

**The contribution of the theme of divine judgment to the  
argument of the book of Ecclesiastes**

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## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any institution for a degree.

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## **Abstract**

There has been no general agreement among scholars about the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes. There are several interpretive paradigms for handling tension in the book. Many scholars think the book does not affirm afterlife or a divine judgment in it. This dissertation studies what the book teaches about divine judgment and how it contributes to the argument of the book. The argument of the book is evaluated by studying key lexemes and their usage. Key passages discussing divine judgment are exegeted to determine what the book teaches about divine judgment and how that relates to the argument of the book. The teaching on divine judgment is placed in the context of the canon. Finally, homiletic implications of the study are discussed.

This study concludes that the book of Ecclesiastes argues that no permanent profit is possible in this life. This makes all work futile with respect to the goal of securing permanent profit. This futility is discussed using the key word הבל 'futility', which is used as an antonym of יתרון 'profit' and with a singular meaning whenever used in reference to the summary "all is futile". This futility is used to argue for valuing joy instead of living an achievement-centered life. The book of Ecclesiastes teaches a personal divine judgment of all deeds in the afterlife in the epilogue and probably in the body of the work. In the area of divine judgment, tensions in the book are to be solved by reading the book harmonistically. There is a possible allusion to the Egyptian view of afterlife in Ecclesiastes 3:21. The theme of divine judgment is used to address lack of justice in this life, as a basis for revering God, and to guide the pursuit of joy. The teaching on divine judgment is in agreement with the rest of the canon.

The use of the key word הבל 'futility' argues for a unified meaning, but such a meaning has been elusive. I present a novel solution to the lexical dilemma. While the idea that הבל means 'futility' is not novel, this study shows that the futility is specifically in relationship to an attempt to secure permanent profit. The minority view that Qohelet consistently affirmed a conscious afterlife and a divine judgment in it has significant ramifications for understanding the book and for Old testament biblical theology. The view that this is a plausible interpretation of the book is supported by new arguments.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

### 1.1.1 Qohelet

The book of Ecclesiastes claims to record the words of קהלת (Eccl 1:1<sup>1</sup>). The word is sometimes used with the article (קהלתה, Eccl 12:8), which suggests that originally it was a common noun rather than a proper noun. It may be used in the book of Ecclesiastes as a proper noun or as a noun referring to a person functioning in some role in a קהל 'assembly', such as the one gathering the assembly together, 'gatherer', 'collector' (Seow 1999:95-97). There is some debate on whether it can refer to collecting things, like wisdom or wealth, or only assembling people (Provan 2001:28). Many take the gathering to be for the purpose of addressing people. Thus קהלת is “one who addresses a public assembly” (Gesenius 1857:726), “a person who played an (unspecified) role in an assembly” (Provan 2001:28), “great collector (of sentences)” (Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius 1907:875), or “one who gathers material for education of the public” (Bartholomew 2009:102-104). Other suggestions include a proper name and an individual who gathered and evaluated opposing views (Lioy 2008:2). I use the transliteration Qohelet to refer to this person.

The book begins with a third person reference to Qohelet in 1:2 and has a similar ending in 12:8. Starting at 12:8 or 12:9 there is an epilogue. The epilogue contains a brief description of Qohelet as a sage that tried to find fitting words, a warning about a lot of studying making one tired, and an exhortation to revere God and keep his commandments. Qohelet has been identified as king Solomon on the basis of statement “I was (or am) king over Israel in Jerusalem” (Eccl 1:12), claims to wisdom over predecessors (1:16), and claims to wealth (2:4-9). This resembles the portrayal of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:1-10:29, as Longman (1998:2) notes. Yet many consider that Qohelet was not Solomon. Fox (1999:159) thinks the author created a persona of a fictional king based on Solomon. Crenshaw (1987:57), Enns (2011:16-20), Fox (199:159-160), and Longman (1998:2-8) think that the identification with Solomon is a literary device and not a genuine identification. Yet others think that a genuine identification with Solomon is meant (Fredericks 2010:31-36).

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1 Since this study concerns the Hebrew text of the book of Ecclesiastes, I number verses according to the Hebrew verse numbers.

Arguments for the identification not being genuine include the alleged strangeness of saying that he had grown in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before him (Eccl 1:16), as only David preceded Solomon (Enns 2011:17). Enns thinks that a counter-argument that there were non-Israelite kings in Jerusalem before David has the air of desperation about it. A second argument is that the royal persona seems to recede to the background after Ecclesiastes 2:16, and that the author seems aloof toward kingship in 4:1-3, 4:13-16, 5:7-8, and 10:20 (Longman 1998:5-6, Enns 2011:19-20). A third argument, though more about authorship than the identity of Qohelet, is based on dating the book as post-exilic (Enns 2011:20). A fourth argument is that because Qohelet does not explicitly say that he is Solomon, he must be distancing himself from Solomon. This would allegedly have been recognized by the ancient reader (Longman 1998:83-84). A fifth argument is that the author *was* king rather than *is* king in Ecclesiastes 1:12 (Ogden 1987:34). A sixth argument is that there is no known king named Qohelet (Fox 1999:372).

These arguments are hardly strong. Recognizing that there were non-Israelite kings before David in Jerusalem does not seem to be very desperate. Wisdom and its limitations are certainly talked about in the near context (Eccl 1:13, 16, 17, 18) and continued somewhat later (2:14-16). Assuming that Qohelet was wiser than his predecessors strengthens the assumption that he knew what he was talking about when he spoke of the limitations of wisdom. Being wiser than David is one thing, but the assumption is strengthened even more if he was wiser than all the preceding rulers over Jerusalem. Thus, on the basis of the principle of relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995:155-171), the assumption that gentile kings were included is sensible.

Likewise the royal persona may not be very relevant in a rather philosophical treatise outside of the experiment of 1:16-2:12, where it is relevant on the basis of the king's ability to engage in the experiment. This is precisely where we find the Solomonic allusions besides the introduction of 1:1 and 1:12. It seems that the principle of relevance explains the receding of the royal persona to the background equally well regardless of whether it is fictional or not. The argument about aloofness toward kingship seems likewise weak. There is no reason to think that because one is a king, he cannot talk about kings from an aloof perspective.

Dating the book has been very controversial (see section 1.1.2 below). Without entering that debate, it is sufficient to note that a late date does not in itself imply that it cannot contain words from a person centuries older. The words may have been preserved in a now-lost

document. If the words are considered falsely attributed to an ancient king, it is not clear that it constitutes fiction assumed to be recognized by the readers rather than an attempt at deception.

Also the fourth argument seems weak as long as the details are not filled in. It is not clear why not using one's explicit name should signal an ancient reader that the allusion being made is meant to be fiction. For the fifth argument, it is enough to note with Murphy (1992:13) that the verb *הייתי* 'I was' does not imply that he no longer was king. What was relevant is that he had been king and thus been able to conduct his royal experiment, not whether he still was king. It is not safe to conclude that the verb form *הייתי* 'I was' implies in this context that kingship did not extend to the present. This judgment is shared by many scholars (Crenshaw 1987:71, Fox 1999:170-171, Seow 1997:119).

The sixth argument can be answered by pointing out that Qohelet may be a common noun used to refer to the king or the king may have had a nickname. The arguments presented above that the author of Ecclesiastes meant the readers to consider Qohelet as anything other than Solomon are not conclusive. It seems more probable that a genuine identification with Solomon was intended.

### **1.1.2 Date and authorship**

The book of Ecclesiastes is anonymous. According to the text, the epilogist may be Qohelet. That would make Qohelet the author of the book (Lioy 2008:15-16 calls Solomon the author of the book, but in 2008:108 he does not express any commitment to whether he authored the epilogue) or a literary persona used by the author (Fox 1999:372-373). The text allows just as well for the possibility that the epilogist is a person who preserved Qohelet's words by including them in his own literary composition. That would make Qohelet an author of parts of the book, but not the author of the book as a whole.

The book has been dated variously from Solomonic times in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC (10<sup>th</sup> century BC, Lioy 2008:1-7, Archer 1974:486-496 argues for the possibility) to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or perhaps as early as 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (Ogden 1987:15) and all kinds of dates in between (probably the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Whybray 1989b:19; no earlier than 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Seow 1997:20; post-exilic, Enns 2011:16-22; no later than 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, Fredericks 2010:31-32).

It is clear from the different dates given to the book that Solomonic authorship is ruled out by many, and that the possibility is allowed by other dates. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that Qohelet is intended to be Solomon in a real sense, though nothing of great significance relating to the theme of this dissertation depends on this assumption. Yet there is no claim that the book was authored by Solomon. It claims to record his words. No claim is made that any archaic language forms were retained. Thus the identification of Qohelet as Solomon is compatible with both early and late authorship. Because determining the date of the book more precisely is not relevant for the purposes of this study, I will not pursue the issue of dating further.

### 1.1.3 Key word הבל

There is a variety of scholarly opinions about what Qohelet's message was. His view is summarized by the statement “הבל הבלים הכל הבל” *'hebel of hebel, all is hebel'* in Ecclesiastes 1:2 and 12:8. The meaning of the expression and its relationship to the message of Qohelet and of the book of Ecclesiastes is debated. According to Seow (1997:102), no single definition works in every case. He uses 'fleeting' and describes another use as of something beyond human ability to grasp. He thinks the term is negative. Provan (2001:51-52) approaches the question similarly. The basic meaning is ephemerality, but the word is also used to describe the elusive nature of reality, the lack of human ability to control it.

Fox (1999:35-36) criticizes multiple meanings for the word. “If Qohelet were saying, 'X is transitory; Y is futile; Z is trivial,' then the summary, 'All is *hebel*' would be meaningless.” His criticism makes an important point. There must be a common core of meanings of הבל in the book, at least as far as the summary goes. This is not to deny that the context may bring out different aspects of meaning, but to say that there must be some level of abstraction that fits all the uses. Seow's view is therefore not likely to be correct.

Fox (1999:27-42, 144) understands הבל to mean 'absurd', and he thinks the book is about the absurdity of life. Life is absurd, and the proper way to respond to it is to make the best of a bad situation. Enns agrees with Fox about the meaning of הבל as 'absurd'. He considers the message of Qohelet to be that everything is absurd (2011:5), meaninglessness is a heavy burden laid on humanity, it is God's doing (2011:39-40), and Qohelet is angry or at least disillusioned with God for it being so (2011:39, 54-56).

Longman understands הבל to be 'meaningless' (Longman 1998:61-65). He summarizes the message of Qohelet as "Life is full of trouble and then you die" (1998:34). According to him (following Crenshaw), Qohelet denied God's goodness, and portrayed people as powerless to acquire essential truth (Longman 1998:36). Qohelet notes about various things that they are הבל. Making conclusions on that basis presupposes that the things called הבל had meaning to Qohelet. Otherwise he could not have used them as part of his argument. Qohelet clearly values certain things, such as joy. These things were significant, valuable, and meaningful to him in some way.

Longman (1998:32) says that Qohelet not only states that everything is meaningless, but also specifies a number of areas and shows why they have no value. Qohelet gives reasons why toil cannot give ultimate satisfaction. It appears that Longman uses meaninglessness in the sense of valuelessness, and that subjective value for a person would count as value (since ultimate satisfaction is a subjective value). This makes Longman's view problematic.

Perhaps Longman's view could be saved by taking meaninglessness in the context of an objective value as opposed to the subjective values Qohelet had. In other words, Qohelet valued things that he knew were objectively speaking valueless. In this interpretation, life would be meaningless objectively speaking, but people, including Qohelet, may construct local meanings in it. Yet, I find little in the book of Ecclesiastes to support the idea that Qohelet made a distinction between meaningful life subjectively speaking and meaningless life objectively speaking. I find it difficult to take הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes in the sense of 'meaningless' as referring to all of life.

Ogden (1987:17-22) and Ogden and Zogbo (1997:2-4) understand הבל to mean 'enigmatic'. DeRouchie (2011:10) suggests that הבל in Ecclesiastes means 'unfathomable' (not 'unknowable' or 'unintelligible'). It is enigmatic. Fredericks (2010:23, 27-31, 46-54) argues that the meaning of הבל is 'temporary' and that it can be a positive note at times.

Methodologically, he does not believe that we are justified in coming up with a meaning that fits the text of Ecclesiastes contextually, if there is no further support that the meaning exists for the word (2010:50; he refers approvingly to Miller 2002:5). Fredericks considers the meaning of the word to be so important that he says that the history of interpretation of Ecclesiastes is a history mainly of its meaning of הבל (Fredericks 2010:46).



Fredericks's point on methodology is an important one. The book of Ecclesiastes does not use the word in such a variety of contexts that it would adequately define the meaning for the word. Usage outside of the book of Ecclesiastes should be considered, too. No new meanings should be invented without a good argument either for the need of the meaning to explain usage or for ease and plausibility of linguistic development from well attested meanings.

Miller (1998) proposes a symbolic meaning for הבל. He thinks there must be consistency of meaning between the usage of the word in the body of the book and in the summarizing statements at the beginning (1:2) and end (12:8) (Miller 1998:438). This is in basic agreement with Fox's argument about singularity of meaning throughout. Miller thinks that no suggestion has been successful so far (1998:439). In Miller's view, this symbolism combines three metaphors: insubstantiality, transitoriness, and foulness. For this to be convincing, there has to be a level of abstraction that combines the three symbolic meanings. In Miller's view, it is found in the symbolic level, but he does not demonstrate what the unified meaning is. He only points out its three realizations (Miller 1998:454). Thus the view suffers from the same problem that Fox (1999:35-36) pointed out in the multiple sense views, that the summary loses its meaning.

This argument may not invalidate Miller's view, as it may still be possible to find a unifying meaning that is compatible with his view. At the minimum it can be said that there is need for some refinement. The hypotheses presented above for the meaning of הבל are absurd(ity), enigma(tic) or unfathomable, a combination of different views, and a symbolic combination of insubstantiality, transitoriness, and foulness.

The idea of יתרון in 1:3 influencing and setting the tone for the understanding of הבל in 1:2 seems not to have been given much of attention. It is not addressed in the following commentaries: Bryson (2011:38-43), Crenshaw (1987:57-61)<sup>2</sup>, Enns (2011:30-36), Fox (1999:27-42, 109-113), Goldingay<sup>3</sup> (2014:177-178), Kaiser (1979:47-49)<sup>4</sup>, Lioy (2008:16-

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2 Though he finds a connection between verses 2 and 3, verse 3 justifying verse 2, he does not examine its influence on the lexical understanding of the words (Crenshaw 1987:59).

3 Goldingay also finds the same connection between verses 2 and 3, and notes that the sense in which things are utterly empty (הבל) is that there is no point putting effort into trying to achieve things. I think he is on the right track. Goldingay does not examine the relevance of the issue to the semantics of הבל as used in the rest of the book of Ecclesiastes.

4 Kaiser (1979:49) thinks that the controlling idea is not הבל but יתרון.

22)<sup>5</sup>, Longman (1998:61-65)<sup>6</sup>, Murphy (1992:lviii-lx, 3-10), Ogden (1987:18-26)<sup>7</sup>, Provan (2001:51-54), and Seow (1997:101-104). However, Whybray (1989a:35) notes that verse 3 expresses the idea of verse 2 in concrete terms.

A highly prominent word with a vague or ambiguous meaning at the beginning of the discourse creates an expectation that the author clarifies its meaning. The first sentences after the introduction of the key word may set the tone for the reader's understanding of the word. It is worth checking whether an antonym of יתרון makes sense: that which does not bring any profit (or which is futile in bringing profit), or by way of metonymy, that which points to futility in bringing profit.

This hypothesis of the meaning of הבל has not been studied in literature to my knowledge. If it can be established, then the message might be summarized in 1:2-3: there is nothing anyone can do to make any profit out of life. Whether the message can be thus summarized is studied in chapter 3.

#### 1.1.4 Message

Not only is there substantial difference of opinion about the meaning of the key word in the summary of the message, but the answer to Qohelet's question in Ecclesiastes 1:3 has been differently understood. The verse asks "מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש" 'what profit does one have of the work he does under the sun'. This has been understood as a key question by Ogden (1987:28) and Fredericks (2010:21-23, 38). They give different answers to it.

Fredericks (2010:105) thinks that Qohelet's answer is that there is benefit in the joy that work may produce. Fredericks thinks that the message of Qohelet is about advantage to labor. The book tries to answer the question why one should work so hard and wisely. The argument is that there is an advantage to labor and that it is joy. The book does not discuss the meaning of

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5 Lioy (2008:17) uses several words to describe הבל: empty, transitory, futile, absurd, beyond mortal grasp.

6 Longman notes that if there is no meaning (referring to Ecclesiastes 1:2), there could be no profit to labor (alluding to Ecclesiastes 1:3). Yet he does not consider this in connection with the semantics of הבל.

7 Ogden makes a conceptual connection between הבל and חלק, which he contrasts with יתרון in the example of the lonely workaholic of 4:7-8 (1987:20, 23). The workaholic acquires some portion but does not really ask for the purpose. Yet he does not make a connection between the meanings of הבל and יתרון. He calls יתרון the programmatic question, which at times is answered by the הבל phrase (1987:14). Yet no connection is made between the meanings of the words in 1:2 and 1:3.

life. The key to interpretation is to understand that הבל means 'temporary' and not 'meaningless'. (Fredericks 2010:32, 38, 105.)

Ogden (1987:23-24, 28-29, 42) thinks Qohelet is saying that there is no advantage under the sun. He contrasts יתרון 'profit' and חלק 'portion' (glosses mine). Ogden (1987:24) thinks that for something to be יתרון 'profit', it is bound up with the “eternal” dimension of 3:9. Others express the message of Qohelet around themes like satisfaction (Castellino 1994:40-43) or the meaning of life (Caneday 1994:94-98).

There is general agreement that Qohelet recommends joy, but the precise sense has different interpretations from 'pleasure' (Fox 1999:113-115) to 'genuine joy' (Fredericks 2010:100-101, 105, gloss mine). The attitude has been understood as a serious recommendation (Johnston 1994:144-147; Fredericks 2010:38-39, 101) or as deep resignation (Enns 2011:49-50, Longman 1998:106-107).

Part of the difficulty in determining the message of Qohelet is in determining his view of divine judgment. Some think that he denied retribution in the afterlife to be any solution to be reckoned with in this life (Fox 1999:215), and others think it is the major reason to fear God (Caneday 1994:107-108). Yet others think that Qohelet's view is not coherent, both embracing an eschatological judgment and denying it (Longman 1998:127-128).

The call to enjoyment is linked with judgment in Ecclesiastes 3:16-22, 8:11-15, and 11:9. It is clear that judgment is linked with present enjoyment in some way in Qohelet's thinking. Yet the conceptual link is very different if ultimate judgment and ultimate justice is affirmed (Caneday 1994:107-108) or questioned (Longman 1998:131) or if Qohelet is trying to focus the attention of readers to present living rather than resolving questions about the future (Provan 2001:97).

Difficulties with the interpretation of the book has led some to question the integrity of the book. For example, Creshaw (1987:48) thinks there are a number of glosses in the text (2:26a, 3:17a, 8:12-13, 11:9b; and perhaps 5:18 and 7:26b) in addition to the superscription (1:1) and the epilogues (12:9-11 and 12:12-14), even though he sees the book essentially a unity. Yet, some others treat the book as a unity in its entirety (for example Seow 1999:38-43).

### **1.1.5 Relationship between Qohelet and the epilogist**

The message of Qohelet and the message of the book of Ecclesiastes are considered to be radically different by Longman (1998:37-39, 280-281). He evaluates the message of the book to be a warning against the kind of skeptical wisdom that Qohelet's message represents. The message of the book is represented by the epilogist (12:8-13). Longman's view leaves one wondering why one would preserve a book he disagrees with enough to warn about it, but would not clearly express that he disagrees with it, why, and what he disagrees with in particular. The end of the book does not seem to be a clear warning about the majority of the contents of the book.

Enns (2011:15-16, 113-116) thinks the message of the book is more affirming of Qohelet: he was indeed wise and had good questions, but the reader is warned to go beyond them. Despite doubts, one is to fear God and obey him. He, like Longman, sees a big contrast between Qohelet and the epilogist. Longman (1998:280-281) thinks that the warning of Ecclesiastes 12:12 is about all wisdom writing, including Qohelet's dangerous material. Enns (2011:113) thinks the warning is about continuing in the same vein with Qohelet. Both make the end key to the message of the whole book. The contrast is crucial to their understanding of the message of the book.

Many commentators do not see such a deep contrast between the epilogist and Qohelet. For example, Seow (1997:388) understands the warning similarly to Enns (2011:113) in that it is a warning not to go beyond what has been written, but he puts it in the sense that "the sages have adequately given their instruction and there is, therefore, no need to go beyond them". Fox (1999:371-373) thinks that Qohelet is a literary persona used by the author in a thought experiment. The difference between Qohelet and the epilogist is in emphasis, not in a contradiction of the message. Ogden (1987:207-214) considers the epilogist to support fully Qohelet's teaching as inspired truth. Ogden (1987:208) considers the epilogist to be a different person from Qohelet, but not a mere literary persona like Fox thinks (1999:372-373).

### **1.1.6 Common ground in interpretation**

Despite all these differences of opinion, there is some general agreement about the message of the book. Fox (1999:4) summarizes three areas of general agreement in the interpretation of the book Ecclesiastes:

(1) Everything in this life is, in some way, inadequate – worthless, vain, futile, transient, or senseless, and injustices abound. (2) There is no point in striving too hard for anything, whether wealth or wisdom. (3) It is best simply to enjoy what you have when you have it and to fear God. To this the traditional interpreters add: and study Torah.

### **1.1.7 Divine judgment in the book**

The theme of judgment in Ecclesiastes has been variously approached. God's role as a judge is generally affirmed, but scholars differ in how it is carried out and how much is assumed to be known in the book. St.Iago-Peretz (2013:233-234) considers it unclear if God will judge after death, during life, or in the distant future. Fox (1999:55-59) argues that Qohelet thinks there will be a future judgment. Fox paints a picture of God as an imperfect judge. Afterlife might be a solution, but it is unknown. Crenshaw (1987:24) thinks the judgment is probably death itself. Whybray (1989b:76) places the judgment in this life. Seow (1997:166, 175) thinks that according to Qohelet, God will judge, in the sense that judgment belongs to him, but it is not certain how he will exercise this right, as the future is unknown. According to Ogden (1987:60), Qohelet thinks God will indeed judge human injustice, though it may not always seem that way.

