden of Eden with its provision, protection and dependency upon God. The world outside the garden is marked by a strained relationship with God, by pain in childbirth, by toil and, ultimately, death.

The results of this independence are written across the pages of Genesis: the choice of Cain to kill his brother or of Joseph to resist the adulteress. Most of the stories of Genesis describe much more complex moral choices, such as those of Tamar, Abraham, Hagar and Sarah, all concerned with the preservation of family lines. Choices are made but the outcomes are unpredictable. When Joseph refuses to sin against God he finds himself first in prison and then in a palace. Moral

choices are complex. The experiment with the tree of knowledge of good and evil has proven problematic. Wrong choices bring grief and trouble and even right ones can do the same. While they do become more like God in their ability to decide upon good and evil, this is not the boon the first humans had envisaged.

Qohelet's world is the post-Eden world of toil, frustration, disaffection from God and death. The defective retribution principle identified in Ecclesiastes (Eccl 11:6) along with the uncertainty of outcomes found in both Ecclesiastes and the post-Edenic chapters of Genesis are an ongoing legacy of human choice. Qohelet asks and answers the question: how have the choices made in Genesis 3 worked out for us?

This failure is a necessary part of life for if the retribution principle worked infallibly then humans would have only a theoretical ability to make free choices but a practical disincentive to do so. A strong correlation between deed and outcome places humans in the position of being no more than animals in one of Skinner's operant conditioning chambers. This hardly equates to people being moral creatures.

The second failed experiment is Qohelet's own. He embraces the challenge of Genesis, the new freedom it provides, and as the wisest of all men with unlimited resources, he will search out what is good and worthwhile to do under the sun. Within wisdom literature retribution demonstrates what is good for its enactment receives reward. According to Qohelet, the retribution principle fails in this regard and so good and evil must be discovered through human ability. Yet this also fails, for his wisdom avails him nothing. There is nothing profitable; toil remains; knowledge brings grief and death trumps all. The quest for knowledge, wisdom, good and evil leads not to happiness but to despair and hatred of life. Retribution is inconsistent and God's will is sovereign, inscrutable and insurmountable.

Ecclesiastes can be a confusing book and contains many elements that are contradictory. This has been explained in several ways. For some the contradictions are the result of an orthodox redaction of a hetero-orthodox book. Loader considers them polar extremes, thesis and counter-thesis and conclusion.

Sharp sees them as deliberate irony. For Longman Qohelet is confused about what he believes,⁷⁰⁴ and for Fox he is a mirror of the contradictions found in the world itself. Fox is certainly correct, but the significance of the book lies in the purpose these contradictions serve. Qohelet's purpose is less than straightforward. To make a statement such as **וְאֵין כָל-חֶדֶשׁ תַחַת הַשְׁמֶשׁ הַכֹּל הַבָּל** or **הַבָּל הַבְּלִים הַכֹּל הַבָּל** is to evoke a questioning response in the reader, for however the word is defined surely not everything can be **הַבָּל**? Is there the potential for something new under the sun? The hyperbole of Qohelet's opinions and the contradictory view he presents are designed to invite the reader to consider the issues and form their own judgement. Thus, readers find themselves engaged in the same quest as the writer. For us this too becomes a failed quest, for despite our collective wisdom, the world remains unchanged. Qohelet concludes that human beings are not good at making moral choices. We lack the wisdom or perspicacity for the task.⁷⁰⁵ Despite searching for millennia for wisdom, knowledge and goodness, humanity is no nearer to either a religious or secular utopia.

Mitigated Failure

God's actions in Gen 2-4 are significant, firstly, in allowing free access to a dangerous tree and, secondly, by endorsing the new freedom the humans have chosen. God does not seek to undo Adam and Eve's choice or to prevent Cain from exercising his unique understanding of what is good. This suggests that God is complicit in the choice Adam and Eve made. The path is well trodden but the ability to obey God assumes the ability to disobey Him, and love for God is meaningless unless the possibility of ignoring or hating Him exists. God's purposes for humankind can only be achieved outside of Eden. As Dell notes, God shows no intention of rectifying human nature in either text.⁷⁰⁶ The themes of maturation and human ability to chart their own course suggest that it is both necessary and desirable for humans to be like God in this respect. It is in fact part

704 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 256.

705 Farmer observes that the nature of wisdom is correct living. It is in this that humans have failed (*Farmer, Who Knows What is Good?* 1).

706 Katharine Dell, "Exploring Intertextual Links between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1-11," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 578 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 10.

of what it means to be human. If this is not quite a *falling up*,⁷⁰⁷ for it is an act of disobedience punished by God and leads to a plethora of unfortunate incidences recorded across Genesis, then it is a necessary fall from both a divine and human perspective.