These authors have not come into agreement about when and how God will judge according to the book of Ecclesiastes. The certainty of a just judgment in this life is denied in 8:14. An eschatological judgment would solve the problem, a solution that the epilogue may hint at. Whether this solution is accepted as representing the teaching of the book influences how one approaches the theme of judgment as well as the argument of the book.

There are six prominent judgment passages in the book. They are Ecclesiastes 3:16-22, 5:1-7, 8:5-6, 8:10-15, 11:9, and 12:13-14. The last of them is attributed to the epilogist. Qohelet's view of judgment in the passages is controversial, as well as the relationship of the epilogist's view to Qohelet's view. In Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 Qohelet begins with an observation of injustice in court, and then proceeds to a note of God judging and people and animals dying alike. The sections ends with a recommendation of joy. Two major exegetical questions that influence the interpretation of Qohelet's view on judgment are whether Qohelet claimed that God will judge everyone (Caneday 1994:107-108) or not (Seow 1997:166) and whether Qohelet considers a judgment in the afterlife to be unknowable (Crenshaw 1987:104-105) or not (Caneday 1994:107-108).

In Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 Qohelet discusses fulfillment of vows to God. He says that not keeping one's promise to God may lead to God's judgment in this life. There is not much dispute about the implications here, but it is noteworthy that Qohelet has an understanding that God may judge in time. Ecclesiastes 8:5-6 says that the wise know 'judgment'. It is disputed whether it refers to judgment or not (Crenshaw 1987:148, 151 translates it as 'procedure'), and if it does, whether to a human (Fredericks 2010:193) or a divine one (Seow 1997:281). The relevance of this passage to the theme of divine judgment depends on how one exegetes this passage, but in any case its contribution is small.

Ecclesiastes 8:10-15 begins with an observation on the wicked, notes that delay of justice encourages evil, continues with a statement that it will be well with those that revere God and it will not be well with the wicked, and ends with a statement that at times the righteous suffer what is due to the wicked and vice versa. The passage has tension in that it both affirms justice in the sense of good resulting from good actions and vice versa and notes the existence of exceptions. This tension has been dealt with in a few ways. Crenshaw (1987:155) considers the passage problematic and thinks it is possible that the epilogist added the expression of traditional belief. Bartholomew (2009:290-291) thinks that Qohelet juxtaposed two contradictory views without attempting to resolve the contradiction: the sinners do prolong their lives and they do not prolong their days.

Lioy (2008:83) understands the judgment as eschatological. Yet, he says, it is difficult, even for the wise, to reconcile the notion of divine retribution with injustices in this life. Provan (2001:168) thinks that Qohelet believes in the idea of ultimate justice, but he is unable to understand how it works out in practice. Ogden (1987:137) has a similar approach: Qohelet supports the traditional view but he also brings before it serious questions.

Fredericks (2010:196-197) thinks that verse 12 is to be taken in an absolute sense, not as a generalization. That is, it will always be well with those who fear God. If the criminal sinner lengthens his days because of lack of swift sentencing and execution, the extension of life is only an illusion. At the end, his life will not be as long as an elongated shadow before dusk. The exceptions to justice in verse 14 are only temporary exceptions that do not upset God's ultimate justice. Krüger (2012:10) suggests that the reason why it will always be well with those who fear God is that the fear of God is not a means to an end but an end in itself.

Judgment in Ecclesiastes 8:10-15 has been understood as a juxtaposition of contradictory views, as a rule that is questioned, and as a reference to an eschatological judgment. Whether one thinks ultimate justice is affirmed or not in this passage and whether the justice is eschatological or not has a major influence on how one sees Qohelet's the view of divine judgment.

In Ecclesiastes 11:9 enjoyment is recommended for the youth. They are also encouraged to think of God's judgment, whether as a basis to enjoy (Gordis 1951:325-326, Seow 1997:371) or as a warning not to disrespect God in enjoying (Crenshaw 1987:184). It is significant that enjoyment and judgment are related.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 is part of the epilogue and it contains a very clear statement of judgment of all works. It is sometimes seen to have a different perspective from Qohelet's. For example, Seow (1997:394-395) says that Qohelet has said only that God will judge, but has not spoken of a judgment in a future judgment day. There is specific accountability for keeping the commandments, which he does not find in Qohelet. Yet, he considers the epilogist's viewpoint compatible with Qohelet's thought. Fredericks (2010:251) thinks that the epilogue summarized the message of Qohelet rather than changes the subject. The judgment in the epilogue is seen to be probably eschatological by some (Seow 1997:395, Longman 1998:283) as implied by the thoroughness of the judgment. Some are hesitant (Murphy 1992:126).

The main questions in the passage from the point of view of judgment are two: whether this is a reference to an eschatological judgment and whether this view of judgment is the same as expressed elsewhere in the book or stands in contrast to it. Of the six judgment passages, Ecclesiastes 3:16-12, 8:10-15, and 12:13-14 make the greatest contribution to the theology of divine judgment in Ecclesiastes.

It has been noted that Ecclesiastes describes the world as having been made crooked by God (Eccl 7:13; Seow 1997:240, 250-251; Fox 1999:259; Ogden 1987:111). Some authors identify this crookedness as a result of the curse by God as the result of the fall (Caneday 1994:109-113, Fredericks 2010:70, Shank 1994:79-80). Borgman (2011:64) calls the הבל a judgment imposed on the world by God. As the curse can be thought of as judgment, the crookedness can be discussed under the heading of God's judgment even though the book of Ecclesiastes does not use the word in this sense. On the other hand, Whybray (1989b:74-75)

thinks that, according to Qohelet, God is not responsible for the fact that the world is not as it should be. He acknowledges that some things are, according to Qohelet, crooked in this life and have been made so by God (Whybray 1989a:118-119).

## **1.2 Research question**

The research question is “How does the theme of divine judgment contribute to the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes?” This is subdivided to the following questions:

- (1) What is the argument of the book?
- (2) What does the book of Ecclesiastes teach about divine judgment?
- (3) How does the theme of divine judgment relate to the argument of the book?
- (4) How is the theme of judgment in the book related to the rest of the canon?
- (5) What are the homiletic implications of the argument of the book and of divine judgment as part of it?

Question (4) is not strictly speaking a subquestion of the research question, but it relates the research question to a wider context.

## **1.3 Purpose**

This study seeks to establish what the theology of divine judgment is in the book of Ecclesiastes and how that contributes to the argument of the book. It is assumed that a correct understanding of divine judgment in Ecclesiastes helps clarify the argument and the relationship of the book to the rest of the canon. It is further assumed that a lexical study of key terminology in context helps establish the argument of the book. The study attempts to test these assumptions and to contribute to the exegesis and theology of Ecclesiastes by clarifying the theology of divine judgment. The study is expected to be relevant in evaluating competing paradigms for the interpretation of the book.

## **1.4 Research design and methodology**

The purpose of this dissertation is to seek to answer the research questions using the following methodologies: exegetical study, literature review, retrodution, and systematic theology. Exegetical study applies established hermeneutical tools to discover the meaning



and implications of a text as intended by the author (Smith 2008:169, 180). Sperber and Wilson (1995:72-73) argue, in the context of linguistic pragmatics and relevance theory, that assumption schemas are completed into full-fledged assumptions on the basis of contextual information. This implies that text communicates less than the text in context. Exegesis does not attempt to find the meaning of a passage in isolation from the communicative context. Even though there is a great deal that is unknown in the original context of the book of Ecclesiastes, the exegete should make a plausible case for his interpretation of a passage in the context as far as it is known or can be argued to be likely.

The purpose of literature review is to place the research in the context of scholarly discussion. According to Smith (2008:214-216), a literature review should cover all the major contributions to the research topic, it should treat the authors fairly, review the current state of the debate, and it should be interpretive in that the researcher interacts with the literature.

Retroduction means constructing a theory that accounts all the data in a unified way (Smith 2008:188). Geisler (2002:210-211) describes it as gaining additional insight from further knowledge. It thus forms a benign circle. In the context of this study, it means presenting a coherent conceptual model that accommodates the various research results arrived at looking at the judgment passages and other relevant passages in Ecclesiastes.

Systematic theology attempts at a systematic presentation of a topic. In evangelical systematic theology, the Bible is taken as an authoritative source. Geisler (2002:218-224) presents doing systematic theology in nine steps: (1) an inductive basis in Scripture, (2) a deduction of truths from scripture, (3) the use of analogies, (4) the use of general revelation, (5) the retroductive method, (6) systematic correlation, (7) each doctrine is correlated with all other doctrines, (8) each doctrine is expressed in view of the orthodox teachings of the church fathers, and (9) livability is the final test for systematic theology.

Many writers appreciate developing a historical perspective as part of the methodology in doing systematic theology. Models exemplifying this appreciation include Grant Osborne's comprehensive model (Osborne 2006:379-382, 406-409) and Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest's integrative model (Lewis and Demarest 1996:23-40, especially 33-34). Geisler (2002:224) takes a further step in giving the teaching of church fathers a methodological authority above the weight of their arguments, though he does not call them inerrant. This is not done in any of the models described by Smith (2013:47-70): Bruce Ware's basic model,

which has no historical component, and Grant Osborne's comprehensive model and Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest's integrative model. My study does not give church fathers any special authority.

Not all of Geisler's steps are relevant in this study. The purpose of this study is not to make a systematic theological study of any particular doctrine. Rather, the purpose of systematic theology in this study is to correlate the exegetical findings to a systematic study of canonical texts. It is thus selective in its scope. In practice, it means comparing the findings with systematic theologies.

An important part of the study is a study of key passages on judgment in Ecclesiastes and key concepts as used in Ecclesiastes as related to the argument. The study will consist of

- a literature review. The purpose is to find out different proposed views on the argument of the book as a whole and on judgment and on key concepts, such as חלק, יתרון, שמחה, הבל, רעות רוח, רעיון רוח.
- a lexical and exegetical analysis of key terms as used in Ecclesiastes. They are the aforementioned list (חלק, יתרון, שמחה, הבל, רעות רוח, רעיון רוח). The emphasis is on הבל.
- an exegetical analysis of passages necessary for determining the argument of the book and a synthesis of the results of the analysis.
- an exegetical analysis of the key passages on judgment: 3:16-22, 5:1-7, 8:5-6, 8:10-15, 11:9, 12:14. The goal is to be fairly comprehensive, but yet keep the focus on the contribution to the theme of judgment.
- a cursory comparison with other canonical material and systematic theology to determine the relationship of the theology of the book to the rest of the canon in the area of divine judgment.
- A discussion of homiletic implications of the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes and of divine judgment as part of it.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

This study attempts to find out the contribution of the theme of divine judgment to the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes by first analyzing the argument of the book. The analysis of the argument is organized around the usage of key vocabulary. Then the teaching of the book on divine judgment is studied by conducting an exegetical study of the key passages. The theme of divine judgment is related to the argument of the book and to the rest of the canon. Finally, homiletic implications are discussed. In chapter 2, the current state of scholarship relating to the research question is reviewed. In chapter 3, the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes is studied. In chapter 4, the key passages on divine judgment are analyzed and the conclusions are related to the teaching of the rest of the canon in a cursory way. In chapter 5, implications of the study are discussed.

## **2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the answers given in research literature to what the argument of the book is and what the book teaches about divine judgment. These relate to subquestions (1) and (2) of the research question. First the problem of tensions in the book of Ecclesiastes as an interpretational issue is discussed because the way tensions are handled has a major impact on how the argument of the book is understood. Some approaches to the book consider the book to contain ideas that are in tension or mutually outright contradictory. A major question is whether this is so and if it is, how the ideas relate to each other and to what the book actually teaches if the book even has a uniform message in its final form. Assuming the book does not have a uniform message, exegetical scissors have been used to excise supposedly later parts of the text to make a uniform message for the original form of the book. These approaches are discussed in section 2.2.

Then different views on the argument of the book are reviewed. The different views are grouped in four groups: a study of the meaning of life, an argument to revere God, an argument to enjoy life, and an argument for the value of work. This is followed by a review of the main views on key vocabulary. Key vocabulary and its usage are exegetically important in determining the message of the book. The review of views on key vocabulary puts the more detailed study of key vocabulary in chapter 3 in the context of other research. The literature review ends with a review of views on divine judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes, a theme studied in chapter 4.

### **2.2 Tensions in the book of Ecclesiastes as an interpretational issue**

#### **2.2.1 Introduction**

Michael Fox has recognized the importance of dealing with tensions in Qohelet's thought as central to the interpretation of the book (Fox 1999:1-26). Fox speaks of contradictions, but I use the word 'tension', as Fox uses the word 'contradiction' in a broad sense, not referring to logical contradictions only, but also to unresolved tensions (Fox 1999:3). The way tensions are handled influences how one understands the argument of the book. Fox refers to several attempts at explaining the tensions as part of his argument that they are purposefully there to describe a world that has these tensions in itself (Fox 1999:26). The world being absurd

consists in these tensions. Fox understands the key word הבל as 'absurd' (Fox 1999:30-42). There are several ways in which interpreters have handled tensions in the book of Ecclesiastes. I discuss the views in the same order as Fox (1999:14-26), with Fox's own view last.

### 2.2.2 Harmonization

One way to deal with tension is harmonization. It means “reconciling of apparently contradictory statements by showing that they use the same words differently or deal with different matters” (Fox 1999:15). Fox sees two problems with harmonizing Ecclesiastes. One is that the text itself gives no guidance to make the kinds of distinctions harmonization requires. The other is that interpreters read the passages to be harmonized in the context of their own assumptions of what the meaning must be instead of the context of the immediate literary unit or the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole.

Fox uses Ecclesiastes 8:15 (ושבחתי אני את השמחה) 'and I praised joy') and 2:2 (לשחוק) 'I said of laughter “senseless” and of joy “what does it accomplish?”') as a test case. The Amoraim explained that in the positive case it spoke about joy that came from fulfilling commandments and the negative case about joy that does not come from fulfilling commandments. (Fox 1999:15.) Fox is right about the example, but it does not follow that the tension here is a contradiction. Fox has shown one inadequate way of harmonizing the passage, not that it should not or cannot be harmonized. One possible way of harmonizing the text is to understand the text as drawing attention to the limitations of joy. It does not have to be understood as implying that joy has no value. The value of joy is elsewhere implicitly affirmed by recommending joy. Yet, joy is very limited in what it can achieve (“what does it accomplish?”).

Fox further notes four methods of resolving tensions by Abraham Ibn Ezra as summarized by M. Zer-Kavod: “(1) Two sentences are in themselves correct, each in different circumstances. (2) Sentence A is conditional, sentence B is absolute. (3) Sentence A is the exception, sentence B is the rule. (This is actually a formulation of a contradiction, not its resolution.) (4) Sentence A is someone else's opinion, sentence B is Qohelet's.” (Fox 1999:15). He further adds two categories by M. Zer-Kavod: “(5) A contradiction is produced by one sentence being taken out of context. (6) A contradiction is produced by a certain (extraneous) supposition.” (Fox 1999:15-16, Zer-Kavod 1973:26-27).

Another harmonizing approach is H.-W. Hertzberg's principle of the “Zwar-Aber Tatsache” (Hertzberg 1963:30). This means that first a statement is made by way of concession and then another statement is made which represents Qohelet's own opinion. Fox grants that at times two viewpoints confront without contradiction, but in the book of Ecclesiastes, it results in a **הבל** statement, which he understands as a declaration of dissatisfaction (Fox 1999:16).

Fox (1999:17) also refers to J. Loaders's (1979) harmonization of polar opposites. The tensions are harmonized by ascribing one pole of the tension to someone else (advocates of conventional wisdom) and the other to Qohelet. This is illustrated by Loader's (1979:100) discussion of Ecclesiastes 8:10-15 where he ascribes the idea that it will be well with those who revere God to tradition. Loader considers the quote to be ironical. This example is reminiscent of the approach of discovering quotations in section 2.2.4. Another example of Loader's polar opposites is in Ecclesiastes 8:2-9, where power of the king as caused by God's work and powerlessness of the subjects are polarized (Loader 1979:69-73). In this Loader discerns polarity between Qohelet's opinion and general wisdom, which is reminiscent of the approach of detecting dialectic discussed in section 2.2.6. Fox (1999:17) is not opposed to all harmonization, but he thinks that it cannot be justified to the degree that Qohelet's major tensions (or contradictions, as he calls them) would be resolved. For Fox's own view, see section 2.2.8. The argument from the example of joy in Ecclesiastes 2:2 and 8:15 that Fox used against harmonization was not cogent. This does not constitute an argument that Qohelet's tensions can be successfully harmonized, but it does serve as a warning not to underestimate the possibility of harmonizations.

### **2.2.3 Subtracting later additions**

One way to resolve tension is to dismiss some statements as later additions. This makes the tension to disappear from the original text, though it may leave the tension in the later redaction unresolved. This approach was common in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fox 1999:18), but it started to wane in the twentieth century (Bartholomew 2009:37).

Murphy (1992:xxxiii-xxxiv) suggests that the passages mostly viewed as glosses are judgment passages (Eccl 3:17, 8:12b-13, 11:9) but not exclusively (5:18, 7:18b). For example, Crenshaw (1987:102) thinks that in Ecclesiastes 3:17 Qohelet expresses belief that God will judge. He sees that as contradictory with the idea that the same fate befalls evildoers

and good people, as Qohelet repeatedly complains. His solution is to take the expression of belief in Ecclesiastes 3:17 as a later gloss.

Fox (1999:18-20) offers four criticisms of this approach to the book of Ecclesiastes. He notes that the hypothesis of additions is reasonable, yet he denies that it will solve the tensions in the book of Ecclesiastes. First, he claims that the sentences commonly eliminated are intertwined syntactically with material thought to be original on the basis of their content and style. He takes 2:13-14a as an example. The passage praises wisdom, and is introduced in a manner typical of Qohelet (וַיֵּרָא אֵלַי שׁ 'and I saw that'). Yet if verses 13-14a are excised, the statement about wisdom that 2:12a anticipates is missing. The remark about death in verse 15 could not follow verse 12 directly because without verse 14a there is no antecedent for כֻּלָּם ('them both' or 'them all') in verse 14b. (Fox 1999:18.)

Second, Fox thinks that usually a corrective gloss can be expected to follow the statement it is supposed to correct, yet in some passages at the center of this discussion, it is the skeptic who has the last word (Fox 1999:19). This is a problem if it is supposed that an orthodox glossator tried to fix unorthodox Qohelet's statements. The passages Fox takes as an example are Ecclesiastes 2:12-16, 3:17, 8:5-7 and 8:10-14. Interestingly for the purposes of this study, the three last ones are judgment passages.

Third, the proposed glosses do not fulfill the supposed purposes of the glossators. Fox takes 8:11-12a+14 as an example of a passage where God's absolute justice is repudiated. The glossator could have added an assertion of the future day of reckoning after verse 14, in case he could not eliminate the offending words. Now as the text stands, the hypothetical glossator lets Qohelet have the last word. Fox thinks that the current arrangement might serve the purposes of a thinker wanting to portray the world's absurdities, but not to offer comfort to a pious believer in God's unwavering justice. (Fox 1999:19.)

Fourth, removing the supposed additions does not remove the skeptical and pessimistic character of the book. The assumption that the book needed excessive glossing to make it more acceptable does not explain the desire to copy and gloss the book instead of ignoring it.

Fox gives good examples of some implausible glosses. Fox's argument was not that there are no glosses but rather that they cannot solve the tensions in the book. The identification of glosses is problematic. As we have no unglossed text to compare the glossed text with, the interpreter has to resort to hypotheses that are inherently difficult to prove. Furthermore, it

seems that the book made some sense in the final form, as some final glossator decided to publish it, and many copyists found the book worth copying. Saying that the glossators made the book contradictory does not explain why. If they did not like it, they could have ignored it or made a rebuttal. Instead, they supposedly made it contradictory. I find this and consequently the idea of massive glossing in the book of Ecclesiastes implausible. It is not the way to solve tensions in the book.

Many recent scholars see the book as mostly a unity, or at least do not resort to finding glosses as a way to resolve tensions. The list, allowing for a separate superscription and epilogue includes Ogden (1987:10-11), Murphy (1992:xxxii-xxxiv), Seow (1997:38-43), Longman (1998), Fox (1999:18-20), Provan (2001:32-34), Liroy (2008:4), Bartholomew (2009<sup>8</sup>), and Enns (2011). Crenshaw (1987:48), on the other hand, resolves tension by appealing to glosses<sup>9</sup>. Ogden (1987:11) says that most modern scholars accept that Qohelet (referring to Eccl 1:2-12:8) is the work of one sage. Thus it seems that the approach of subtracting later additions is no longer as popular as before.

## 2.2.4 Discovering quotations

Some think that some statements in the book of Ecclesiastes are quotations or expressions of someone else's opinion than Qohelet's. This idea is very old. Gregory Thaumaturgos wrote the earliest extant Christian work on the whole book of Ecclesiastes (Μετάφρασις εἰς τὸν Ἑκκλησιαστικὴν τοῦ Σολομῶντος 'Paraphrase of Solomon's Ecclesiastes'). He died around 270 AD. (Bartholomew 2009:26).

In his work, Thaumaturgos attributes some statements in the book to different times of Qohelet's thought or to different people. For example, at the end of chapter 1, Qohelet's earlier thought of his wisdom is contrasted (verse 16) with his later view that his pursuit of wisdom had been in vain (verse 17) (Bartholomew 2009:26, Migne n.d.:990-991<sup>10</sup>). In his paraphrase on Ecclesiastes 9:1-4, the idea that all things may happen to all people, the godly

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8 Bartholomew (2009:81-82) expresses his way of dealing with tensions. He does not resort to glosses as a way of resolving tensions but rather he thinks the tensions should stand and not be minimized.

9 He considers the following verses to be glosses: 2:26a, 3:17a, 8:12-13, 11:9b, and perhaps 5:18 and 7:26b.

10 Λογισάμενος γάρ ποτε ἐγὼ κατ' ἑμαυτὸν, καὶ οἰηθεὶς ὡς ἀπάντων εἶην τότε τῶν πρὸ ἑμαυτοῦ γεγονότων ἐνταυθοῖ σοφωτερος· ἔγνων παραβολὰς τε συνεῖναι καὶ πραγμάτων φύσεις. Ἰήθην δὲ τηνάλλως ἐπὶ τούτῳ φέρεσθαι, καὶ σοφία μὲν γνῶσιν ἔπεσθαι, γνώσει δὲ πόνους ἐπακολούθειν. 'For at some time I considered myself and thought that then I was wiser in this than all that had been before me. I knew parables and the nature of things. But I thought I had pursued that in vain and that while wisdom follows knowledge, pain comes with knowledge.' (Translation mine.)



and the wicked, is framed as a seeming truth entertained by Qohelet in the past or as reflections of fools (Migne n.d.:1010<sup>11</sup>). This is one way of reconciling tensions in the book. The problem with this approach is that the chapter gives no indication that Qohelet distances himself from the thoughts expressed in Ecclesiastes 9:1-4 like Gregory Thaumaturgos interprets the book.

Gordis uses quotations as a way to deal with tensions. He defines quotation in the context of his study of the book of Ecclesiastes as “words which do not reflect the present sentiments of the author of the literary composition in which they are found, but have been introduced by the author to convey the standpoint of another person or situation” (Gordis 1951:96). As quotations can be used in different ways, to support one's idea (acknowledged by Gordis 1951:99-101 as common in Qohelet) or to discuss an opposing viewpoint, the way Gordis formulates his definition supports the idea that his use of finding quotations in the literary text is to deal with tension between two (or more) expressed viewpoints by ascribing them to different people.

To illustrate Gordis's use of quotations as a way to resolve tensions, I refer to his explanation of Ecclesiastes 4:5-6. Gordis (1951:150) translates the passage as follows: “Some men teach, 'The fool folds his hands and thus destroys himself.' But I declare: 'Better a handful acquired with ease than two hands full gained through toil and chasing after wind.’” The phrases “some men teach” and “I declare” are Gordis's additions to make his thought clear. They have no counterpart in the Hebrew text. Gordis (1951:231) argues that Qohelet could not call the man who takes his ease a fool, because he stresses the folly of hard work.

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11 Ὡμην γὰρ ἅπαντας τότε τῶν αὐτῶν ἀνθρώπους ἡξιῶσθαι· καὶ εἴ τις σοφὸς, δικαιοσύνης μὲν ἐπεμελήθη, ἀδικίαν δὲ ἐξετράπη, καὶ ἔχθραν ἔφυγε πρὸς ἅπαντας δεξιὸς ὢν, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἀρεστὸν Θεῷ, οὗτος ματαιοπονεῖν ἐφαίνετο. Τέλος δὲ ἐν ἐδόκει δικαίου τε καὶ ἀσεβοῦς, ἀγαθοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ, καθαροῦ τε καὶ ἀκαθάρτου, καὶ Θεὸν ἱλασκομένου καὶ μὴ. Ὅτε γὰρ ἄδικος καὶ ὁ ἀγαθός, ὅτε ἐπίορκος, καὶ ὁ τέλειον ὅρκον ἐκτρέπόμενος, εἰς ταῦτ' ὅλος ἐλαύνειν ἠλπίζετο, κατὰ γνῶσιν τε τις ὕπαισι τοῦ εἰς ὅμοια τελευτᾶν ἅπαντας. Γινώσκω δὲ νῦν ὡς ἀφρόνων ταῦτα ἐνθυμήματα, καὶ πλάναι καὶ ἐξαπάται. Καὶ πόλλα λέγουσιν, ὥς ὁ ἀποθανὼν οἴχεται τέλειον· καὶ προτιμητέον τὸν ζῶντα τοῦ τεθνηκότος, καὶ ἐν σκότῳ κείμενος ἢ, καὶ κύνος τρόπον, τὸν βίον διαπορεύεται, παρὰ τὸν λέοντα τὸν τεθνηκότα. 'For then I thought all people are worthy of the same. If someone wise gave heed to righteousness and turned from unrighteousness and avoided enmity by being kind toward all, which is pleasing to God, he seemed to labor in vain. There seemed to be one end for the righteous and the impious, for the good and the evil, for the pure and the impure, the one who appeases God and the one who does not. For when the unrighteous and the good, when the one who swears falsely and the one who avoids all vows, seemed to go to the same end, then a certain low opinion comes that all end in the same way. Now I know that these thoughts are the reasoning of fools, and errors and deceptions. And they often say that the dead are completely gone and that a living person is to be preferred to a dead one even if he is in darkness, even if he lives his life like a dog, which is better than to be a dead lion.' (Translation mine.)

Yet, this passage allows for a very easy harmonization: Qohelet recognizes that too little work and too much work both lead to problems. Even Gordis (1951:100) takes Ecclesiastes 10:18 as a truth that “the most confirmed cynic will agree” with: “Through sloth the ceiling sinks, And through slack hands the house leaks.” (translation Gordis's). This he uses as an example of a quotation that Qohelet agreed with. If Qohelet acknowledged that both extremes of too much work and too little work lead to trouble, this fact offers a very good foundation for harmonization. Qohelet juxtaposed warnings of both extremes. He first noted how envy may be a source of hard work. Some go to the other extreme and do not work enough. Qohelet recommended both work and rest. This interpretation seems more reasonable than finding a quotation of a view Qohelet did not approve of and that he did not care to distance himself from.

Lohfink also uses quotations to resolve tensions. To illustrate his approach I use again Ecclesiastes 4:5-6. Lohfink (2003:69-70) thinks verses are “an ironically broken citation of current opinions” because otherwise Qohelet would identify himself with the popular philosophy that rejected wealth and withdrew from public life. The reasoning is dependent on his identification of the context of the book. He thinks it is written in the Ptolemaic period and in the context of a competition between Greek and Jewish education “as an attempt to profit as much as possible from the Greek understanding of the world, without forcing Israel's wisdom to give up its status” (quote from Lohfink 2003:6; Lohfink 2003:4-6).

Whybray (1994) studies the use of quotations in the book of Ecclesiastes. He has four criteria for the identification of a quotation: (1) The saying must express a complete thought independent of its context. (2) The form of the saying must correspond closely to sayings in the book of Proverbs. (3) The saying must have tension with its immediate context in the book of Ecclesiastes or with Qohelet's characteristic ideas. (4) The language of the saying must be free from late features such as those of the language of Qohelet. With these criteria, he concludes that Qohelet used quotations to give them his unqualified or relative approval, not to contradict or refute them. (Whybray 1994:187, 194-199.)

Fox notes that we can expect the author to mark quotations expressing an opinion contrary to the author's in some way, especially if they are important for interpretation. Marking may be explicit or virtual. Virtual marking can be expressed by mentioning another person besides the primary speaker in the context, or a reference to speech, or a shift in grammatical number

and person. Fox thinks there is no marking, whether explicit or virtual, in the verses that Gordis identifies as quotations of views that are not Qohelet's. (Fox 1999:22.)

Identifying quotations is not crucial to the interpretation of the book. The author could have let the reader know of the presence of a quotation if he considered it important for the interpretation of the book (Fox 1999:20). Neither is finding quotations an adequate way of dealing with tensions in the book of Ecclesiastes.

### **2.2.5 Hearing dialogue**

Some scholars think the book records dialogue. For example, T. A. Perry gives precise boundaries to the voices in the dialogue. Qohelet (K) is seen as a pessimistic man of experience, surrounded by the voice of a pious presenter, a man of faith (P) (Perry 1998:ix-x, 3). Perry thinks that the most resistant obstacle in the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes involves contradictions, such as the pious conclusion on fearing God being out of step with the call to pleasure and complaints on the vanity of creation (Perry 1998:x-xi). An example of the voices in dialogue in the book of Ecclesiastes is Perry's comments on Ecclesiastes 6:3, after Qohelet's speech in 6:1-2 (Perry 1993:108, Fox 1999:24):

P:(3) "If a man begets a hundred children and lives a long life: despite the length of his days, if he does not take satisfaction in these good things..."

K:"... and have a proper burial, I would say that the stillborn child is better off than he."

P: (4) "Yet, as you would argue, in vanity he comes and in darkness he goes forth..."

As Fox (1999:24) notes, this suffers from the same problem as the quotation solution to tensions. The change of speaker is not indicated in the text. Perry (1993:x) draws a parallel between the book of Ecclesiastes and the Mishnah. In the Mishnah there is an interplay of different voices. This is quite clear, since the different voices are often named. The fact that there is a literary work that makes it clear that it presents an interplay of different voices does little to argue for the applicability of hearing different voices in the book of Ecclesiastes. Indeed, the book of Ecclesiastes does not make it explicit that it is intended to be read as a record of dialogue. Thus Perry's approach fails to convince.

### **2.2.6 Detecting dialectic**

Murphy (1992:lxiii-lxiv) seeks to solve the tensions by recognizing dialogue with traditional wisdom. He thinks that Qohelet's attitude toward traditional wisdom is ambivalent and that he

attempts to refine it, working from within the tradition. Murphy uses Ecclesiastes 2:13-17 as an example. In traditional wisdom the superiority of wisdom over folly is recognized (2:13-14a). In response, Qohelet notes the limitations of the wisdom in that both the wise and the fool die. The dialogue consists in putting the old wisdom in new light without canceling the old wisdom.

It is not clear that recognizing dialectic is helpful in the example. It seems to speak more to the historical context in which the book was supposedly written than contribute to understanding the meaning of the passage. Certainly there is no contradiction in considering wisdom more beneficial than foolishness and recognizing that both the wise and the fool die. Whether he is having a dialogue with traditional wisdom or not does not add much to the exegesis of the passage. Proponents of traditional wisdom were hardly claiming that only the fools die and the wise do not. This seems to be a case where harmonization gives an easy solution.

Fox (1999:25) criticizes Murphy's approach in that there is no a priori criteria for recognizing traditional ideas, and even if there were, we would not know whether Qohelet thought them to be true or not as he may incorporate them into his own thought as well as limit or reject them. He notes that Qohelet does not give any guidance in making this determination. This could be seen as a sign of Qohelet's approval on what is termed as traditional wisdom. Indeed, Fox (1999:26) says that Qohelet never sets himself against traditional wisdom but folds it into his teachings. Fox (1999:15) does not deny that Qohelet was in dialectic with his predecessors, but he claims that this was true of all wisdom literature.

### **2.2.7 Internal struggle**

Fox (1999:26) refers to the attempt of K. Galling (1932) to analyze Qohelet's tensions as symptoms of a disturbed soul. Galling considers Qohelet to struggle between the old wisdom school and his observations. In this sense, this is similar to the dialectic view above. This tension produced a writing that is not internally consistent. The inconsistency reflects the inconsistency of Qohelet's worldview. Fox notes that a disturbed soul can be very consistent and that a psychologistic explanation is not an interpretation. The first critique perhaps concerns the manner of writing. Qohelet could have described his struggle more explicitly if the tensions are to be explained as a result of his internal struggle. The second critique points out the need to interpret the meaning of the text.

Bartholomew's (2009) approach is similar in that he also thinks Qohelet struggled between two worldviews, and that this produced the tensions in the book. Bartholomew sees Qohelet as going through a painful process of spiritual formation that he describes in Jungian terms (Bartholomew 2009:377-386). The basis of his interpretation is an intrapersonal dialectic in which Qohelet struggles between two worldviews. According to him, Qohelet juxtaposes two different approaches to life, one on the basis of his Jewish faith and the other on the basis of autonomous epistemology. Bartholomew considers the most basic difference between the two to be epistemological. Qohelet's problem was an autonomous epistemology based on his own observations and thinking. The juxtaposition of the two views creates tension that invites the reader to fill the gap. (Bartholomew 2009:80-82, 269-277.) There is some sort of resolution at the end of the book (Eccl 11:9-12:7) when Qohelet affirms life and exhorts to remember the Creator (Bartholomew 2009:354-355). Qohelet personally found a deeply existential resolution to his quest (Bartholomew 2009:376, 382).

Bartholomew notes that scholars tend to see Qohelet either as fundamentally positive or fundamentally negative. He thinks that this neglects the juxtaposition of contradictory views that is central to the book. Thus he warns scholars not to fall into the trap of overemphasizing either pole of Qohelet's thinking at the expense of the other. (Bartholomew 2009:93.)

Bartholomew's view is that the book of Ecclesiastes is Qohelet's personal journey. He went through a painful crisis with resolution of his struggle in the end (Bartholomew 2009:93, 363, 380-382, 385). The indication of a turning point in his struggle is in Ecclesiastes 11:7(-12:6). The verse says: "Truly, the light is sweet and it is good for the eyes to see the sun." This verse Bartholomew interprets in Jungian terms as the ego beginning to approach the center of the self. (Bartholomew 2009:381.) In Bartholomew's view there is dialectic in the book of Ecclesiastes. This dialectic is not presented primarily as a dialogue between an old wisdom school and an attempt to refine it, but rather as the personal struggle of Qohelet between two schools of thought. Thus the dialogue is primarily intrapersonal. The views may be contradictory to each other, and that is to be expected.

Bartholomew's analysis is thought-provoking and carefully thought out. However, the textual evidence is meager that 11:7-12:6 is the resolution to the personal enigmas set forth earlier. Many enigmas were set forth as personal observations and unexplained juxtapositions, and the supposed resolution does not come with any comment or link to the enigmas it is supposed to solve. The resolution is never spelled out in the intellectual realm. Neither are the

questions that were raised answered in his interpretation other than with a general pointer to remember the Creator and finding that life is sweet.

Bartholomew (2009:366) thinks that according to the epilogist, Qohelet found the answer. However, the book does not resolve the proposed enigmas. The proposed resolution (Bartholomew 2009:354) is quite subtle and does not address the enigmas in an identifiable way. Qohelet never disputed the idea that life is good except when describing the lot of the suffering. The book does not guide the reader in arriving at the proposed interpretation. The book never calls anything a resolution. His journey was explained in the first person, but the supposed resolution was not. The book does not present him as having arrived at the solution that he supposedly advises his readers to apply.

This criticism may be harsh in that most readings of Ecclesiastes suffer from a similar problem. We could say that the book does not explain itself enough for scholars to have found unanimity about its meaning. There are gaps as Bartholomew has noted, and different scholars fill the gaps differently. It is to be noted that the book of Ecclesiastes does not explain the gaps as contradictions. This fact invites a harmonistic approach. The tension is lessened if there is a plausible way to harmonize the text. Detecting personal struggle has been used as a way to resolve tensions in the book of Ecclesiastes, but it suffers from lack of support from the text itself. As the book does not claim that Qohelet was struggling with inconsistency or with an attempt to reconcile two incompatible worldviews, there is the danger that the inconsistency lies in the interpreter's attributions rather than in Qohelet's thoughts.

### **2.2.8 Absurdity of life**

According to Fox, Qohelet is a man of faith who knows of realities that violate his faith (Fox 1999:134). His faith is premised on the idea that meaningfulness requires that there is immediate, individual, recognizable, consistent, and final consequences for actions. Because life does not conform to this expectation, it is absurd. (Fox 1999:138-139.) The book ends with a postscript that makes the message of the book to be “Even if everything is absurd, *nevertheless* we must fear God and keep his commandments.” (Fox 1999:144, italics his). Qohelet gives various pieces of advice on how to live in an absurd world. In Fox's view, the tensions become a central theme in the book. Life is absurd and the tensions are to be seen as Qohelet's expression of how he saw life.

According to Fox (1999:31), absurdity is a relational concept. It resides in the tension between reality and a framework of expectations. Thus in Fox's view, the absurdity that Qohelet sees consists at least partially in the contradiction between his expectations of consequences and his observations of realities that violate his expectations. The solution, given in the epilogue, is to fear God and keep his commandments despite the absurdity. Thus in Fox's interpretation the book does not attempt to solve or minimize the tension but rather acknowledge it without solving it beyond giving some advice, such as the advice to fear God given in the epilogue. The expectations are never challenged as part of the framework. If they were, it would resolve some of the absurdity. Fox's view is heavily dependent on his interpretation of הַבֵּל as 'absurd'. See section 2.4.8 for various views on the meaning of the word and my discussion in section 3.6.

### **2.2.9 Conclusions on attempts to solve tensions**

Several approaches to tensions in the book of Ecclesiastes were surveyed above.

Harmonization has been used, but it has been found problematic by many scholars. Only a few arguments against harmonization were surveyed. They were not considered convincing. This does not prove that a successful harmonization is easy or possible throughout the book, but it serves as a warning not to neglect harmonization as an interpretive tool.

The approach of subtracting later additions does not explain why the additions were made in the first place. It creates other problems while solving the issue of tension. As an approach, it seems to have lost popularity toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The approach of discovering quotations is very old, but it suffers from the problem of not finding support in the text. Neither does the approach of hearing dialogue find support in the text.

There have been various proposals to solve tension through finding dialectic. Some see it as external dialectic with or within different schools of thought. Yet, the book offers no textual basis in determining which view is whose. Neither does Qohelet distance himself from these alleged different schools. Others see internal dialectic or internal struggle within Qohelet. Bartholomew's (2009) approach finds little support in the text for the idea that Qohelet found a resolution to his existential quest along the lines of Bartholomew's Jungian interpretation. The danger of this approach of internal dialectic being used to solve tensions is that the interpreter may attribute false inconsistencies to an author he does not understand well.

Fox's approach to the book of Ecclesiastes as giving advice on how to live in an absurd world does not solve the tensions but maximizes them in order to give a weak form of resolution by the advice. This view is heavily dependent on the meaning of 'absurdity' for הבל.

My purpose in this study is not to address, let alone resolve, all tensions in the book of Ecclesiastes. Therefore I do not attempt to give a unified theory on how to do so. At this point I wish to point out that the potential of harmonization needs more attention. Bad harmonizations in the past may have caused scholars to miss the potential of finding better harmonizations. I also wish to set forth several guidelines for dealing with tensions, each as a comment to one of the approaches surveyed, in the same order.

- (1) Plausible harmonizations, whenever available, should be utilized. This is what readers normally do when they read a text trying to understand the author.
- (2) In solving tensions, additions are not to be appealed to without very strong evidence. This is based on the assumption that the book as we have it makes sense as a literary work, regardless of its hypothetical literary origins.
- (3) Any appeal to a passage as a quotation should be argued for on the basis of the text if it is used to resolve a tension in the book. This is not to deny the possibility of earlier material and quotes being used, but to say that that should not be used to distance Qohelet's view from the material without arguments that are based on the text. In cases that it can be independently shown that some passage is a quotation, this fact can be used in the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes, but it should be kept in mind that if the author wanted to distance himself from the quote, he could have done so explicitly. If he did not, it is likely that he agreed with the quote.
- (4) When resolving tensions, changes of the speaker or the writer should not be appealed to without textual clues.
- (5) It is recognized that the book of Ecclesiastes was born in a historical context and that it addresses questions in that context. In that sense it was in dialectic within its context. Yet, it is assumed that whenever the author wanted the reader to solve the tension by considering one view as not that of the author, he would give some clue to the effect. Thus the method of finding dialectic with other schools of thought can be used to resolve tension only if the text itself supports the idea that the author wanted the text to be so understood.



(6) The possibility of inner dialectic within Qohelet is not ruled out a priori, but in resolving tensions, it is to be argued on a case-by-case basis with the arguments preferably rooted in textual evidence. It is assumed that tensions are not to be resolved by appealing to authorial inconsistency due to his struggle if a plausible harmonization is available. This is because other things being equal, an internally consistent interpretation of a book is preferred to an internally inconsistent.

(7) It is agreed with Bartholomew (2009:81-82) that gaps in a literary work such as the book of Ecclesiastes invite the reader to fill the gaps. This is a task for the theologian. I am not convinced that the way to fill the gaps should be premised on the assumption that הבל means 'absurd' (see sections 2.4.8 and 3.6). Many of these gaps will be smaller as presented in the following chapters than in Bartholomew's interpretation. The gaps that remain in the area of divine judgment are discussed in section 4.2.8.

## **2.3 Views on the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

Subquestion (1) of the research question concerns the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes. This is related to the question of tensions discussed in the preceding section, as the approach one takes to the tensions has a great influence on how he sees the argument of the book as a whole. In section 2.4 the major views on some important lexical items are reviewed. These views relate to the question of the argument of the book.

In sections 1.1.3 and 1.1.4, it was noted that there is no scholarly agreement on the meaning of key word הבל and on the question that is answered by calling everything הבל. This impacts the understanding of the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes. I will discuss first in this section several ways the argument has been understood. The main approaches reviewed here for the argument of the book are seeing the book as a study of the meaning of life, as an argument to fear God, as an argument to enjoy life, and as an argument for the value of work.

### **2.3.2 Ecclesiastes as a study of the meaning of life**

#### **2.3.2.1 Introduction**

Several authors approach the book of Ecclesiastes as being concerned with the value or the meaning of life. I survey the views of Jerome, Fox, Crenshaw, and Bartholomew.

### **2.3.2.2 Ecclesiastes as an argument that secular life is meaningless**

Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, known in English as Jerome and born in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, interpreted the book of Ecclesiastes using two principles: (1) the world is worthy of contempt and (2) the entire earthly scene may be considered valueless. An ascetic life devoted to the service of God is necessary. (Bartholomew 2009:26-27, Kallas 1979:61-66.)

Jerome set the direction for much of Christian interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes until the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Bartholomew 2009:28). He understood the universe to be transient and therefore הבל 'vanity'. He drew a parallel between הבל 'vanity' and the visible, which is temporal in 2 Corinthians 4:18. According to Jerome, the universe is הבל 'vanity' because it will pass away. This does not equate vanity with transience but it gives transience as a reason for the vanity of the universe. (Hieronymus 2012:36.)