Qohelet's reading of the Genesis narrative is coloured by his understanding of human freedom to make moral choices. The fall that Qohelet sees is inextricably linked to the capacity to choose between good and evil (sometimes even mistaking the good for the bad and vice versa), allied with an incapacity to foresee the consequences of these choices. Human nature itself is not flawed. The freedom to choose is also the freedom to err and thus the freedom to determine one's own destiny. Qohelet's observation leads him to the view that humanity has a greater proclivity for evil than for good. How could a freedom won in defiance of a divine command not lead to a problematic outcome? The predilection of humans towards wickedness perhaps tells us something about the relative natures of good and evil.⁷⁰⁸ As in the garden, wisdom apart from obedience is dangerous. This is not to say that righteousness and even wisdom are not found, only that those who demonstrate them are in the minority. Human beings may still aspire to what is good. It is clear from Ecclesiastes that the current state of affairs is fixed unalterably by God (Eccl 1:13; 3:11, 14; 7:13; 8:17; 9:1; 11:5).

Nor is Qohelet's search for what is good a total failure, for despite his protestations to the contrary he manages to set out a series of recommendations that he claims will achieve happiness. We are to eat and drink, to enjoy work and relationships, to make the most of what we have and to find enjoyment in the simple things of life. We are to enjoy not only the fruits of work but work itself. Work, food and relationships are creational blessings. Pleasure is found only where God ordains it (Eccl 2:24, 5:19, 6:2). This creates a tension, for humans have freedom to find what is good but they do this against a background of divine sovereignty. Success is only found where God permits it.

707 Magonet, *A Rabbi Reads the Bible*, 121-127.

708 Clemens, "The Law of Sin and Death," 7.

Qohelet embraces the challenge of this world and lays before us the task of finding out what is good, what brings profit and what gives value to life. He recognises that this is no easy task (Eccl 2:3; 6:12). He also recognises that an exceptional person may find what is good and live accordingly (Eccl 7:28). Wisdom and knowledge are gifts from God (Eccl 2:26). The experiment of Eden has been a failure but a necessary and redeemable failure.

How to Live in a Fallen World.

זכור את־בוראיך בימי בחורתיך

Remember your creator in the days of your youth,
Ecclesiastes 12:1

Life, like the book of Ecclesiastes, is a series of breaths. As the book progresses the use of **הבל** becomes less frequent and the book ends in death and the loss of breath (Eccl 12:7). Ecclesiastes can be understood as a journey from youth to old age.⁷⁰⁹

Before the frame editor gives his conclusion Qohelet gives his own (Eccl 11:7–12:8). The first part may be considered the last of the *carpe diem* passages. Longman describes it as the most optimistic section of the book.⁷¹⁰ The last section of this is the mortality poem, describing the slow and inevitable ageing process and arguably an eschatological conflagration. This poem is like nothing else in the book (although it is clearly intended to resonate with Eccl 1:3-11). Qohelet gives death the last word. Here the enjoyment of life is contrasted with the ever-present shadow of death. Death is the compendious expression of the fall. Though there are days of light and darkness,⁷¹¹ though good and evil are inextricably interwoven, life must still be lived to the full. Eaton describes this as a life of faith without certainties.⁷¹²

709 Mills understands the book in this way (*Reading Ecclesiastes*, 14).

710 Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 259.

711 Many commentators take “days of darkness” to be synonymous with death (Eccl 6:4) (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 75; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 324; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 134-135; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 259; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 116). Murphy and Longman include old age. I disagree: death is always a day in Ecclesiastes (7:1; 8:8). Elsewhere darkness means grief or folly (Eccl 2:13-14; 5:17 (also days)). I take days of darkness here to be days of trouble cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 348).

712 Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 143. Life without retribution requires a different kind of faith from that where deeds are rewarded observably. Arguably, it is this kind of faith that the book of Ecclesiastes is intended to promote. Zuck agrees. He states that life cannot be understood or explained, for there is too much injustice; instead it must be lived by faith (Zuck, “God and

Qohelet has chronicled throughout the book the failure of people to find lasting profit in work, or pleasure, or in the acquisition of wealth, fame and power. Humans cannot discover wisdom by their own efforts and cannot forge their own destinies in defiance of God's will. The attempt, though it be made in each generation to live in independence from God, can never succeed. What then is the way forward? How then are humans to live in a crooked world where "wickedness and folly outweigh righteousness?"⁷¹³ Ecclesiastes 11:7-10 gives us the answer. The uncertainties of life and approaching death concentrate the mind on what is important in life. Humans are to make the most of every moment of their lives by finding joy in all activities and by banishing בָּשָׂר and רַעַת, the trials of a crooked world. The nature of the world as it is must be accepted. יְהִרְזֹן will not be found and death cannot be avoided. People can only live within the "times" that God establishes. God's power is omnipresent and humans are powerless to control the present or forecast the future. This is not a reason for pessimism but a call to redirect our lives to the sources of joy that are available to us (Eccl 2:25-26; 5:20; cf. 6:2). Qohelet advises us to follow our desires (cf. Eccl 9:10). This is not a call to licentiousness (cf. Num 15:39; Sir 5:2), for that approach has been tried and found wanting (Eccl 2:1-14; 7:25); rather, it is a call to enjoy the present moment and give thanks for what we have and can still do. To this God has already given His approval (Eccl 9:7b).⁷¹⁴ What sets this apart from what has previously been said in Eccl 2:24; 3:12-13, 22; 5:17; 8:15; 9:7 is that all human choices are subject to divine judgement. To find joy requires an acceptance of God as the arbiter of life, death, good and evil. If humans wish to find happiness and live a worthwhile life

Man," 48-49).