Jerome said (commenting on Ecclesiastes 1:3) that men “sweat in vain in the labor of this world, accumulating riches, educating their children, maneuvering for office, and constructing buildings”. Then in death they hear: “Foolish man, tonight your soul will be taken away from you; whose now will be what you have prepared?” (Jerome cited Luke 12:20). Jerome writes this in a context where he has said of the universe that it is vanity compared to God. Human labor (in 1:3) is an example of the general vanity of the universe (in 1:2). Jerome does not build any contrast between the meaningfulness of spiritual life and the meaninglessness of secular life. (Hieronymus 2012:35-36.)

Jerome's interpretation of individual passages is at times forced. For example, he allegorized the exhortation of Ecclesiastes 9:7 referring to eating one's bread and drinking one's wine with joy to refer to spiritual bread and wine. He mentioned, and rejected as inferior though useful, the interpretation that it is “to be taken in the simple sense, as in: 'Whether you are eating or drinking, or whatever you are doing, do it all in the name of God'”. (Hieronymus 2012:104.) A significant feature of Jerome's interpretation is that he takes the meaning of הבל to be 'vanity', or something of no value or of little value.

### **2.3.2.3 Ecclesiastes as advice on how to live in a meaningless world**

Fox (1999:5) thinks that Qohelet is primarily concerned with the meaning of life and that he denies that it is meaningful by calling everything הבל 'absurd' and רעות רוח 'senseless' (glosses Fox's). When meaning collapses, it is still possible to reconstruct local meanings. For

life to be meaningful implies to Fox that the sum total of one's deeds and experiences achieve or prove something beyond themselves.

Fox thinks that Qohelet looks at life as meaningless and absurd. “Qohelet's central premise is that meaningfulness requires that an action or quality X produced the appropriate consequence X', and not-X did *not* produce X” (Fox 1999:138-139). The consequence (X') must be immediate, individual, recognizable, consistent, and final. A different kind of consequence is absurd. Only a consequence that fit these criteria can be counted as יתרון 'profit' and have meaning. In the absence of profit, “all human virtues are devoid of meaning”. Qohelet's criteria for meaningfulness are so strict that almost nothing can meet them. (Fox 1999:139).

Fox continues that despite his negative assessment of life, Qohelet has positive things to say. His view is confined to the world under the sun, but within the confines he discovers some moments of meaning. Instead of solving the problem of absurdity, he answers his question of “what is good for a man to do under the heavens during the few days of his life” (Ecclesiastes 2:3b). The answer accommodates to the absurdity instead of solving it. He embraces the very activities that are absurd: work, pleasure, wisdom, and righteousness. They have value for the moment only and allow people to find little meanings in the vast absurd. The epilogist adds that even if everything is absurd, people should fear God and keep his commandments. (Fox 1999:140-144).

Fredericks (2010:48) criticizes the idea that even if everything were meaningless, it would still be possible for something to be more meaningful than something else. This criticism speaks to Fox's interpretation that Qohelet constructed little meanings in the vast, meaningless absurd. Fox's interpretation makes Qohelet somewhat inconsistent. The inconsistency is in the fact that Qohelet lived as though certain things had value and yet allegedly did not believe in a meaningful universe. Another weakness in Fox's argumentation is that absurdity as defined by his description of consequences expected by Qohelet for actions is not incompatible with a meaningful universe. It is not contradictory for the universe to be thoroughly absurd as defined by Fox, and yet meaningful in the sense that it derives its meaning from fulfilling the purpose of its Creator.

These weaknesses do not invalidate Fox's interpretation as he does not claim that Qohelet is completely consistent. He only claims that the persona does not self-destruct (Fox 1999:373).

He denies consistence in Qohelet's thought by calling him “a man of doubt, who knows the realities that violate his belief” (Fox 1999:134). It is a significant feature of Fox's interpretation (along with many other interpretations) that it does not allow for a completely consistent Qohelet. Fox's approach is heavily dependent on the understanding of הבל as 'absurdity'. If this meaning fails, so does his approach to the book of Ecclesiastes. See section 2.4.8 for various views on the meaning of הבל and my discussion in section 3.6.

Crenshaw (1987:23-28) also considers Qohelet's message to be that life is profitless and absurd. Because death cancels human achievement, life has no meaning. The advice is to enjoy life if one can, but Qohelet recognized that not everyone can. There is no discernible principle of order in the world. This lack of order Fox would call absurd in that the consequences do not follow actions properly. Crenshaw's view sets traditional wisdom and Qohelet's message at odds with each other, with Qohelet believing that chance determines everything (Crenshaw 1987:24), and that life has no meaning because death cancels every achievement (Crenshaw 1987:25).

This interpretation leads Crenshaw to attribute some passages that speak to the contrary to a glossator or as a concession to tradition to be undercut (Ecclesiastes 3:17 tentatively a gloss, Crenshaw 1987:102; Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 either a gloss or a concession to be undercut, Crenshaw 1987:155). Thus Crenshaw resorts to solving tensions by appealing to glossators (see section 2.2.3) or references to the traditional wisdom view (see section 2.2.6). This approach to solving tensions is not convincing to me (see section 2.2), and therefore I reject this approach.

These authors understand the book of Ecclesiastes as an argument that life is meaningless on account of life being absurd in that consequences do not match deeds the way they should. Qohelet offers advice for living in this meaningless and absurd world.

### **2.3.2.4 Ecclesiastes as an argument that remembering one's Creator solves the struggle of searching for meaning in life**

Bartholomew (2009), like Longman (1998) and Enns (2011), approaches the book of Ecclesiastes as a report of Qohelet's faith journey (Bartholomew 2009:93). According to Bartholomew, Qohelet had Jewish faith and he wrestled with autonomous epistemology that probably owed much to the Hellenistic spirit. He juxtaposed the two with little comment about how to reconcile the two. However, toward the end his viewpoint shifts. He exhorts to

remember the Creator, which presents a possibility of resolution. (Bartholomew 2009:125, 269-277, 342-345, 353-358.)

What the faith journey approaches have in common is that they approach the book of Ecclesiastes as journaling an individual's faith journey instead of representing his mature thought. Certainly there are elements in the book that express Qohelet's journey of faith (especially in chapter 2). These are marked as such by the use of narrative. Yet the weakness of these views is that the book itself does not indicate that it was supposed to be read as a journey of faith by an individual instead of a philosophical treatise that embeds narrative.

Bartholomew (2009:271), quoting Fox (1999:81-82), refers to Qohelet's epistemology as autonomous: "We need not suppose that the author has [sic. Fox: had] read the Greek philosophy or even heard about its [sic. Fox: it in] particulars. He does, however, share the fundamental tenet of Greek philosophy: *the autonomy of individual reason*. This is the belief that the individual can and should proceed toward truth by means of his own powers of perception and reason, and that he can in this way discover truths previously unknown." (Italics Bartholomew's.)

According to Bartholomew, Qohelet seeks the meaning of life by studying it using the methodology of autonomous epistemology (Bartholomew 2009:119). His problem was that he put his autonomous epistemology before faith in God. Ontology should rather precede epistemology. To turn this relationship around is devastating to the Christian worldview. (Bartholomew 2009:275.)

Autonomous epistemology leads to the conclusion that everything is הבל 'enigmatic'. This meaning for the key word הבל is central to his approach to the book. These statements are juxtaposed with passages evoking the joyful appreciation of life that he has learned from the Israelite tradition. This juxtaposition opens gaps in the reading. Bartholomew considers that 11:7 is the turning point. The book of Ecclesiastes starts to move progressively toward a resolution of joy and enigma. Finally resolution comes through remembering the Creator and rejoicing. (Bartholomew 2009:119, 342-343.) Even this supposed resolution is not that clear. Elsewhere Bartholomew (2009:354-355) calls it "the *possibility* of the resolution of the tension in Qohelet's juxtapositions of enigma and joy" (italics his). The text itself does not connect the supposed resolution with the enigmas that Bartholomew finds in the text.

One problem with Bartholomew's view is that if Qohelet called all kinds of things enigmatic as a central point in his thinking, one would expect him to spell out the nature of the enigma. He does not appear to do this even once. To use Miller's (2002) terminology, the enigma is not guarded even once in the book (see section 2.4.8.4). Why would a reader end up thinking that Qohelet wanted to communicate enigma if that is not part of the basic meaning of the word and if he never indicates that he uses the word differently? Apparently the reason for this interpretation is that some readers find Qohelet's observations enigmatic. But he calls them **הבל**, not enigmatic. The meaning of the word **הבל** is discussed in more detail in sections 2.4.8 and 3.6.

Qohelet's autonomous epistemology is central to Bartholomew's interpretation. He understands Qohelet to juxtapose two alternative responses to situations (Bartholomew 2009:81-82). One is that of wisdom tradition and the other is his observations based on his autonomous epistemology (Bartholomew 2009:269-277). He thinks that Qohelet juxtaposed alternative visions of life (Bartholomew 2009:303). The book of Ecclesiastes gives no textual indication that Qohelet intended these viewpoints to be interpreted as alternative visions rather than affirming both viewpoints. The text is difficult to read as alternative visions with no textual signal.

The problem with autonomous epistemology for Qohelet, according to Bartholomew (2009:274), was that it had lead him to folly. Bartholomew (2009:264) translates Ecclesiastes 7:23 as "All this I tested by wisdom. I said 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me." He interprets the testing by wisdom to refer to Qohelet's methodology or epistemology. The passage is ironic, according to Bartholomew (2009:265). Qohelet's "wisdom" is different from the traditional wisdom. Because Qohelet's method of wisdom did not yield wisdom the "wisdom" was not wise (Bartholomew 2009:265). This "wisdom" comes to mean folly (Bartholomew 2009:274) Bartholomew's interpretation is dependent on an ironic reading of wisdom. He considers that **חכמה** 'wisdom' was used with a different meaning from its meaning in the book of Proverbs and often ironically (Ecclesiastes 1:13, 2:3, 2:15, 6:8, 7:23, 9:13, Bartholomew 2009:79, 92, 130-131, 143, 237, 240, 264-265, 274, 313, 315-316).

Many of the passages are quite easy to read with no irony. For example, Bartholomew considers the case of the wise commoner that saved a city and was forgotten (Ecclesiastes 9:13-18). This example of "wisdom" turns out to be an example of why "wisdom" has no value (Bartholomew 2009:315). Wisdom is used ironically because what Qohelet observes

subverts traditional wisdom (Bartholomew 2009:313). This example is illustrative of the weakness of Bartholomew's approach in two ways.

First, the interpretation stretches the valuelessness of wisdom. It certainly saved a city and possibly the wise man himself. Thus the subversion of wisdom is very limited. Being remembered and honored afterwards for one's wisdom is hardly the way Qohelet would value the case. Rather the point is how untrustworthy that kind of evaluation is. If the wisdom is not real wisdom, then the person being forgotten is not so poignant. Qohelet's point is made more clearly when it is real wisdom that is forgotten.

Second, Bartholomew (2009:313) overemphasizes the difference to traditional wisdom. He refers to Proverbs 24:3-7: "Wise warriors are mightier than strong ones, and those who have knowledge than those who have strength; for by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory" (vv. 5-6 quoted by Bartholomew from the New Revised Standard Version). Contrary to Bartholomew, there is nothing in the proverb to contradict Qohelet's perspective. They both affirm each other: wisdom is needed in war. The wise commoner saved the city in time of war by his wisdom. Qohelet's point is rather that even great wisdom does not guarantee that it is recognized.

Bartholomew's interpretation is dependent on understanding **הביל** as 'enigma' and on interpreting several references to wisdom as ironic. It is weak in that the supposed resolution to the enigmas is not indicated by the text in any clear manner.

### **2.3.2.5 Conclusions on Ecclesiastes as a study of the meaning of life**

Jerome, Fox, and Crenshaw considered the theme of the book of Ecclesiastes to be about the meaninglessness or valuelessness of life, and Bartholomew argued that the argument of the book is that the struggle of searching for meaning can be solved by remembering the Creator. Fox and Crenshaw argued for meaninglessness of all life to have been Qohelet's view. Bartholomew considered the message to be the individual's search for meaning. His view is dependent on the meaning of enigma for **הביל**. Crenshaw had to appeal to glosses to uphold his interpretation and Fox's view is very dependent on the meaning of absurdity for **הביל** and does not allow for a thoroughly consistent Qohelet.

### **2.3.3 Ecclesiastes as an argument to revere God**

#### **2.3.3.1 Introduction**

In addition to the view that the book of Ecclesiastes is a study of the meaning of life, there is the view that the basic argument of the book is to revere God. The epilogist explicitly argued for reverence for God (Eccl 12:13). This is part of the message of the book of Ecclesiastes. Different scholars give different weight to this aspect of the message in relation to the whole message of the book. Here I discuss only approaches that make reverence for God a central part of the message.

#### **2.3.3.2 Ecclesiastes as an argument to revere God without the basis of individual retribution**

Hartmut Gese (1983) approaches the book of Ecclesiastes as a crisis of wisdom. In older wisdom, according to Gese, the well-being of an individual or its opposite has an inner unity with his deeds. This inner unity is not that of a cause and an effect, but rather two aspects of the same thing. The well-being includes at least some aspects of one's outward situation, such as reputation (Gese 1983:144 uses the example of esteem accorded to the person in his circles). For Qohelet, whatever happens to an individual is not related to one's essential being. What happens is related to *מקרה* 'chance' (Gese's gloss, 1983:144). This notion of chance appears to be quite similar to predestination in Gese's understanding of Qohelet. Consequently, for Qohelet there is no connection between cause and effect among human beings. There is retribution, though, but that is not individual, but rather the regulation of world events. (Gese 1983:143-146.)

According to Gese (1983:149), Qohelet basically exhorts to the fear of God. Then one will accept the good times with thankfulness and understand in the bad time that it also was planned by God. The summary at the beginning (Ecclesiastes 1:2) and end (Ecclesiastes 12:8) of the book only shows the way that leads to the right fear of God.

The view of older wisdom and its relationship of the book of Ecclesiastes has been controversial. By the end of the twentieth century no consensus had been reached. (Bartholomew 2009:38). Gese assumes a rather specific view of the older wisdom. I find little evidence to favor the kind of rigid unity between well-being (as manifested in reputation) and deeds. A correlation is definitely assumed in wisdom literature, but this correlation need not



be taken as the kind of inner unity that Gese writes about. Nevertheless, I think that he rightly recognized the centrality of reverence for God in Qohelet's thought.

### **2.3.3.3 Ecclesiastes as an argument to revere God despite confusion**

Longman (1998) and Enns (2011) take Qohelet's message to be quite similar to the view of section 2.3.2.3 that life is meaningless. Their interpretation basically shares the same basic approach as far as Qohelet is concerned. However, they see a big contrast between the message of the book and that of Qohelet.

According to Longman, Qohelet's theology was used by the epilogist to warn of the dangers of speculative, doubting wisdom. The normative teaching is in the two last verses of the book that exhort to fear God and to keep his commandments because of God's future judgment. (Longman 1998:38-39.) Enns thinks the epilogist is more appreciative of Qohelet. Yet the epilogist warns not to go too far into the kind of words Qohelet has been uttering. One could continue endlessly in the same way, but such things must be brought to an end. The frame narrator did not warn of Qohelet but of going beyond him. He encourages to fear God, not because it makes sense but whether or not it does. (Enns 2011:113-114.)

The weakness of Longman's approach is that it does not explain why Qohelet was quoted so extensively if he was warned about. Enns's interpretation addresses this question better. Enns's interpretation is also dependent on quite a subtle interpretation of the end of the book and on an interpretation of the body of the book as presenting Qohelet as confused. In their interpretation, the book does not much discuss the main message of the book. Most of the book is concerned in spelling out the dilemma, which is addressed very briefly and the connection of the conclusion to the main contents of the book is not very clear, even though it is to be understood as the main message. If the epilogue is to distance the epilogist from Qohelet's theology, it lacks clarity in that it does not address Qohelet's theology or the supposed dilemmas in it. The end of the book is very anti-climactic in this interpretation, a point which Enns (2011:114) admits.

### **2.3.3.4 Conclusions on Ecclesiastes as an argument to revere God**

There is some textual support for the idea that the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes is that reverence for God is important (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Gese adds to this that one should revere God without the basis of individual retribution. Longman and Enns adds to this that one

should revere God despite confusion. While there is some promise in this approach, I do not consider some key assumptions by these scholars surveyed in this section to be solid. In Gese's case it is the rigidity of traditional wisdom thinking and in Longman and Enns's case it is the epilogue having a hermeneutically significant and textually poorly marked meaning.

### **2.3.4 Ecclesiastes as an argument to enjoy life**

#### **2.3.4.1 Introduction**

Besides views that make the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes related to the meaning of life or reverence for God, others take the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes to be about enjoyment of life. The details of the argument differ. I survey the views of Whybray and Ogden.

#### **2.3.4.2 Ecclesiastes as an argument to enjoy God's gifts despite our ignorance and toil**

Whybray (1994:209-210) summarizes Qohelet's conclusions as follows:

1. What good things God has given us are intended for our enjoyment, and in the giving of them he has shown his approval of our actions. To enjoy them is actually to do his will.
2. We must accept our ignorance of God's purposes and of the reasons why he has permitted evil to exist in the world: and we must take life as we find it and enjoy what we can, because
  - a. we cannot change the fate which God has chosen for us;
  - b. we cannot know what God has in store for us;
  - c. life is short and death inevitable.
3. The recognition that toil is part of what God has allotted to us in this life and that reliance on our own efforts is vain, enables us to find enjoyment even in our toil.

Whybray (1994:203-209) bases his conclusions on a study of seven passages where Qohelet recommends whole-hearted pursuit of enjoyment. The passages are Ecclesiastes 2:24a, 3:12, 3:22a, 5:17, 8:15a, 9:7-9a, 11:7-12:1a.

Whybray (1994:210-212) also discusses verses that have often been considered to express a pessimistic worldview. They are Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, 7:1b, 4:1-3. He solves the challenge from these verses to his view by appealing to a contrast between disillusionment before a

more mature judgment (2:24-26), to irony (7:1b), and to reflection of oppression not to be taken as his fundamental attitude (4:1-3).

The view that the book of Ecclesiastes is an argument to enjoy life has strong support in the text. This aspect of the argument is part of the common ground of interpretation (see section 1.1.6). However, it has been put in different contexts. For example, Fox takes it as an advice on how to live in an absurd life (see section 2.3.2.3). So for him this aspect of the book is not as central as for Whybray. Whybray (1989a:24-25) notes that there are two ways the recommendation can be understood: as a desperate recommendation to get superficial pleasures because life does not offer anything better and death is expected, or as a recommendation to take full account of the vanities of this world and face up to them so that one is then free to receive the gift of joy in simple things from God.

Whybray has made a good contribution in drawing attention to the positive recommendation for the book. Nevertheless, this in itself does not explain the basis for the recommendation, which would be an important part of a full description of the argument (see section 3.8 for some comments in that direction).

### **2.3.4.3 Ecclesiastes as an argument that life under God must be taken and enjoyed in all its mystery**

Ogden summarizes the thesis of the book of Ecclesiastes as “life under God must be taken and enjoyed in all its mystery”. Ogden's view is based on the idea that הבל does not summarize the thesis of the writer even though it occurs frequently and at central points in which the author answers his own programmatic question. Rather, he takes the recurring advice to rejoice as the thesis of the book. The purpose of the book is “calling on the next generation to ponder deeply the kinds of life issues to which there seem to be no complete answers, while at the same time holding firm, and positively accepting, life as God gives it”. (Ogden 1987:14-15.)

Ogden arrives at the thesis and the purpose of the book by means of studying the structure. In his view, the basic framework for chapters 1-8 is the programmatic question about the יתרון 'advantage' of humanity. The answer is that there is no advantage under the sun, and it is demonstrated by examples from personal and social life. Each subsection is relevant to answering the basic question. In the final chapters 9-12, there is a shift to appraising the value of wisdom. (Ogden 1987:13-14.)

In Ogden's view, Qohelet argues that there is no יתרון 'advantage' found in material possessions or other attainments. Advantage is not dependent on material success. Ogden allows for the possibility that יתרון 'advantage' might refer to "an inner contentment which abides throughout an enigmatic life", but he thinks that it also seems "to incorporate the possibility of some experience beyond death". He also discounts the possibility of reference to inner satisfaction by taking into account the additional fact that יתרון 'advantage' is not to be found under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:11). For something to be counted as יתרון 'advantage', it would then have to be of a somewhat different order, even though not 'other worldly' in the full sense. In this sense, Qohelet points in the direction of יתרון 'advantage' that transcends earthly experience. Qohelet uses the word "to gather up all his hopes that there might be some just resolution of these many human enigmas". (Ogden 1987:23-25.) The meaning of יתרון is discussed more fully in sections 2.4.4 and 3.4.

Another important point in Ogden's view is that the word הבל identifies the enigmatic and suggests that life is not fully comprehensible. Specifically, the word does not carry the meaning of 'vanity' or 'meaningless'. (Ogden 1987:14). His view of הבל is discussed in more detail in section 2.4.8.

Ogden's view of the thesis of the writer is in the answer to the question of how to live rather than in the answer to the programmatic question on the profit of work. It would not make a great difference if the thesis were understood as the answer to the programmatic question and the advice on how to live was seen as a practical exhortation on the basis of the thesis. The difference is basically whether one looks at the book from the viewpoint of expository or hortatory discourse type. Modified in this way, Ogden's view would contrast with the views that consider the argument to be that life is without meaning in that in Ogden's modified view, the argument would be rather that work is profitless in terms of any יתרון 'advantage' under the sun. It is a more limited view in that life itself is not declared meaningless. I think this would be a step in the right direction.

It is noteworthy that Ogden arrives at this interpretation not supposing that הבל is the answer to the programmatic question of profit of work, but supposing that the programmatic question is answered in the negative (under the sun) and that הבל means 'enigmatic'. Understanding הבל as the direct answer to the programmatic question in the negative would add cohesion to the book. Ogden has good textual support in making enjoyment a central part of the book. He considers the counterpoint to be הבל, 'mystery' or 'enigma'. If this interpretation of הבל is

not correct, his interpretation of the argument of the book needs refinement. I will argue that this is indeed the case in sections 2.4.8.2.2 and 3.6.

#### **2.3.4.4 Conclusions on Ecclesiastes as an argument to enjoy life**

Both Whybray and Ogden have made important observations on the centrality of the theme of enjoyment for the book of Ecclesiastes. This in itself is a good beginning towards understanding the argument of the book. Ogden understands the programmatic question to be about the profit of work and the answer to be that there is none under the sun. He also understands הבל as 'enigma'.

#### **2.3.5 Ecclesiastes as an argument that there is value in work**

Besides views on the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes as related to the meaning of life, reverence for God, and enjoyment, there is the view that the book concerns the value of work. According to Fredericks (2010:22), the book is not about whether there is any purpose in life but rather about whether there is any advantage to the labor involved. This shares with Ogden the basic question about advantage to labor. Both take this to be a programmatic question for the book (Fredericks 2010:96, Ogden 1987:22). The answer Fredericks gives is that there is indeed profound, good, and enjoyable benefits even though they are not lasting.

Fredericks summarizes the premise of Ecclesiastes 1:2 for the speech's ultimate conclusion as follows: "Since everything is temporary, be wise, be diligent and be appreciative while you can." He further emphasizes that being temporary does not imply meaninglessness. There are four categories of temporary things in the book of Ecclesiastes: life itself, human efforts and their results, pleasure, and tragedies. (Fredericks 2010:74.)

The basic question is made more acute by the laboriousness of work (Fredericks 2010:75). The advantage is joy. This joy is to be found in simple experiences: food, drink, and rewarding work. This joy comes from God rather than the gifts themselves. (Fredericks 2010:105.) The viewpoint of Qohelet is that of the present life of the individual in that he encourages to be happy in this life without worrying about what happens on earth after we die (Fredericks 2010:126). The conclusion of the book about fearing God in light of his judgment (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) is the same message Qohelet had elsewhere (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, 8:2, 9:2), so the conclusion is on the same topic as the rest of the book (Fredericks 2010:249-251).

Fredericks approaches the book from a viewpoint that **הבל** means 'temporary' throughout the book. With this premise, he interprets the message to be that work is valuable because of the joy it produces. This is the **יתרון** 'profit' of work. The contrast to Ogden's view is that **יתרון** 'profit' may be found under the sun in Fredericks's approach. When Qohelet claims that there is no **יתרון** under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:11), Fredericks understands the context to limit this to lasting advantage (Fredericks 2010:94-95). Thus the usage of the word is a contextually limited use for Fredericks and for Ogden it is the typical use of the word. In Fredericks's view, the typical use of **יתרון** 'profit' refers to this-worldly and temporal advantage, as indicated by his understanding of Qohelet's answer to the programmatic question. While Fredericks's approach could also be classified under the “argument to enjoy life” views, he gives **יתרון** as the answer to the question of the value of work. His view of the argument of the book could perhaps be summarized at the risk of oversimplification as “work is valuable in giving joy”.

Fredericks's approach is quite dependent on the meaning of **הבל** as 'temporary'. This question is studied in more detail in sections 2.4.8.2.4 and 3.6. There is little doubt that 'temporary' is one of the meanings of **הבל** (Ps 39:6). The question is whether it is consistently so used in the book of Ecclesiastes. Another important point is that Fredericks views **יתרון** 'profit' and **חלק** 'portion' as near synonyms with no contrastive usage in the book of Ecclesiastes. If these conclusions are not agreed with, some aspects of the argument of the book should be reconsidered.

### **2.3.6 Conclusions on the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes**

Four general approaches to the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes were surveyed. Some (Bartholomew, Crenshaw, Fox, Jerome) approach the book as a study of the meaning of life. Fox's and Crenshaw's views do not allow for Qohelet to be consistent without appealing to glosses. Bartholomew's view is very dependent on interpreting **הבל** as 'enigma'.

Others (Enns, Gese, Longman) approach the book as an argument to revere God. That is part of the argument of the book. The scholars surveyed had strong key assumptions that influenced their interpretation. Gese approaches the study from a view of rigid unity between deeds and well-being, such as manifested in reputation, as part of the old wisdom school. I do not find much evidence for this rigidity in older wisdom. Longman and Enns approach the book with the end as a key to the whole. Yet much depends on a rather moot reading of the

end which really does not address the questions supposedly raised in the body of the work. While the argument to revere God is part of the argument, I do not find this group of approaches promising.

Whybray approaches the book as an argument to enjoy life. I fully agree that it is a central part of the message of the book. The details of how it relates to the rest of the argument need to be filled out. Some comments in this direction are made in section 3.8. Fredericks approaches the book as an argument that work is valuable. The value of work is recognized in the book. Yet Fredericks's approach relies in the meaning of 'temporary' for הבל, and on the positive answer to the programmatic question of יתרון 'advantage' of work. These questions are addressed in sections 2.4.4, 2.4.8, 3.4, and 3.6.

## **2.4 Views on key vocabulary**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

In previous sections of the literature review approaches to the tensions of the book and views on the argument of the book were reviewed. The question of key vocabulary relates to how the argument is understood. Answers to this question are reviewed here. In section 1.1.3, it was noted that the keyword הבל is used to summarize the message of the book and that there is no consensus about its meaning. In section 1.1.4 it was noted that another significant, vocabulary-related question is the meaning of the question about יתרון in Ecclesiastes 1:3. I proceed to present views on these and other key vocabulary.

### **2.4.2 The expression תחת השמש**

The expression תחת השמש 'under the sun' is an expression that occurs in the Bible only in the book of Ecclesiastes. Seow (1997:104-106) argues on the basis of various Semitic inscriptions that the phrase means the realm of the living as opposed to the netherworld. The expression can be distinguished from תחת השמים 'under heaven' in that 'under the sun' is a temporal expression and 'under heaven' speaks of universality. Tsumura (1997:188) understands the meaning to be “life in the real world”. Lipiński (2006:312) comments that in Phoenician, the expression “denotes the state of the living in contrast to that of the dead”. In the book of Ecclesiastes he thinks it means “on earth”. I accept the conclusion that it refers to the realm of the living as opposed to the realm of the dead.

### 2.4.3 The word **קָלָח**

The word **קָלָח** occurs 66 times in the Hebrew Bible apart from its use as a proper name and a homonym in Proverbs 7:21. In the book of Ecclesiastes it occurs eight times (2:10, 2:21, 3:22, 5:17, 5:18, 9:6, 9:9, 11:2).<sup>12</sup> It is often translated as 'portion'. It refers to something a worker can get from his work. The word is used positively to affirm what one can have.

One view for the meaning of the word **קָלָח** as used by Qohelet takes it in the sense of 'temporally limited'. Fox (1999:109-110) refers to Rashbam as favoring this interpretation. Fox argues against this interpretation by pointing out that in Ecclesiastes 9:6 it would make no sense to complain that the dead have no more temporary portion among the living. Fox's objection appears to me to be weak. Even if **קָלָח** refers to a temporally limited portion, it does not follow that the temporal limitation is emphasized in every occurrence. If all portions among the living are temporary, that is enough to explain why **קָלָח** could be an appropriate word in Ecclesiastes 9:6. This objection of mine, of course, does not suggest that temporariness is part of the semantics of the word. I think it is not (see section 3.3.2) and that Fox's conclusion is correct despite the weakness of his argument. If **קָלָח** is temporally limited in the book of Ecclesiastes, the limitation comes from the context of its use in the book of Ecclesiastes rather than the semantics of the word.

Another view for the meaning of **קָלָח** is Fox's suggestion that it “is a portion in the sense of possession, something one gets, irrespective of whether it is adequate or satisfying or deserved or durable.” 'Being partial' is an incidental feature of the meaning of the word. A portion may be possession or pleasure or some other experience. Almost always the significant quality of **קָלָח** is that it belongs to someone. (Fox 1999:110-111.) Van Dam (1997:162) thinks that the the word does not mean a part as opposed to the whole in Ecclesiastes 3:22, 5:18, 5:19, and 9:9.

Another view for the meaning of **קָלָח** is that of Seow (1997:132). In this view, **קָלָח** is a technical term and refers to “the space allotted for human existence”. This view he gets from Galling. Seow gives no argument why the word should be considered a technical term. Fox (1999:110) criticizes this meaning as awkward in context. One of his examples is Ecclesiastes 5:18. There Qohelet says that it is God's gift when one can **לִשְׂאֹת אֶת חִלְקוֹ** 'take his portion'. This, according to Fox, cannot be allotted space, since he already possesses the space apart

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<sup>12</sup> The statistics are based on Even-Shosan (1997:375-376).



from any volition of his. It is rather something in the space, since one can choose to take or ignore this portion. Regardless of whether Ecclesiastes 5:18 is a good example of חלק apart from volition, in Ecclesiastes 2:10 the word refers to an experience (see section 3.3.3), and an experience cannot be a space, other than metaphorically or metonymically. Furthermore, the word refers to 'possession' in Ecclesiastes 2:21 as an object of giving (see section 3.3.4). To understand possession as space requires another metaphor. I do not see any special reason to consider the word a technical term. Seow's view does not seem very helpful to understanding the way חלק is used in the book of Ecclesiastes.

In another view, there is contrast between חלק as something partial as contrasted with the whole. According to Fredericks (2010:94), חלק "refers to a restricted and assigned share or portion". This view is relatively similar to Fox's understanding, but it does not limit 'restriction' or 'partialness' to an incidental feature. Seow (1997:58) also basically supports this view in contrasting חלק with the whole, but he gives the word a more specific sense, discussed above. Even a limited portion can be enjoyed.

Though there are differences of opinion on the precise meaning of חלק, the general consensus is that in the book of Ecclesiastes it refers to what one can enjoy in this life. The disagreements relate to whether temporariness is part of the meaning of the word or an incidental feature as the result of mortality and whether it is an allotted space or something in the allotted space.

#### 2.4.4 The word יתרון

The word יתרון occurs ten times in the book of Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The occurrences in the book of Ecclesiastes are 1:3, 2:11, 2:13 (twice), 3:9, 5:8, 5:15, 7:12, 10:10, and 10:11.<sup>13</sup> Latoundji (1997:572) gives the word meanings of 'surplus', 'profit', 'advantage', and 'gain'. Kronholm (1990:489) defines it as "that which remains"—the surplus, if any of the balance-sheet of life".

Both Ogden (1987:22) and Fredericks (2010:96) call the question of Ecclesiastes 1:3 "מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו" 'what profit is there for a human in all his work' the programmatic question of the book of Ecclesiastes. Ogden understands יתרון to signify 'advantage'. In his view, it lacks precision in Qohelet's use, and it is used of wisdom's reward both here and after death. There is no יתרון 'advantage' under the sun, so it is not located in this world. Ogden

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<sup>13</sup> The statistics are based on Even-Shoshan (1997:516).

suggests that the concept of יתרון 'advantage' may be bound up with the eternal dimension in Ecclesiastes 3:9-11. The word stands in contrast to חלק 'portion', which is used of fame, fortune, and pleasure, whereas יתרון 'advantage' cannot be found among material and other attainments. Wisdom may lead to יתרון 'advantage'. (Ogden 1987:24-25, 29, 48.)

Fredericks (2010:94-95) understands יתרון to be roughly synonymous with חלק, as he takes a verse (Eccl 2:10) indicating a positive חלק as an affirmative answer to the question of יתרון. At least this indicates that in Fredericks's interpretation חלק implies יתרון. They both refer to that which has value. He considers the question of what יתרון there is to be equivalent to the question of what it does (עשה) in Ecclesiastes 2:2. There is advantage, but it is temporary. (Fredericks 2010:84-85.) Ogden (1987:42) thinks that חלק is distinct from יתרון and is very much this-worldly. There is no יתרון under the sun. Fox (1999:109) notes that according to Qohelet, it is possible to have חלק (Eccl 2:10) and not have יתרון (Eccl 2:11). Both see יתרון to be more demanding than חלק unlike Fredericks.

Fredericks (2010:94-96) thinks that Qohelet answers the programmatic question on whether there is profit (יתרון) to one's labors in the positive in Ecclesiastes 2:11-14. The answer is in temporary joy. According to him, Qohelet's answer is that there is יתרון under the sun, and according to Ogden (1987:23), the answer is that there is none under the sun. The semantic difference in understanding seems to be that Fredericks takes the programmatic question to be of the value of work (in 2010:94 he accepts חלק as יתרון on the basis that having חלק is logically an advantage over not having it) and Ogden takes Ecclesiastes 2:11 as indicating that there is no יתרון under the sun. Fredericks sees יתרון and חלק as roughly synonymous and Ogden sees יתרון as more limited and in contrast to חלק. Fredericks's argumentation is quite dependent on seeing יתרון as somewhat synonymous with חלק 'portion' and טוב 'good'.

For Ogden, there is no יתרון under the sun but there is חלק instead. For something to be counted as יתרון, the criteria are more demanding. Ogden (1987:43) comments on Ecclesiastes 2:13 that wisdom is seen as the only hope for יתרון. Yet the text does not speak of hope but actual יתרון. The text itself relativizes the יתרון relative to סכלות 'folly'. Yet, if the temporal offers no יתרון whatsoever, in the temporal realm wisdom cannot offer more יתרון than folly. To put it differently, one zero is no bigger than another zero. One solution is to take יתרון in Ecclesiastes 2:13 as somewhat untypical in that here temporal benefit is seen as יתרון, but in a qualified sense. The qualification is that wisdom offers more knowledge

(2:14), but as wisdom can offer only limited or temporal help as it does not prevent the common lot<sup>14</sup> (2:15), the relative יתרון turns out not to be יתרון in the more demanding sense. Acting with wisdom gives a short-term advantage over acting with stupidity because of what can be achieved by wisdom, but in either case, the long-term result is no advantage because that the person ends up dead, and he does not take his achievements with him.

For Fredericks's view, the solution for the use of יתרון in Ecclesiastes 2:13 is quite straightforward. There is real profit in wisdom. He takes יתרון in Ecclesiastes 2:11 as untypical in that there lasting advantage is meant (Fredericks 2010:94-95). His understanding that יתרון is 'lasting advantage' in Ecclesiastes 2:11 does not seem controversial. It fits Ogden's view with ease. The main difference between Ogden and Fredericks is which use, 2:11 or 2:13, reflects the typical meaning in the book of Ecclesiastes and more specifically the meaning in the programmatic question of Ecclesiastes 1:3. Furthermore, Ogden thinks that Qohelet at least points in the direction of יתרון which transcends present earthly experience (1987:23).

The implications of whether there is יתרון achievable under the sun are significant for the interpretation of the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes. What precisely Qohelet was looking for in relationship to work sets a frame of reference to the rest of the book. If there is no יתרון under the sun, then Qohelet discusses something that work cannot produce even though people may attempt to work for it. This interpretation may go in the direction of meaninglessness of life (Fox) or in the direction of possibly hinting at יתרון in the afterlife (Ogden). If there is יתרון under the sun (Fredericks), then Qohelet is not discussing any permanent benefit of work and חלק becomes rather synonymous with יתרון. My own view is presented in section 3.4.

#### 2.4.5 The word שמחה

The noun שמחה is a common word in Biblical Hebrew. It occurs 94 times in the Bible, its adjectival form (שמח) 21 times, and the verbal form (שמח) 154 times in the Old Testament<sup>15</sup>. The noun occurs eight times in the book of Ecclesiastes (2:1, 2:2, 2:10, 2:26, 5:19<sup>16</sup>, 7:4, 8:15, 9:7), the adjective once (2:10), and the verb eight times (3:12, 3:22, 4:16, 5:18, 8:15, 10:19,

14 There is disagreement on whether the common lot is death or common things in life (see Wright 2015:259). While the expression may include things in life, I see no reason to limit the scope of the common lot to exclude death.

15 The statistics are based on Even-Shoshan (1997:1169-1170).

11:8, 11:9). The word is significant for the study of Ecclesiastes in that it is used to describe the best things to pursue (3:12, 3:22, 11:8-9).

Lexically the word signifies “a spontaneous and vocal expression of joy rather than a restrained frame of mind”, according to Grisanti (1997c:1251-1252). Also Vanoni (2004:146-147) notes that the word means expressions of joy, though he may overemphasize the expressive side as opposed to inner joy without expression. Without minimizing the observation that often the joy is expressed, the word has a wider semantic range than 'expression of joy' as Grisanti's example of Deuteronomy 24:5 shows, and as he acknowledges with his examples where the extent of this disposition pervades the whole person. The semantic range of the word includes inner joy that cannot be adequately expressed in Proverbs 14:10 (Waltke 2004:590). It is better to consider the meaning of the word to include expression of joy and inner joy.

Fox (1999:113) argues that in the book of Ecclesiastes שמחה means “pleasure, not happiness and certainly not joy.” He defines pleasure as a “feeling-tone” attached to a more comprehensive experience. It is not a feature of the object but a way in which it affects the experiencer. By way of metonymy, a pleasure can be something that stimulates the feeling of pleasure. Happiness Fox defines as an emotion that permeates the entirety of consciousness while it is active. Pleasure may contribute to happiness, but does not guarantee it. Fox defines joy as an intense and stable type of happiness directed at a worthy object. He notes that שמחה often has a distinct behavioral aspect (Fox 1999:123, following Gary Anderson). Fox (1999:115, 123) thinks that pleasure did not produce happiness in Qohelet. He found pleasure unsatisfying, meaningless, and empty. He was no hedonist, because pleasurable feelings did not suffice, as they would for a hedonist.

Fredericks (2010:105) thinks that the advantage to hard work is joy. He means “the profoundest joy that comes from the simplest of experiences: food, drink and rewarding work.” In Ecclesiastes 2:1 Fredericks translates שמחה as 'pleasure', but he sees it as opposed to shallow laughter (Fredericks 2010:76, 84). In 2:2 he uses both 'pleasure' (2010:79) and 'joy' (2010:76) to translate שמחה. I understand this to mean that he did not intend to contrast the two concepts in the book of Ecclesiastes, but that he saw some latitude for the semantics of the word.

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16 This form בשמחת has also been analyzed as an infinitive construct form with a feminine ending. The feminine ending ה becomes ת in the construct form. With this analysis, there are seven nouns and nine verbs in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Bartholomew, on the other hand, sees both 'joy' and 'pleasure' as meanings in the book of Ecclesiastes, with some intended contrast between the two. In Ecclesiastes 2:1 he takes שמחה as pleasure and in Ecclesiastes 2:26 as 'joy' (Bartholomew 2009:128, 130, 149, 153-157). Enns (2011:49-50) takes the exhortation to pleasure to be a deep resignation. It is not that pleasure is very good, but there is nothing better than it.

The word שמחה occurs in significant passages of the book that exhort one to enjoy life. Some (Fox) take the word as 'pleasure', some as 'joy', probably including 'pleasure' but not contrasted with it (Fredericks), and some as either (Bartholomew), depending on the passage. The way we understand joy in the book influences whether we understand the exhortation to be a form of resignation to the best alternative when the striving for anything better has been frustrated (Enns) or an exhortation that sees enormous value in joy itself (Fredericks).

#### **2.4.6 The expression רעות רוח**

The expression רעות רוח occurs seven times in the book of Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The occurrences are 1:14, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 4:4, 4:6, and 6:9.<sup>17</sup> It is almost always used in conjunction with הבל, a key word for the book of Ecclesiastes. The sole exception is 4:6.

As Fox (1999:45) notes, the expression could be either a synonym or a different concept that adds to the meaning of הבל. Fox thinks that if it adds to the meaning of הבל, the addition is a further undesirable nuance to the assertion of absurdity. Fox understands הבל as 'absurd'. Several possibilities have been presented for the meaning of the phrase רעות רוח.

(1) 'Pursuit or desire of the wind' (by someone). This is suggested by Seow (1997:121-122) who glosses it as 'a pursuit of wind' or 'a desire of wind'. He supports his interpretation with postbiblical Hebrew and Aramaic and Phoenician parallels, and notes רעה רוח in Hosea 12:2 as a parallel. He understands the wind to denote futility or meaninglessness in accordance with the usage of the word in other wisdom literature. He says that the word "is frequently a metaphor for things that have no abiding value or are insubstantial". I understand his suggestion to be that the phrase means futile pursuits or pursuits of things that have no abiding value. Bracke (1997:1149) thinks that "an impossible, futile task is indicated".

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<sup>17</sup> The statistics are based on Even-Shoshan (1997:1087).

(2) 'Desire the wind has'. This is suggested by Fredericks (2010:82). He translates the phrase as “the whim of the wind”. The connotation is the unpredictable and changing desire of the wind. He refers to winds changing direction. This suggestion understands the wind to be personified so as to have a will, and the changes of the direction of the wind as changes of the will. The fact that wind has not been personified elsewhere in the book somewhat decreases the likelihood of this interpretation because such a personification does not have authorial clues to help the reader arrive at this interpretation. Yet it does not make the interpretation impossible.

(3) 'Thoughts made of wind'. This is suggested by Fox (1999:48). He takes it as a genitive of material and translates it as “windy thought(s)”. This implies chaotic, aimless thoughts. In this suggestion wind is a metaphor for aimlessness or chaos. Fox (1999:45) suggests that רעות retains its well-known Aramaic meaning 'desire', but that the concept of רעות רוח is not distinguished from רעיון רוח (see section 2.4.7). Therefore he uses 'thought' to translate both. He thinks that Qohelet did not distinguish between desires and thoughts by using רעות and רעיון.

(4) 'Shepherding the wind'. This is suggested by DeRouchie (2011:12-13). This suggests a straining and fruitless task. He sees a link between shepherding the wind and the one shepherd of 12:11, whom he identifies as יהוה. Shepherd is a metaphor used of God as a provider and protector of his own. The mention of the shepherd pushes readers to the one who governs all things. I understand DeRouchie's view in the sense that instead of a futile attempt to shepherd the wind, one should let the true Shepherd to shepherd himself. Ogden and Zogbo (1997:44-45) hold to this view, though they do not connect the idea with the one shepherd of 12:11.