713 Fredericks, *Coping with Transience*, 32. Cf. Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 2.

714 Gordis goes beyond this understanding, taking Eccl 11:9b to mean that God will judge you if you do not "enjoy" (רָמֵשׁ) life. He supports this by noting that "enjoy" is an imperative, as are most of the verbs in this section (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 338).

they must acknowledge the Creator.⁷¹⁵ This does not guarantee the avoidance of death or days of darkness, for both will occur.

Remember (**זכור**) means more than an intellectual process or a linking of past with present and future.⁷¹⁶ It frequently refers to a turning towards something which results in action (Gen 8:1; 9:15; 19:29; Exod 2:24; Lev 26:42; Deut 9:7; 25:17; Josh 1:13; 2 Kgs 20:3). Remember, here, is followed by a call to fear God (Eccl 12:13). It connects each human life with the author of that life and with the Creator of all things. To this end it is also a call to a renewed relationship with the Creator.⁷¹⁷ Life must be lived in consideration of the giver of life (Eccl 12:7), the inevitability of death and the nature of the world. Qohelet uses the word to evoke a sense of responsibility to live life with reference to God.

There is no way back to the garden and so the way forward must be found. Life must be lived in righteousness and in the acceptance of a crooked world that can never be straightened, for doing what is right (Gen 4:7) still leads to acceptance, even if it does not bring reward.⁷¹⁸ Qohelet calls for obedience and submission to God, not independence from Him. As in the garden of Eden, God alone is the ultimate judge of good and evil and His judgement overrides that of humans. The only way forward for humans is to submit their judgements of what is right and wrong, good and evil, worthwhile or **הבל** to those of God.

715 Longman and Crenshaw suggest that there is no contextual basis for “Creator” (**בוראיך**) as a reference to God here and offers pit (i.e. grave), health, or well (i.e. wife) as alternatives, noting that most MSS have “Creator” in the plural. Both authors give both suggestions and neither indicates a preference for one over the other. There is no textual evidence to support a different reading. The text makes sense as it stands, for what follows is creational in nature. Creator also resonates with Eccl 1:4-10 and Eccl 12:7, which both represent God as Creator (Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 260; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 184).

716 Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 214.

717 This echoes the account of Enoch, where in the seventh generation a human once again walks with God (Gen 5:22; cf. Gen 3:8).

718 Weeks, *Ecclesiastes*, 89.

*The end of the matter; all has been heard.
Fear God, and keep his commandments;
for that is the whole duty of everyone.
For God will bring every deed into judgement,
including every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Appendix 1

Occurrences of הַבְלָה in the First Testament

Genesis 4:2 x2	Ecclesiastes 3:19
Genesis 4:4 x2	Ecclesiastes 4:4
Genesis 4:8 x2	Ecclesiastes 4:7
Genesis 4:9	Ecclesiastes 4:8
Genesis 4:25	Ecclesiastes 4:16
1 Kings 16:13	Ecclesiastes 5:6
1 Kings 16:26	Ecclesiastes 5:9
2 Kings 17:15	Ecclesiastes 6:2
Job 7:16	Ecclesiastes 6:4
Job 9:29	Ecclesiastes 6:9
Job 21:34	Ecclesiastes 6:11
Job 27:12	Ecclesiastes 6:12
Job 35:16	Ecclesiastes 7:6
Job 37:12	Ecclesiastes 7:15
Psalm 31:7	Ecclesiastes 8:10
Psalm 39:6	Ecclesiastes 8:14 x2
Psalm 39:7	Ecclesiastes 9:2
Psalm 39:12	Ecclesiastes 9:9 x2
Psalm 62:10 x2	Ecclesiastes 11:8
Psalm 62:11	Ecclesiastes 11:10
Psalm 78:33	Ecclesiastes 12:8 x3
Psalm 94:11	Isaiah 30:7
Psalm 144:4	Isaiah 49:4
Proverbs 13:11	Isaiah 57:13
Proverbs 21:6	Jeremiah 2:5
Proverbs 31:30	Jeremiah 8:19
Ecclesiastes 1:2 x5	Jeremiah 10:3
Ecclesiastes 1:14	Jeremiah 10:8
Ecclesiastes 2:1	Jeremiah 10:15
Ecclesiastes 2:11	Jeremiah 14:22
Ecclesiastes 2:15	Jeremiah 16:19
Ecclesiastes 2:17	Jeremiah 23:16
Ecclesiastes 2:19	Jeremiah 51:18
Ecclesiastes 2:21	Lamentations 4:17
Ecclesiastes 2:23	Jonah 2:8 [9]
Ecclesiastes 2:26	Zechariah 10:2

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