(5) Jerome reports that the Hebrew under whose tuition he studied told him that the word רעות in Ecclesiastes 1:14 signifies more 'affliction' and 'badness' than 'pasture' or 'will' (Hieronymus 2012:43). I take this to mean that the Hebrew took the root to be רע 'bad'. It is noteworthy that the noun derived from the adjective takes the form רעה or רע but רעות does not seem to be attested. We might argue that Jerome's Hebrew friend was a fluent speaker of Hebrew whereas much of the classical Hebrew language has not been preserved. However, even he was centuries removed from the time the book was written and may have conjectured a meaning in an attempt to understand the book.

(6) 'Toiling for self'. Staples (1943:96-98) understands רעות רוח not as synonymous to הבל but as adding another viewpoint. The רוח refers to what drives man. He understands the construction as a subjective genitive. The idea of 'הבל ורעות רוח' in the book of Ecclesiastes is that even if something is rationally incomprehensible (הבל), man must toil, driven by his רוח 'spirit' or 'self' and for his רוח 'spirit'.

Several suggestions have been made for the phrase רעות רוח: pursuit of the wind, desire the wind has, thoughts made of wind, shepherding the wind and badness of the spirit, and toiling for self.

### **2.4.7 The expression רעיון רוח**

The expression רעיון רוח occurs twice in the book of Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The occurrences are 1:17 and 4:16. The word רעיון occurs also in Ecclesiastes 2:22 as part of the expression רעיון לבו and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. In the Aramaic Bible the word has several more occurrences: Daniel 2:29, 2:30, 4:16, 5:6, 5:10, and 7:28.<sup>18</sup>

The expression is taken as a synonym of רעות רוח by Fox (1999:45), Seow (1997:121), Fredericks (2010:82), and Bracke (1997:1149). Their mutual disagreements on the meaning of רעות רוח are mirrored exactly on the meaning of רעיון רוח. The basic meaning of רעיון is taken to be 'desire' (Fredericks 2010:82, Fox 1999:45). DeRouchie (2011:12) thinks that רעיון רוח means 'windy thoughts' or 'disturbing thoughts that are ineffectual, bearing no gain'. He thinks that the meaning is not completely synonymous with רעות רוח.

### **2.4.8 The word הבל**

#### **2.4.8.1 Introduction**

The word הבל has been recognized as the key word in the book of Ecclesiastes. The way it is understood has a big influence on how the argument of the book is understood. The word is used to summarize the contents of the book: all is הבל (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12:8, Miller 2002:1-2). It is often used as a predicate (something is הבל). The noun הבל occurs in 73 times in the Hebrew Bible apart from its use as a proper name (8 references to Abel). In the book of Ecclesiastes, it occurs 38 times (1:2 five times, 1:14, 2:1, 2:11, 2:15, 2:17, 2:19, 2:21, 2:23, 2:26, 3:19, 4:4, 4:7, 4:8, 4:16, 5:6, 5:9, 6:2, 6:4, 6:9, 6:11, 6:12, 7:6, 7:15, 8:10, 8:14, 8:14,

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<sup>18</sup> These statistics are based on Even-Shoshan (1997:1087).

9:9, 9:9, 11:8, 11:10, 12:8 three times). This leaves 35 occurrences outside of the book of Ecclesiastes.<sup>19</sup> In this section I discuss views represented in literature for the meaning of the word in the book of Ecclesiastes, and in section 3.6 I will present my own view and argue for it, and test Fredericks's hypothesis in more detail than in this literature review.

Miller (2002:2-14) summarizes attempts to define the meaning of הבל as understood by scholars in three categories: abstract sense, multiple senses, and a single metaphor. The single metaphor sense differs from the abstract sense view in that the single metaphor view takes the meaning of הבל in Ecclesiastes to be a live metaphor that requires alertness by the reader to the clues given by the author (Miller 2002:10-11). This means that the proponents of a live metaphor view do not see the meaning in Ecclesiastes as having been lexicalized whereas the abstract sense views in Miller's classification take them as lexicalized. For the purposes of this discussion, I discuss both views under abstract sense views. This is followed by discussion of multiple sense views and finally Miller's own symbolic view.

## **2.4.8.2 Abstract sense views**

### **2.4.8.2.1 Introduction**

Various abstract senses for הבל have been proposed. Miller surveys translations and commentators, and arrives at several proposals as glosses: vanity, vain, futility, futile, emptiness, meaningless, incomprehensible, incongruous, ironic, zero. He notes Ogden's thought that it "conveys the notion that life is enigmatic and mysterious" (Miller 2002:3). Others could be added to Miller's list: absurd (Fox 1999:30-33), temporary (Fredericks 2010:46-54), and Miller himself continues the list later on (Miller 2002:4-5).

A single meaning is expected for a thematic word that summarizes the various uses of the word throughout the book. The main material of the book is bracketed inside statements that all is הבל (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 12:8). As Fox (1999:35-36) notes, the summary calls for a single sense. The challenge is to find a single meaning that fits all the contexts in which הבל is used. Miller summarizes the challenge by saying that no proposal so far has completely successfully translated הבל by one abstract concept (Miller 2002:7). The important issue is not glosses or their fit in a translation, but the semantic meaning of the Hebrew word הבל. Nevertheless, his comment reflects the difficulty of finding a single abstract meaning.

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<sup>19</sup> These statistics are based on Even-Shoshan (1997:279).



Among suggested meanings are 'enigmatic' (Bartholomew, Ogden), 'absurd' (Fox), 'futile', 'meaningless' (New International Version), 'fleeting' (Seow; 'transient': Fredericks). Some resort to 'vapor' or 'breath', which is not helpful, because it does not bring one any closer to finding the abstract sense the metaphor is used to convey. Next, I will discuss the following proposals to the meaning of הבל: enigmatic, absurd, temporary, and meaningless. In section 3.6 I argue for a single, abstract sense that fits all the occurrences in the book of Ecclesiastes that are included in the summary statement.

#### **2.4.8.2.2 הבל as enigmatic**

The word הבל has been understood to mean 'enigmatic' or 'incomprehensible' in the book of Ecclesiastes (Staples 1943:95-104, Bartholomew 2009:104-107, Ogden 1987:17-22, Ogden and Zogbo 1997:3-4). Staples (1943) bases his argument on a few claims. He claims that הבל was used in a cultic context with a respectable meaning. He uses Jonah 2:9 and Psalm 31:7 as examples of uses where the phrase refers to something “considered as of sufficient importance for their deity to view with concern” as opposed to something of no worth (Staples 1943:95-96). However, both of these examples were uttered by someone who indicates his disapproval for the cult or idol in question. In neither one is it the evaluation of the one who worships הבל 'idol' or a cultic ritual of Staples' interpretation. Thus this argument for Staples' premise is invalid. Neither are these the only two options.

Staples presents cases where a word of respectable meaning became one of disrepute. From this he draws the conclusion that הבל originally “carried some such idea as 'cult mystery,' and so something unfathomable, something unknown or unknowable to man.” (Staples 1943:96). This does not follow from the premise. He further claims that רוח 'spirit' is something that impels man to strive for something that does not give any profit. This is enigmatic, and is described by the word הבל.

The majority of Staples' article is devoted to showing how this would work out in the text of the book of Ecclesiastes. Labor without profit is הבל (Staples 1943:99). Joy is הבל because it is not constant in its desirability (Staples 1943:99). Wisdom is not הבל, but it is rather man's inability to attain perfect wisdom and understanding that is הבל (Staples 1943:100). The ability to use wisdom is not הבל, but “the lack of profit enjoyed by the wise man as over against the fool” is הבל (Staples 1943:100). The phenomenon of man not being able to “discover by his own experiences that he has any advantage over the beast” is הבל (Staples

1943:101). Life is הבל since it is uncertain (Staples 1943:101). Words of the fool are הבל (Staples 1943:102). Profit is not הבל, but the lack of it is (Staples 1943:102). Evil or unpleasant things (רעה) are incomprehensible, since they are fitting in their proper time and everything that happens is good as God directs the universe. Staples means 'evil' not as a moral category, but as something unpleasant. According to him, there are no real evil events in a universe directed by God. If they were truly comprehended, they would not be bad (רעה). Evil is evil only because it is not fully understood. The unpleasantness is based on man's inability to understand it fully. (Staples 1943:103-104.)

Staples did not support his premises by solid arguments. This does not make the premises false, but it does not add credibility to his idea. Fredericks (2010:49) notes that Staples (1943) is an example of an approach that emphasizes the contextual use of the word. Staples attempts to show that הבל means 'incomprehensible' by showing that the meaning fits the context, in other words that it is not contradictory to the way the word is used in the book of Ecclesiastes. This is a negative rather positive argument for the truth of his view. The idea of הבל meaning incomprehensible or enigmatic has been followed by later scholars. I now turn to arguments presented by Ogden, Zogbo, and Bartholomew.

Ogden and Zogbo (1997:3-4) list five examples of things called הבל:

- (1) A workaholic that does not ask what he is working for (4:7-8)
- (2) A person to whom God has given material blessing but who cannot enjoy them (6:1-2)
- (3) Occasions when good things happen to bad people or vice versa (8:14)
- (4) Times where there seems to be no reward for being wise (2:15-17)
- (5) Times when justice does not triumph over evil (3:16-19).

In Ogden and Zogbo's interpretation, Qohelet wonders why God does not make things the way they should be. Qohelet expresses frustration by the use of the word הבל and he acknowledges that he is faced with questions he cannot answer. It is to be noted that in none of the situations (1) to (5) does Qohelet connect the הבל judgment to God failing to correct the situation. In 4:8 and 6:2 he uses phrases ענין רע 'bad thing' and חלי רע 'bad suffering' respectively to expand on the הבל judgment. They are not expressions of enigma but of suffering.

In Ecclesiastes 2:15 Qohelet wonders why he has become so wise because he will have the same lot with the fool, including ultimate death and being forgotten. He may have wondered if he has misspent his efforts in becoming wise as he will lose his wisdom, but it does not seem mysterious that he strove after wisdom. If there is enigma here, it is in the common lot between the wise and the fool. There is nothing in the text or the book to raise the question of why the wise do not live forever. When the common lot is discussed in Ecclesiastes 9:1-3, it is lamented but not raised as an enigmatic question.

Ogden (1987:18-19) understands Ecclesiastes 3:17-18 as an example of הבל judgment in response to an apparently insoluble theological problem of divine justice. He interprets the passage as offering two approaches to a socio-theological problem, to affirm religious beliefs even more strongly (3:17) or to leave the question open (3:18). This approach is similar to Bartholomew's (2009:177). Yet even if 3:17-18 is interpreted as juxtaposing two different approaches, it does not follow that Qohelet describes the situation as enigmatic. The הבל attribution is at the end of 3:19. The subject is כל 'all', and the phrase is used to generalize the statement that humans have no advantage over animals. The הבל judgment gives a more general case of which the specific statement of no advantage is an example. The הבל judgment appears not to be directly related to the stated enigma of justice. It is possible to create an indirect link by arguing that the lack of advantage is another example of injustice, for example because it deprives the first enigma of injustice a possible solution. However, this is not an obvious or necessary interpretation. At most, this solution makes the view possible, not probable. For a full discussion of the passage, see section 4.2.1. This passage does not give any substantial support for the theory of 'enigma' as the meaning of הבל.

Ogden (1987:20) claims that the enigma of Ecclesiastes 4:7-8 is in the fact that the person never stops to ask for what purpose he is doing all that he is doing. Apart from the hypothetical meaning of הבל, there is nothing in the text to point to a failed attempt at understanding why the workaholic does not ask what his purpose is. Thus this interpretation fails to be textually supported. Bartholomew (2009:105-107) argues for the core meaning of 'enigmatic' on the basis that Qohelet has an epistemological quest and that if there is meaning and value, it cannot be grasped.

DeRouchie (2011:9-10) adds two more arguments. He suggests that the time poem in chapter 3 argues for enigma in timing based on comparison with 3:11 where man does not know God's work. Furthermore, he refers to passages that speak of the present (6:12, 9:1, and 9:12)

or the future (2:19, 3:22, 6:12, 7:14, 8:7, 10:14, 11:2, and 11:6) not being fully understood. His second argument is that many הבל conclusions do not focus on brevity of life but on the bitter lack of gain under the sun. While this presents an argument against the view that הבל means transience, it does little to support the idea that it means enigma. Rather it points to futility in attempting to gain something under the sun. For a full discussion of this point, see section 3.6.

The interpretation of הבל as 'enigma' does not have much of positive support in the text of Ecclesiastes. In none of the passages referenced above is it a meaning that the context clearly points to. Because the word is not used to refer to 'enigma' outside of the book of Ecclesiastes (see Miller 2002 for a fairly comprehensive study of the word), the meaning is questionable in the first place. Therefore the meaning of 'enigma' for הבל is to be rejected.

#### **2.4.8.2.3 הבל as absurd**

Fox (1999:30-42) argues that in the book of Ecclesiastes הבל means 'absurd'. “The absurd is a disjunction between two phenomena that are thought to be linked by a bond of harmony or causality, or that *should* be so linked.” (Fox 1999:31, italics his.) Fox takes Ecclesiastes 8:14 as a test case. There two הבל judgments frame a statement of fact: there are righteous people who receive what is appropriate to the deeds of the wicked and vice versa. The referent for the הבל judgment is the fact. (Fox 1999:30.)

Fox (1999:30) argues that here הבל cannot mean 'vaporous' as none of the qualities usually associated with vapors apply. It is not transitory or fleeting, and if it were, it would be good (Fredericks 2010:51-52, 197, takes it in this sense and thinks it is fortunate that the cases of injustice are only momentary). It is a substantive reality, not something inconsequential or futile. Also Fox thinks that incomprehensibility does not adequately capture the disturbing quality in the events that disturb Qohelet (contra Ogden 1987:138-139). Fox's understanding of הבל is that it is a negative term that is oppressive and even tragic (Fox 1999:33).

Fox (1999:36-42) surveys several categories of things called הבל. They are (1) toil and wealth, (2) pleasure, (3) justice, (4) wisdom, (5) speech, (6) living beings, (7) death, and (8) all. The absurdity of toil is that one toils and another enjoys the benefits. All pleasure, even legitimate and reasonable, is absurd in that it fails to prove meaningful even though it is the best thing around. Justice is absurd when lifespans are not proportionate to moral deserts, as

when the righteous die younger than the wicked. Wisdom is absurd in that the wise and the fool end up the same. Speech is absurd in that in disputes with God words are only meaningless, even ludicrous, sounds. Living beings are absurd in that man has no advantage over beast because both inhabit an irrational world. Death is absurd in that we are not to expect greater meaning or rationality after death than before it, according to Qohelet. All is absurd, limited to the sphere of human life. Even so, the all is not absolute, as neither fear of God nor justice (when it works) is absurd. So the all refers not to every event but to events as a collectivity.

From this survey two things emerge. Fox considers the absurd to be a negative term used to describe things that Qohelet thought should not be so. Also it paints a picture of expectations of not absurd: there should be right and consistent consequences for proper distinctions, such as between righteousness and wickedness, humans and animals, wisdom and foolishness.

#### **2.4.8.2.4 הבל as temporary**

Fredericks (2010:50-53) argues that the basic meaning of הבל is 'temporary'. He accepts Fox's argument for a singular meaning throughout. In Ecclesiastes, the only case where הבל perhaps means 'vanity' as in cultic passages in the Old Testament is Ecclesiastes 5:6. Yet here also Fredericks considers 'temporary' to be a probable meaning. Fredericks (1997:1005-1006) understands all occurrences in the book of Ecclesiastes to signify 'temporary' with the exception of Ecclesiastes 5:6 and 6:11.

Fredericks's (2010:46-53) argument may be summarized as follows. First, near synonyms of 'vanity' do not occur in the book of Ecclesiastes (עין, ריק, שאו, תהו). Instead a constellation of references emphasizing life's ephemerality are found in the book of Ecclesiastes. Second, הבל is used to describe an aspect of life that “even the most cynical and sceptical could not dismiss as inconsequential” (Fredericks 2010:47). Third, Fredericks considers those scholars who think Qohelet is self-contradicting to use contradictory reasoning. He refers to the claim that if everything is absurd, then comparisons such as “nothing is better than” imply qualitative distinctions within the categories of 'meaningless' and 'absurd'. Fourth, Fredericks thinks that Qohelet would be a bully as a leader to his followers to pretend that there was significance to one's actions while believing that all those efforts are meaningless or absurd.

Fredericks's third argument may not fully appreciate Fox's position even though he mentions Fox as an example of those using contradictory reasoning (Fredericks 2010:48). Fox did not

claim that everything without qualification is הבל (see section 2.4.8.2.3). Fredericks's view on the meaning of הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes is not without problems. While it is granted that הבל does have the meaning of transience in the Hebrew language, not all passages in the book of Ecclesiastes easily admit this meaning to the word. Ecclesiastes 1:14 is an example. In it, Qohelet claims “I have observed all the activity done under the sun, and really it is all temporary and like the whim of the wind” (translation from Fredericks 2010:76). Fredericks (1993:24-26) understands Ecclesiastes 1:4-11 to be about temporality and cyclicity.

While it could be argued that all human activity is temporary (death will terminate it), and even events in nature are temporary and thus the statement is true, the interpretation does not fit well contextually. The preceding co-text (1:4-7) describes the incessant activity in nature, not a temporal one. Human generations come and go, the sun rises and sets, winds go around, water flows in rivers. Qohelet did not describe this as a temporary state of affairs. As a matter of fact, at some level of abstraction, there is nothing new. The old activities keep repeating. This all was preceded by evaluating everything as הבל, and now in 1:14 Qohelet again evaluates works done under the sun as הבל. While it goes without saying that an individual activity is indeed temporary, the emphasis is on the permanence of kinds of activities. Fredericks's view is given further consideration in section 3.6.

Seow (1997:112) thinks that הבל is ephemeral and unreliable. Fredericks (2010:52) takes issue with including the unreliable as part of the meaning. Yet, Seow (1997:295) takes הבל in Ecclesiastes 8:14 as referring to the “incomprehensible reality”. He calls it an enigma. Thus Seow's view is properly classified as a multiple sense view (section 2.4.8.3).

#### **2.4.8.2.5 הבל as meaningless**

Longman (1998:63) argues that הבל means 'meaningless' on the basis of its use with a parallel term שקר 'false'<sup>20</sup> (Jer 16:19) and שוא 'worthless' (Zec 10:2) in the context of idolatry. Other parallel terms are ריק 'in vain' (Is 30:7) and כזב 'lie' (Ps 62:10). He admits that in some passages 'temporary' or 'fleeting' is a contextually possible meaning (Ps 39:5-6), even though 'meaningless' is a strong possibility.

Longman (1998:65) does not think Qohelet limited the meaninglessness contextually. Instead, Qohelet leaved nothing out, and claims that there is no meaning in anybody or anything. This

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<sup>20</sup> All glosses in this paragraph are Longman's.

view is consistent with an interpretation of Qohelet arguing that life is meaningless (cf. section 2.3.2.3). However, Longman thinks that the message of the book and Qohelet's message contrast. The consequence of this interpretation is that it makes Qohelet inconsistent as he clearly has values and behavioral recommendations in life. An inconsistent Qohelet is no threat to Longman's interpretation, as the message of the book is to warn of Qohelet's philosophy (Longman 1998:280-281).

Seybold (1978:316) thinks הבל is used to express worthlessness. He argues that יתרון 'profit', 'advantage', 'gain' is used as an antithesis to הבל 'vanity' in the book of Ecclesiastes (Seybold 1978:319, glosses his). He claims that יתרון 'profit' has the meaning “that which counts or matters”, and that this forces on הבל the special sense of “that which does not count or matter”. Qohelet uses this word to express “a nihilistic judgment on the world and its values”. (Seybold 1978:319-320.) Both Longman and Seybold see the use of the word in the book of Ecclesiastes to imply lack of meaning or value. However, Qohelet had positive values. He valued joy, for example (see section 3.5). The interpretation of הבל as 'meaningless' leads to an interpretation of Qohelet as inconsistent.

#### **2.4.8.3 Multiple sense views**

Seow (1997:102) thinks that no single definition works for הבל in every case in the book of Ecclesiastes. In 6:12, 7:15, and 9:9, הבל refers to the ephemerality of life. In 5:6, 6:4, and 6:11 הבל refers to that which is of little consequence, or even empty. The word is used in connection with רעות רוח and רעיון רוח (both glossed as 'pursuit of wind' by Seow). These expressions Seow understands to mean activity with no chance of success. What is הבל cannot be grasped, either physically (for the literal meaning of the word) or intellectually. The common fate of death for the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked, humans and animals, is “confoundingly unpredictable and unknowable”.

Seow (1997:102) thus combines the meanings of ephemerality, lack of significance or consequence, futility of pursuit, and incomprehensibility in the use of הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes. He thinks that the word has negative connotations, and notes that it is used specifically of human existence and experience of earthly realities. God or the world in general is not called הבל.

The problem with the multiple sense view is that הבל is used to summarize the message of the book. Yet, this does not mean that every instance necessarily has the same meaning. It is

possible that there is an isolated use of the thematic word that is not included in what is summarized by הבל. Furthermore, it is possible that the word is used in slightly different meanings that are close enough to allow for the summary. Yet, in this case, at some level of abstraction, it is to be expected that there is a single meaning. Seow (1997:102) understands the summary in the sense that הבל cannot be grasped or controlled.

In Ecclesiastes 4:7-8 there is a lone workaholic who works only for himself. The situation is הבל. Seow (1997:181) interprets this as enigmatic. Contextually, there is little to draw attention to any difficulty Qohelet might experience in understanding the situation. If verse 4:4 is considered to be closely related to this, then Qohelet understands the situation to arise from envy. Textually this example is contrasted with those who are not socially lonely. They are in the better situation according to Qohelet. Therefore, even if 'enigma' in Ecclesiastes 4:7-8 might be an example of that which cannot be intellectually grasped, and thus fit the summary, it is not the way Qohelet uses the word to build his argument.

In Ecclesiastes 11:10 Qohelet calls youth הבל. Youth is certainly temporary, and Seow takes it to be the meaning here (1997:102). Yet this is hard to take as part of the argument that all is הבל in the same sense as Ecclesiastes 4:7-8. Thus Seow's approach is undermined by the summary that all is הבל, unless these examples can be brought under a common abstract category. But if this can be done, then the view is no longer a multiple sense view in the sense I use the term in this classification.

Perhaps it could be argued that these examples are not related to the summary. Seow does not use this argument. Rather, he refers to the summary when noting the use of the word הבל in Ecclesiastes 11:10 (Seow 1997:351). Furthermore, both of these passages seem to be fairly normal uses of הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes. I conclude that Seow's view is not adequate for the way Qohelet uses the word הבל.

Caneday (1994:95-96) warns not to be too hasty in translating הבל with a single word. This may place his view in the multiple sense view. He lists four general categories of Qohelet's use of הבל. It can (1) express 'meaninglessness' in the most general sense. (2) It is used to express vexation arising from laboriousness of work and inability to control the disposition of possessions. (3) It is used of frustration over the delay of retribution. (4) It is used to vent vexation with the present world. He sums up by quoting Shank (1994:75): "Different 'aspects'



of the idea of vanity are employed by Qoheleth to vividly illustrate the reality of the curse of God placed upon the work of man after the fall.”

It is noteworthy that Caneday's four categories are not semantic categories. Rather they illustrate the usage of the word, and as such say little of the meaning of the word. He sums it all under one general category relating to the fall. This might imply that his view is a single abstract sense view. As Caneday does not attempt to explain the semantics of the phrase but rather its usage by listing categories the word refers to in the text of the book of Ecclesiastes, his view cannot be placed into a list of semantic views of הבל with any confidence.

#### **2.4.8.4 Miller's symbolic view**

I quote Miller's thesis in full:

The thesis of this study is that Qohelet employs *hebel* as a “symbol”, an image which holds together a set of meanings, or “referents,” that can neither be exhausted nor adequately expressed by any single meaning. A number of different referents may be discerned for *hebel* in Ecclesiastes, each of which finds connection with some aspect of *hebel*'s material sense: its insubstantiality, transience, or foulness. Qohelet carefully constructs these metaphorical referents of *hebel* into a single symbol embodying them all in order to communicate the message that all human experience is *hebel* in one way or another. (Miller 2002:15, italics his.)

Miller makes a distinction between metaphor and symbol. He approaches metaphor as a figure of speech where the subject (S) is spoken about in terms of the predicate (P) “to communicate the referent or meaning (R)” (Miller 2002:32). He does not make the traditional distinction between sense and reference. Both are subsumed under (R). Miller follows Philip Wheelwright's definition for a symbol:

A symbol, in general, is a relatively stable and repeatable element of perceptual experience, standing for some larger meaning or set of meanings which cannot be given, or not fully given, in perceptual experience itself. (Quoted by Miller 2002:44.)

Miller further explains the use of tensive symbols in literary uses. A symbol is tensive if it holds together a set of meanings which cannot be exhausted by any one referent (Miller 2002:44). A literary tensive symbol always functions metaphorically. Additionally, it may function on the literal level (for example, a national flag). A predicate term (P) communicates an R-value “system”, or several R values, about one or more subjects (S). Miller uses an example where daylight (P) may be used both for actual light in the material sense and the

message that the hero of the story has suddenly realized (S) the truth (R). Although daylight represents truth, it is not a complete explanation, as light has further connotations (R values), such as warmth, purity, and epiphany. Because of this, the story itself is more adequate to convey its message than any attempt to summarize it. (Miller 2002:45.)

Miller studies the use of הבל in the Old Testament, Dead Sea literature and Rabbinic literature paying special attention to how the word, when used metaphorically, is guarded (Miller 2002:53-90). By guarding he means authorial clues to the meaning of the metaphor. There are three primary types of clues: synonyms, contraries, and extensions. When none of these is used, the metaphor is expected to be understood without these authorial clues. These he calls stock metaphors. (Miller 2002:38-42.)

The non-metaphoric sense Miller calls the material sense. The material sense is mostly found in postbiblical literature. Miller discerns a few uses: heat or steam, breath, vapor within a living being, vaporous perspiration, and noxious vapor (Miller 2002:54-56). He claims that the use of הבל (in the material sense) always involves “a quantity of visible matter diffused through or suspended in the air” (Miller 2002:60-61), but he does not demonstrate that it is visible. Indeed, it is not clear that his example of “one who becomes asphyxiated in a sealed environment” and “is said to be killed by its vapor” is plausibly interpreted as being killed by “visible matter diffused through or suspended in the air” (Miller 2002:56). Nevertheless, the visibility is sometimes present, as “steamy heat of the baths” (Miller's 2002:55 example).

Miller considers the material sense of הבל to be the basic use from which the metaphorical uses are derived. He identifies four significant qualities of הבל 'vapor' (Miller's gloss) that are used as a basis for the metaphors. Vapor (1) is insubstantial, (2) is transient (as mist dissipates quickly), (3) may give an illusion of being more than it is (as it is visible), and (4) it may be harmful (but need not). He discerns three basic metaphorical uses in his study of the Hebrew corpus: transient, insubstantial, and foul. (Miller 2002:61.) His thesis is that in the book of Ecclesiastes these are combined in one symbol.

Miller thinks that his view of הבל as a literary symbol explains how the word can be used in a variety of contexts with several different senses (or referents, as he calls them) and the summary that all is הבל is nevertheless not contradictory. Qohelet calls various aspects of human experience הבל, and they are הבל in different ways. All is הבל in one way or another. Miller claims that his symbol thesis thus resolves the supposed incoherence in

Qohelet's use of the term. (Miller 2002:161). Rhetorically Miller considers the audience to experience destabilization of their belief system as they recognize that **הבל** is not used materially, then that a single metaphor will not work. Finally they seek out help to resolve the uncertainty. As the audience reads on, the potential of the symbol **הבל** for restabilization becomes evident. (Miller 2002:168.)

Miller has made a laudable and extensive study on the word **הבל**. He has found several ways the word is used metaphorically. His method was to study the guarding of the word supposing that the writers aided the readers in understanding the metaphor, with the exception of what he called stock metaphors (Miller 2002:37-44). Miller thinks that Qohelet does not use **הבל** as a stock metaphor (Miller 2002:53-54). Though there may have been more lexicalization of the metaphors than Miller assumes, language still contains redundancy. Therefore his methodology is not made irrelevant if some of the uses are not novel metaphors. The three metaphorical meanings he found (insubstantiality, transience, and foulness) are used by several writers, according to Miller. This strengthens the assumption that these meanings may be more or less lexicalized and thus stock metaphors. Even so, guarding may be needed to disambiguate between several stock metaphors.

Miller quotes Fox's criticism on several meanings for **הבל**: "If Qohelet were saying, 'X is transitory; Y is futile; Z is trivial,' then the summary, 'All is *hebel*' would be meaningless." (Fox 1999:36, Miller 2002:4.) Yet it is not clear if Miller's thesis fares much better under this standard, despite his claim to the contrary. He has moved the argument from the lexical meaning of **הבל** to the symbolic use of the word. Yet the basic criticism remains: if Qohelet were saying, "X is insubstantial, Y is transient, Z is foul, so all is insubstantial, transient, or foul in some way", one tries to find the abstract concept that combines the three. Miller's thesis does not require the abstract meaning to be any sense of any lexeme in the language as he claims that the symbolic meaning was constructed by Qohelet. However, if there is no abstract meaning that subsumes the three meanings, the summary fails.

Miller (2002:46) refers to the possibility that someone might use the word 'pig' to a Sixties police officer and to a messy roommate and then continue that "In those days, pigs were everywhere." Yet this use of language directs the listener to assume that there is a common element in the different uses of the word 'pig'. Otherwise the conclusion that pigs were everywhere does not communicate other than at the level of a pun or a mnemonic use of the symbol. A workable solution with a single abstract meaning for the word **הבל** is superior if it

works in every instance in the book of Ecclesiastes related to the summary. This allows for more specific meanings in specific contexts as long as there is a level of abstraction that subsumes all the specific meanings. The more specific we can make that abstraction without violating the text of the book of Ecclesiastes, the better. This is what I attempt to do in section 3.6.

### 2.4.9 Conclusions on key vocabulary

Words that are important to the understanding of Qohelet's argument include **יתרון** and **הבל**. Ogden and Fredericks think Qohelet's quest was to answer the question of **יתרון** 'advantage' of labor (gloss theirs). The argument is summarized by calling all things **הבל** by Qohelet himself. Thus the understanding of **הבל** influences how Qohelet is understood.

Some take **הבל** to mean 'enigmatic'. Bartholomew, for example, takes the enigma to be central to the argument of the book. He understands the book to be about resolving a psychological conflict relating to the enigma. The breakthrough is found when Qohelet finally recommends enjoyment of life. Thus the solution is related to **שמחה** 'joy'. The meaning of 'enigma' for **הבל** is crucial for Bartholomew's understanding of the book (see section 2.3.2.4). Lexical arguments surveyed for the meaning were found to be weak.

Some take **הבל** to mean 'absurdity'. Fox is an example of a scholar who understands the book to be about advice how to handle the absurdity of life, life that lacks proper consequences and distinctions. The advice is to be found in **שמחה** 'pleasure' (Fox's gloss). The meaning of 'absurdity' for **הבל** is crucial for Fox's understanding of the book (see section 2.3.2.3).

Some take **הבל** to mean 'meaninglessness'. Longman, for example, understands Qohelet's argument to be about the meaninglessness of life. The book itself is seen as a warning about Qohelet's philosophy. Both the meanings of 'absurdity' and 'meaninglessness' as attributed to **הבל** correlated with views of an inconsistent Qohelet in this survey. Taking **הבל** in the sense of 'meaninglessness' and Qohelet as having values in a meaningless universe would make him inconsistent. This does not invalidate the semantic view of **הבל**, but it is a noteworthy consequence for the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Fredericks understands **הבל** as temporary. Using the test case of Ecclesiastes 1:14, I concluded that it is not the likely sense in the context. He interprets Qohelet as consistent. Some take **הבל** in a variety of senses. Seow and Miller are both examples of this approach,

although in different ways. Miller takes the term to be a symbol that combines several meanings, and Seow does not add this symbolic layer in his interpretation. These approaches are problematic in that Qohelet summarizes his argument by calling all **הבל**. Assuming that Qohelet is consistent and that weakly-argued-for meanings for **הבל** are suspect, there is need for a fresh evaluation of the meaning of **הבל** and its influence on the understanding of the argument of the book. This is what I do in section 3.6.

The word **חלק** is used to describe something positive that one gets from labor. Fredericks does not see a contrast to **יתרון**, but other scholars do, such as Fox and Ogden. Ogden takes **יתרון** as something unattainable under the sun and **חלק** as attainable. It is noteworthy that relatively little has been written on the relationship between **יתרון** and **הבל**, even though they are both considered key words. Ogden and Fredericks, who both consider the question about **יתרון** to be a programmatic question, do not think that the question is answered by **הבל**. The question of what the answer to the programmatic question is receives more attention in sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3.

Expressions **רעות רוח** and **רעיון רוח** are often interpreted as something futile, straining and fruitless, chaotic thoughts, or insubstantial. A notable exception is Fredericks who sees a subjective genitive ('the whim of the wind'). The phrases are significant in that they are used together with **הבל** in Ecclesiastes 1:14 and 4:16, and can thus be of help in determining the meaning of **הבל**. The word **שמחה** is commended in the book of Ecclesiastes. This has been interpreted in the range from genuine joy (Fredericks) to pleasure (Fox). The word **חלק** is understood as roughly synonymous with **יתרון** (Fredericks) or in contrast to it (Ogden). This question is significant in that it leads to or correlates with different answers to the programmatic question.

Much of the interpretation of these expressions correlates with how the argument of the book is seen. This is largely dependent on how **הבל** and **יתרון** are understood in the book. Thus these two words are highly significant for the interpretation of the book both in their semantics and in their usage in the book. The other vocabulary surveyed here can offer some safety checks for the exegete: their usage in the context should not call the interpretation of the key words into question. This also works the other way: the interpretation of **יתרון** and **הבל** in the context of the book should not call the interpretation of the less central words into question. This also points to the importance of lexical studies in research into the book of Ecclesiastes.

I present the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes from how these words are used in chapter 3. The review of tensions as an interpretational issue (section 2.2), different views on the argument of the book (section 2.3) and on key vocabulary (2.4) concludes discussion of different views related to subquestion (1) of the research question. Subquestion (1) is “what is the argument of the book”.

## **2.5 Views on divine judgment in Ecclesiastes**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

Different views on divine judgment relate to subquestion (2) of the research question. The subquestion is “what does the book of Ecclesiastes teach about divine judgment”. Weeks (2012:2-3) suggests that some things Qohelet says might be expressed more clearly and persuasively if he did not use the idea of divine judgment. That divine judgment has a place in the argument of the book seems to be fairly clear from several mentions in the book, but that does not make it a major part of the argument. In section 1.1.7, it was noted that there is disagreement among scholars about how divine judgment takes place according to Qohelet.

The book closes with a clear reference to God's judgment. The interpretation of divine judgment in the book has indeed very significant influence on how we read the book. Some interpretations of Qohelet's theology of judgment produce tension in a canonical reading of Ecclesiastes. This tension has been handled differently, from not reading Ecclesiastes canonically to rejecting Qohelet's view and distancing it from the view of the book of Ecclesiastes. I will survey different views on Qohelet's view on divine judgment, followed by a survey of views on the epilogist's view.

### **2.5.2 Qohelet: no just divine judgment, God may judge**

Seow (1997:51) thinks that Qohelet notices that the traditional doctrine of retribution does not work out in real life. By the traditional doctrine of retribution he means that “good acts bring good consequences, evil acts bring evil consequences” (Seow 1997:66). This creates a dilemma that is expressed in Ecclesiastes 8:14. Qohelet does not resolve the dilemma but rather recommends joy. Seow (1997:49) thinks Qohelet's view is that judgment belongs to God alone. In his view, Qohelet indeed says we cannot know the future, and he is not saying that there is a certain eschatological judgment but rather he acknowledges that whatever will be done is entirely in the hand of God (Seow 1997:175 commenting on Eccl 3:16-22).

Neither does Qohelet deny that there will be a retribution (Seow 1997:294). Seow paints a picture of a perplexed Qohelet who is unable to solve the tension between the traditional doctrine of retribution and real life and who does not call it a contradiction but enigma (Seow 1997:294-295). The exhortation to enjoy is presented in this context of enigma in Ecclesiastes 8:15.

In discussing the epilogue, Seow (1997:395-396) suggests that the epilogist probably refers to an eschatological judgment and that Qohelet's theology does not contradict the central tenets of Israelite faith. If Qohelet had believed in an eschatological divine judgment and if he had believed that the consequences of deeds are brought about by God in the eschatological judgment, the enigma would have disappeared. So basically, according to Seow's view, the fact that Qohelet did not believe in justice taking place at an eschatological judgment created the enigma that he was unable to solve. It is to be noted that neither did Qohelet explicitly disbelieve or contradict the idea of an eschatological divine judgment, according to Seow.

### **2.5.3 Qohelet: divine judgment in life, though not perfectly just**

Fox (1999:57-58) says that Qohelet speaks of a special time of judgment for everyone. This does not refer to an eschatological judgment but rather the time when God intervenes in each individual's life. Fox refers to Ecclesiastes 3:17, 8:5-6, 11:9, and 12:14 as teaching the inevitability of divine judgment. Sometimes Qohelet depicts a world in which retribution works through God's judgment, but there are blotches in the picture. Judgment may come too late, and sometimes in life there are exceptions to justice. Fox (1999:67) thinks that Qohelet sees death as the utter end. Thus it is only logical to place divine judgment in life. Fox (1999:69) says that Qohelet considers God's justice and the existence of injustices in the world to be contradictory. According to Fox, the contradiction is not only in Qohelet's mind but rather in the world. A world that holds such contradictions is absurd.

Fox is right that if divine judgment is in this life, there are blotches in the picture. If Qohelet teaches the inevitability of divine judgment, the blotches are evidence that God's judgment is imperfect. The contradiction is in the world because of the way God chooses to judge. Thus Fox's interpretation leaves Qohelet implicitly accusing God for being a poor judge, even if he does not explicitly do so. This could be ameliorated by appealing to another judgment, one in the afterlife, but this solution is one that Fox explicitly denies for Qohelet, as he thinks Qohelet sees death as the utter end.

#### 2.5.4 Qohelet: divine judgment is death

Crenshaw (1987:24) suggests that the divine judgment is probably death. He does not elaborate. Loader (1979:94-95) thinks that the divine judgment in Ecclesiastes 3:17 refers to death. Goldingay (2014:191) implies the same, as he says that God's exercise of authority implies that both the faithful and the faithless die. Fox (1999:215) notes commenting on Ecclesiastes 3:17 that it does not really matter if death is the judgment because the universality of death makes it meaningless as punishment, and if it is something else, death may intervene and make the judgment insecure. Either way the assurance of judgment is small comfort. Whybray (1989a:79) thinks that death is God's ultimate and hidden judgment equally on the righteous and the wicked.

This view of divine judgment may fit some of the occurrences in the book of Ecclesiastes, but not others. For example, in Ecclesiastes 11:9 God is said to bring to judgment על-כל-אלה 'for all this', referring to walking according to the ways of one's heart and the vision of one's eyes (והלך בדרכי לבך ובמראי עיניך). As there is no correlation between the universality of death and one's manner of obedience to the command in 11:9, in this passage divine judgment cannot be death. See chapter 4 for further investigation for individual judgment passages and a synthesis of the theology of judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes. The case of Ecclesiastes 3:17 is examined in detail in section 4.2.1.



### **2.5.5 Qohelet: divine judgment in the afterlife**

Caneday (1994:107) places the divine judgment of the book of Ecclesiastes in the afterlife as a judgment of resurrected people. Caneday has two arguments based on what the consequences of the alternative would have been: (1) if the divine judgment took place in this life, the fear of God would lose its premise and (2) if Qohelet had no belief in final retribution, he would have recommended the philosophy of “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor 15:32). The second argument is not strong as counterfactual speculation about a person we do not know well is precarious. The first argument is true at least in the sense that the fear of God loses some of its foundation if there is no resurrection and no afterlife. Yet the argument does not show that there is no other foundation for the fear of God. The idea that resurrection is the foundation for the fear of God may be true but cannot be taken for granted. Thus Caneday's argument is not conclusive as it stands. The idea that Qohelet believed in judgment in the afterlife has been presented with inconclusive arguments. My view is presented in chapter 4.

### **2.5.6 Qohelet: just divine judgment at an unspecified time**

Fredericks (2010:121), commenting on Ecclesiastes 3:16-17, says that the injustices of 3:16 “are only temporary and will be righted by God's eventual just judgments. It is unclear whether God's judgment will be within the person's lifetime, through natural, legal or other means of retribution.” This leaves room for the judgment to be in the afterlife just as well as during life. However, Fredericks does not appeal to certainty of an eschatological judgment, as retribution may come by various means (Fredericks 2010:237).

If no appeal is made to any eschatological judgment, it is hard to see how a divine judgment that rights all court injustices of Ecclesiastes 3:16 is supposed to take place. As Fox (1999:215) notes, the judgment may be too late as death may intervene, and as Qohelet (Ecclesiastes 8:14) notes, it may not happen on earth. Fredericks leaves the door open to an eschatological judgment and that might be the best solution to the question of how from the viewpoint of systematic theology, if one considers with Fredericks that the judgment of Ecclesiastes 3:17 to be a just judgment that rights the injustices. This solution still leaves room for Qohelet not taking a stand on when the judgment will be, whether in this life or the afterlife.

### **2.5.7 Epilogist: judgment in the afterlife**

Fredericks (2010:250) notes that the reference is not necessarily to a final judgment as judgment will come in many ways for everyone before that. I understand Fredericks to refer to judgment in this life. Yet, according to Fredericks, the thoroughness of the judgment may imply a final judgment. Seow (1997:395) likewise thinks that reference to an eschatological judgment is probable. Murphy (1992:126) is uncertain of whether the reference is eschatological. Caneday (1994:108-109) thinks that the epilogue is in line with Qohelet, and refers to an eschatological judgment. Thus scholars differ in the certitude they ascribe to the judgment in the epilogue being eschatological.

### **2.5.8 Epilogist: no afterlife**

As noted in the preceding section, scholars have been hesitant about whether the divine judgment of Ecclesiastes 12:14 is eschatological. It has been argued that there are many ways judgment will come to everyone in this life. Yet the thoroughness of the judgment has caused scholars to favor the idea that an eschatological judgment is in view. Nevertheless, the idea has been raised that it could refer to a judgment in this life. If taken in this sense, it does not imply that there is an afterlife. Neither does it deny it. Here I attempt to evaluate the possibility that the epilogist does not refer to an eschatological judgment and does not believe in the afterlife.

Such a view implies that every deed will be judged by God in this life or that the judgment is not personal but rather a mere pronouncement. Qohelet observed that exceptions to justice take place in life (Ecclesiastes 8:14). Even if we consider that to be a temporary state of affairs, it hardly is true to life to say that all injustices are corrected in this life. Neither do I consider it likely that Qohelet thought so. If the judgment of God in Ecclesiastes 12:14 refers to this life only, we can conclude that either the judgment is not just or that it is so weak that it does not contradict the reversals of justice that are found in life. In either case it leaves us with a picture of God who does not correct the injustices of this life. Such a view weakens considerably the support the universal judgment of God gives to reverence for God in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14. For this hypothesis to be plausible, it would need the support of a theory of divine judgment that the author of the book can believe to be contextually accessible to the reader. It could take the form of exposition of such a theory in the book itself

or a theory known well enough to the audience. Furthermore, the theory would have to be espoused by the epilogist for the passage to make sense.

One approach might be to consider the epilogist to hold on to a view that all good deeds produce good results in this life. If so, he could think that the exceptions Qohelet mentioned in Ecclesiastes 8:14 are non-existent. This is hardly plausible, since he makes no effort to express such a view. Rather he seems to endorse Qohelet. Another possibility would be that the exceptions are not serious enough to invalidate the view that God will judge righteously in this life and that ultimate justice is indeed found in it even though humans are largely unaware of it. Thus the value system of God would be so different that while man sees injustice in life, God sees it all as just. In a book that is concerned with the apparent injustices, I would expect the epilogist, in case he held such a view, to give some indication that this is the case. Otherwise he writes in a very obscure manner.

A judgment as a mere pronouncement with no personal experience of the judgment is a rather weak form of judgment. Many of the uses of verb טפּשׁ refer to a more concrete execution of judgment. For example in 1 Samuel 24:16 the verb refers to deliverance, not a pronouncement of being right. It seems that the execution of the judgment is part of the frame of the verb טפּשׁ (to be discussed in section 4.1), making a mere pronouncement approach less plausible. The relevance of a mere pronouncement of divine evaluation to the concern of reverence for God in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 is smaller than the relevance of a judgment where the person is present whose deeds are judged.

What kind of view of divine judgment the book presents is the subject of chapter 4 of this dissertation. Here it is enough to note that I do not find support for the idea that there is a just divine judgment of all deeds in this life. If the reasoning above is valid, it leaves the interpreter with a choice. Either the epilogist believed God to judge weakly or unjustly or he believed the judgment to be eschatological. I see no reason to interpret the judgment as unjust. The epilogist could give some support for the importance of revering God from a concept of a weak divine judgment in this life. Yet he emphasizes the judgment to encompass all deeds. An idea of an eschatological judgment is much more relevant in this context. There is also nothing in the context to favor the idea that the judgment is not eschatological. I am not satisfied that a non-eschatological view of judgment in Ecclesiastes 12:14 is correct.

### **2.5.9 The relationship of the view on judgment in the epilogue to Qohelet's view**

Fredericks (2010:250) considers the epilogist's expression of divine judgment in Ecclesiastes 12:14 to be either the implication or direct message of several verses in Ecclesiastes. Others see a contrast between Qohelet's and the epilogist's views (Crenshaw 1987:192). Contrast does not necessarily imply contradiction. The question of whether the views are the same or different but compatible or contradictory, is taken in sections 4.2.7 and 4.2.8.

### **2.5.10 Conclusions on views on divine judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes**

Subquestion (2) of research question is “what does the book of Ecclesiastes teach about divine judgment”. Five ideas of Qohelet's view of divine judgment have been surveyed. They are that the judgment is not certain, that it is not perfectly just, that it is death, that it takes place in the afterlife, and that it takes place in an unspecified time. Argumentation for each of the views, as far as covered in this review of research, was found lacking. The issue is taken up and studied in further depth in chapter 4.

Two hypotheses of views of judgment by the epilogist were discussed. They were that the judgment of all deeds takes place in this life or that it is an eschatological judgment. While several scholars entertain both possibilities, they do not enter into a clear defense of a non-eschatological judgment. This is understandable. In my understanding the case for a non-eschatological judgment is much weaker than for an eschatological judgment. The argument that has been presented for the eschatological judgment from the all-encompassing nature of the judgment seems valid despite hesitancy on the part of some scholars. The judgment should therefore be seen as eschatological.

## **2.6 Conclusions on literary review**

The book of Ecclesiastes has many tensions. There are several ways scholars have handled them. Harmonization, subtraction of alleged later additions, discovery of alleged quotations, detecting alleged dialogue or dialectic, whether intrapersonal or not, and absurdity of the world as being described were surveyed. I drew some guidelines for dealing with tension. In the guidelines I emphasized the importance of textual clues. The potential for harmonization should be considered as sometimes it has been rejected on a weak basis.

Several views for the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes were surveyed. Some consider that the book is about the meaning of life, either in general or of secular life. The versions of this view that were reviewed either present Qohelet as inconsistent, require understanding **הבל** as 'enigma', or are weak in textual support in contextual interpretation or in the need to find glosses. Both reverence for God and the exhortation to enjoy life have an important place in the book. These elements should be heard when attempting to discover the argument of the book.

Key vocabulary was reviewed. The words whose interpretation has a strong relationship to understanding the argument include **הבל** and **יתרון**. Also the relationship between **יתרון** and **חלק** is significant. Word **הבל** is very important, and there are a number of views for its meaning, some more plausible than others. If **הבל** does not mean enigma, it excludes Bartholomew's view for the argument of the book, that remembering the Creator resolves the struggle of searching for meaning in life. There is need for a fresh evaluation for the meaning and usage of **הבל** in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Different views on divine judgment were reviewed. Qohelet either believed in a certain judgment or not. If he believed in a certain one, it was either in this life, death itself, after this life, or temporally indeterminate. The epilogist believed in divine judgment. This is likely eschatological, but many scholars consider the possibility that it could be in this life. These issues are taken up in the rest of the study. Chapter 3 is concerned with key vocabulary and the argument of the book. Chapter 4 is concerned with an exegetical study of judgment in the book with a cursory look at the book as part of the canon. Finally chapter 5 is concerned with implications of this study.

### 3 The argument of the book of Ecclesiastes

#### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to determine the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes. This is subquestion (1) of the research question. The argument is traced through the use of key vocabulary. The reason for choosing this particular approach is that there are a number of key words whose meaning is both disputed and highly relevant for constructing the argument of the book as a whole. Choosing this approach is not meant to invalidate other approaches or to say that a lexical analysis alone is sufficient. The keywords are studied semantically and their use to express the argument is traced. This involves an exegesis of key passages where the words are used along with a sufficient amount of surrounding text, and a synthesis of the results into a summary of the view expounded by the book as revealed in the key passages where the word is used.

The words studied are חלק 'portion', יתרון 'profit', שמחה 'joy', הבל 'futility', רעות רוח 'desire of wind', and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking'. The question of the relationship between חלק 'portion' and יתרון 'profit' is discussed. As noted in section 2.4.4, Ogden and Fredericks give different answers to the question, which results in different understandings of the book. The question of the nature of שמחה 'joy' in the sections of the book recommending joy has been answered differently by Fredericks and Fox. The result is a very different portrait of Qohelet's thinking. This question is addressed in section 3.5. The question of the meaning of הבל and its usage has been elusive to scholars, as noted in section 2.4.8. A new solution to this question is proposed in section 3.6. This word, together with words יתרון 'profit', חלק 'portion', and שמחה 'joy', sets the tone for the interpretation of the whole book. Finally expressions רעות רוח 'desire of wind' and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking', are discussed in section 3.7. They are relevant as likely contributors to the original readers' understanding of הבל 'futility', though unfortunately for modern scholars, the meaning of these expressions is not easy to prove. The corpus of occurrences of these expressions is rather small. Yet it is relevant to see if there is a plausible interpretation of these expressions that is consistent with the other results in this chapter. The chapter is concluded with a summary of the argument of the book.

### 3.2 Theoretical preliminaries

Because word studies are prominent in this chapter, it is appropriate to explain the theoretical framework used in conducting the study. Though the exposition of the framework is rather sketchy and condensed, it indicates the major methodological presuppositions in this study. The reader is advised to refer to the referenced material for further details. The general approach to linguistic meaning in this dissertation follows Sperber and Wilson (1995). While technical aspects of their work are not much referred to, and the argumentation is compatible with other theories of linguistic pragmatics, it is fair to the reader to explain some basic assumptions behind this particular approach.

Language can be understood as a code, but the metaphor of encoding a thought to be conveyed through a channel to be decoded by the recipient is an insufficient model for linguistic communication. Communication<sup>21</sup> is an inferential process for the recipient rather than a decoding process. The recipient uses context to interpret the utterance or the text. Context means the set of premises he uses in interpretation. Context is a subset of all the assumptions of the world he holds. It is thus a psychological concept. For communication to succeed, the writer or speaker and the reader or listener must have some shared context. They have assumptions about what the shared context is. These assumptions are based in part on the physical context, the co-text (the preceding and following text), and encyclopedic knowledge.

A fact is manifest to someone if he can represent it mentally and accept it as true or probably true. The notion of manifestness is weaker than the notion of assumption. A fact may be manifest even if the person has not actually entertained the thought. It is enough that he is capable of doing so. Shared context ('mutual cognitive environment' in Sperber and Wilson's terms) means the set of assumptions that are manifest to both the speaker or the writer and the hearer or the listener and whose existence in the shared context is also mutually manifest. (Sperber and Wilson 1995:1-46.)

A major difficulty in interpreting an ancient book like Ecclesiastes is that modern people are not the original recipients of the book. What the writer assumed to be shared context with his original readers is not likely true with modern interpreters. A major gap is linguistic in the case of the book of Ecclesiastes. The book has many expressions whose meanings are

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21 In this section I am concerned with ostensive-inferential communication, not coded communication. See Sperber and Wilson (1995:46-54).

disputed. Unfortunately for the modern researcher, the classical Hebrew language has not been better preserved. The corpus is limited in both size and its representation of dialects, registers, sociolects, and times. Also the current knowledge of the ideological world that was manifest to the author and his original readers is fragmentary. All this makes it more difficult for the modern interpreter to evaluate the shared context of the author and the readers he originally intended to communicate his thoughts to. This explains at least in part why the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes has proved so difficult for modern scholars. In this chapter, some key words, their meaning, and how the author uses them to expand shared context are discussed.

People process information. A piece of information is relevant to an individual if he is able to combine it with his context to produce a contextual effect, that is to change his mental representation of the world<sup>22</sup>. It is the more relevant, the greater the impact on his mental representation of the world is. It is also the more relevant, the easier it is to process to have the cognitive effects. Informative intention is an intention to make a set of assumptions manifest or more manifest to the audience. Communication is making the informative intention manifest. (Sperber and Wilson 1995:46-64, 123-132, 142-151.)

“Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its optimal relevance” (Sperber and Wilson 1995:158). This means that when a person, such as the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, wants to communicate with his audience, he presents his material with an implicit promise (whether kept or not) that it is worth reading and that it is written in such a way that what is said is relevant. The more accessible the assumptions are that are needed in processing the information, the more relevant it is. From this it follows that the interpreter should pay attention to the preceding near co-text. When dealing with word meanings, only some of the potential meanings are relevant. The meaning potential of a word is broader than its actual meaning in a context. Communication in context has more meaning than an isolated sentence without the context. All this emphasizes the importance of context.

My approach to linguistic categorization follows the prototype theory (Taylor 1989). Whether something falls within a linguistic category, for example the category of הבל, depends generally speaking not on necessary and sufficient conditions, but on similarity to a prototype (or several prototypes). Category boundaries are thus fuzzy. This fuzziness may be illustrated

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22 The more technical definition is: “An assumption is relevant to an individual at a given time if and only if it is relevant in one or more of the contexts accessible to that individual at that time.” (Sperber and Wilson 1995:144.)



with the word 'bald'. A bald person may have some hairs, and there is no clear number after which he is no longer bald. What counts is whether there is enough similarity to the prototype to make the usage of the category relevant enough. Fuzziness has another implication. There are more typical members of a category and less typical ones. Borderline cases are in the periphery of the category membership.

A description of a prototype has typically many features (Taylor 1989:59-65). Prototypes are not the same for each individual. For example, the prototypical chair may be different for one individual from that of another. For communication to succeed, enough shared context is needed, but there is no need for the prototypes to be identical. Some features of a prototype are more central than others. For chairs typically the possibility of using them for sitting on is more central a feature than the material the prototypical chair is made of.

Meanings are relative to domains. For example, the meaning of the word 'Monday' is characterized against a concept of 'week', which functions as its domain. Three-dimensional space with a direction is the domain in which 'up' and 'down' get their spatial meanings. A linguistic expression gets its meaning by profiling an aspect of the relevant domain. (Taylor 1989:83-87.) A knowledge network linking multiple domains is called a frame (Taylor 1989:87-90). For example, the word 'buy' has a merchandise, a payment, a seller, and a buyer as part of the frame against which the word 'buy' is characterized. It also indicates a viewpoint. The viewpoint differentiates 'buy' and 'sell'.

A prototype category may have several foci. This is the case with polysemous words. Each of the meanings constitutes a focus, that is they have a prototype of their own, yet they are related to each other. The two typical ways of extending a prototype are metonymy and metaphor. (Taylor 1989:65-69, 99-141.) What the foci of polysemous categories have in common may be thought of as a more abstract prototype.

For example, a prototypical tree (for example birch) is a plant with a trunk and branches. A 'family tree' is based on a different prototype, that of the use of the word in diagrams. They are in different domains. 'Birch' is a biological species and 'tree' in diagrams is an abstract relation. What they have in common is a branching structure. This may be considered a more abstract (or schematic) prototype that covers both of these more specific prototypes. This approach can relieve some tension between lumpers and splitters. Lumpers look at what

categories have in common and splitters focus on the differences. Both are valid concerns, but they operate at different levels of abstraction with regard to prototype categorization.

The terms 'sense' and 'reference' are used in this chapter. Sense refers to the meaning of the word. Reference refers to what the word is used to refer to. While all words arguably have a sense (or several senses), not all words have a reference. A word may have reference (be referential) in one sentence but not in another. Some words are never referential (for example 'and').

### **3.3 The word חלק 'portion'**

#### **3.3.1 Introduction**

The first word to be discussed is חלק. It occurs eight times in the book of Ecclesiastes (2:10, 2:21, 3:22, 5:17, 5:18, 9:6, 9:9, 11:2). In section 2.4.3 it was noted that the meaning of the word has been understood as a temporally limited portion, a possession, the space allotted for human existence, and a portion as opposed to the whole, depending on the scholar. It is argued below that the word is used to refer to positive experiences and possessions in the book of Ecclesiastes. Understanding the relationship of this word to יתרון 'profit', studied in section 3.4, helps shape one's understanding of Qohelet's message and sets the stage for a deeper study of הבל 'futility'.

#### **3.3.2 General observations on חלק in the biblical Hebrew corpus**

Even-Shosan (1997:373-374) lists 66 occurrences of the word חלק in the Hebrew Bible, excluding homonyms and including Ecclesiastes. Of these, a significant number are marked for possession, either by using a possessive suffix, preposition ל or a construct structure, or by being the recipient of the verb נתן 'give'<sup>23</sup>. Those marked in any of these ways constitute 88 % of the occurrences in the Biblical Hebrew corpus. A common synonym within the corpus is נחלה 'permanent possession', used often of the land owned by an Israelite<sup>24</sup>. Another synonym is מנה 'portion', often used of portions of food<sup>25</sup>. In Joshua 18:5 (והתחלקו

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23 The only exceptions that I found in the Hebrew Bible are Deuteronomy 18:2 (2 times), Joshua 18:5, 18:6, Job 17:5, Amos 7:4, Ezekiel 45:7, and 48:8.

24 For example: Genesis 31:14, Numbers 18:20, Deuteronomy 10:9, 12:12, 14:27, 14:29, 18:1, and 32:9.

25 For example: Exodus 29:26, Leviticus 7:33, 8:29, Ester 9:19, 22, Nehemiah 8:10, 12, and 2 Chronicles 31:19.

אתה לשבעה חלקים 'and they divide it to seven parts') the word refers to parts of land after division. In Mishnaic Hebrew the word means 'part' in Parah 3:11 and Baba Metzia 1:1.

I was unable to find any clear example of 'part of something' with the something explicitly mentioned in the Biblical corpus. This lack of explicit mention of the whole may be due to the size of the corpus, but in any case it does not seem to be a common usage. It may also be due to social overtones of the word (Tsevat 1980:448). In Mishnaic Hebrew, apposition may be used (Peah 5:5 חלקו מעשר עני 'his part of the poor-man's tithe').

I suggest that the prototypical meaning of חלק is 'portion' of something belonging to someone. This view is compatible with the general observations above, specifically with the fact that the person it belongs to is often named, and its relationship with dividing in Joshua 18:5. It is also compatible with the specific passages studied below. The whole can be seen as part of the frame (see Taylor 1987:87-90 for frames), but it is explicitly mentioned only rarely (Jo 18:5). Transience is not part of the semantics of the word for two reasons. (1) The word is used to refer to the permanent possession of part of the land by the Jewish tribes. (2) There seems to be no reason to assign such a sense for the word apart from the question of the kind of relationship the word has with יתרון in the book of Ecclesiastes.

### 3.3.3 Ecclesiastes 2:10

וכל אשר שאלו עיני לא אצלתי מהם לא־מנעתי את־לבי מכל־שמחה כי לבי שמח מכל־עמלי  
:Nothing that my eyes asked would I deny them. I did not deny my  
heart any joy. My heart had joy indeed from all my work, and this was my portion from my  
work.'

Qohelet describes his royal experiment in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. He tested joy, and concluded that it is הבל 'futile' (2:1). He carried out the test by eating and drinking (2:3) and doing all kinds of projects (2:4-6). He also mentioned many things he had (2:7-9). He did not deny himself any joy (2:10). Then he said עמלי וזה היה חלקי מכל עמלי 'indeed my heart was glad from all my work and it was my portion from all my work' (2:10). The whole, which is part of the frame, refers to the sum of (positive) experiences. One's portion refers to one's experiences against the background of the experiences of everyone else. Here the reference is Qohelet's positive experiences as the result of his work. Thus it was called his חלק 'portion'.

According to Ogden and Zogbo (1997:61-62), the connecting כִּי is an emphatic marker used in a clause that indicates the result of the examination. The particle כִּי may mark the statement with assertive focus against a presupposition of ignorance or doubt the reader has about the content. This use is discussed by Follingstad (2001:156-157, 557-586; see especially 575-579). This interpretation is reflected in the gloss above. Alternatively the function of the particle is to mark the antecedent of זֶה in the next clause or to signal Qohelet's interpretation of the results of the examination. In any case, it is the antecedent of זֶה and thus what is called 'portion' is the fact that Qohelet's heart was glad, or simply joy.

Qohelet's experiment was successful in producing joy, and that joy was his חֵלֶק, 'portion'. In this context there is no explicit contrast to any whole, but the implicit whole may be understood as the collective human experience. Qohelet had his part of it, and it was joy. The experience is certainly temporal. The connotation is positive.

### 3.3.4 Ecclesiastes 2:21

כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעָמְלוֹ בַּחֲכָמָה וּבְדַעַת וּהַכְשָׁרוֹן וְלֹאֲדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמַל־בּוֹ יִתְּנֵנוּ חֵלֶק גַּם־זֶה הֵבֵל  
:רַעַה רַבָּה: 'For there is one whose work is done with wisdom and knowledge and skill, and who gives his portion to one who has not worked for it. This is also futile and very painful.'

In Ecclesiastes 2:18 Qohelet notes that he will have to leave his all the results of his work (חֵלֶק metonymically referring to possessions) to someone after him. He does not know if the one who receives them is wise but he will rule over the results of Qohelet's work (2:19). This realization caused him to despair over his work (2:20). The referent of חֵלֶק 'portion' is possessions. It refers to material possessions, as it is given to someone else. To the degree that we see Qohelet using himself as an example of the existence of someone in verse 21, we can conclude that the referent is called עָמְלִי 'my work' in verse 18 (used metonymically for his possessions).

It is clear that in other contexts חֵלֶק can refer to experiences (see section 3.3.3, and section 3.5 for the kind of experience שמחה is). Both possessions and experiences of שמחה 'joy' are what one may get from work. The possessions are part of the sum of all possessions. This may be part of the frame, but it is not as important in the context as its relationship to the worker. It was *his* possessions that he has to leave for someone who has not labored for it. This is considered הֵבֵל 'futility' and רַעַה רַבָּה 'very painful'. The connotation of חֵלֶק is positive.

### 3.3.5 Ecclesiastes 3:22

וראיתי כי אין טוב מאשר ישמח האדם במעשיו כי־הוא חלקו כי מי יביאנו לראות במה שיהיה:  
'And I concluded that there is nothing better for a human than to have joy in his work,  
for that is his portion, for who will bring him to see what comes after him?'

Fox (1999:217) notes three ways the phrase 'after him' has been understood: (1) what happens to an individual after his death, (2) what happens on earth after the individual's death, and (3) what happens on earth later in the individual's life. According to interpretation (3), joy now is important because one does not know the future. Seow (1997:168) does not consider option (3) as possible. His argument is that אחריו 'after him' does not mean later in one's lifetime, though in 7:14 he interprets the same expression as referring to the future of one's lifetime (Seow 1997:240). Fox (1999:217) says that the word clearly has the sense of 'afterwards' in Ecclesiastes 9:3 and Jeremiah 51:46. Seow (1997:300) emends Ecclesiastes 9:3 considering the sense 'afterwards' strained.

Murphy (1992:37) thinks that afterwards means after one's death in Ecclesiastes 2:12, 18, and 9:3. Death is active in the context (Eccl 3:19-20), which favors seeing a reference to death also here, though general ignorance of the future is well known and sense (3) is also relevant in the context. The weakness of interpretation (3) is that it leaves verse 3:22 loose from the context that discusses death. Rejecting option (3) is supported by the fact that death is quite prominent in the preceding context of Ecclesiastes 3:19-21. Understanding the phrase as a reference to death ties the verse closer to the context.

According to interpretation (1), Qohelet is saying that no one will show man what will happen to him after his death. Therefore speculation of life after death should not influence the value of joy in one's work. This is in line with an interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 where the judgment of God is seen as not extending beyond this life, a question taken up in section 4.2.1. The idea of someone bringing him to see suggests that the reference is not to the individual's experiences after his life (option (1)), since there would be no need to bring the person to himself. Therefore, I prefer interpretation (2).

There are three כִּי clauses in this verse. The first is an interpretive marker used to express Qohelet's conclusion that the best thing is to have joy in one's work. The conclusion is supported by the thought that it is his חֵלֶק 'portion' in the second כִּי clause and that it is not clear that someone will bring him back to see and enjoy what will be after his death in the

third כי clause. The portion refers to the joy he has in his works. The enjoyment is temporally restricted by the context, as it is not clear that anyone will enable him to see (to partake with joy) of what comes after his life. The word clearly has positive connotations in this context.

### 3.3.6 Ecclesiastes 5:17-18

הנה אשר־ראיתי אני טוב אשר־יפה לאכול־ולשתות ולראות טובה בכל־עמלו שיעמל  
תחת־השמש מספר ימי־חיו אשר־נתן־לו האלהים כִּי־הוא חלקו: גם כל־אדם אשר נתן־לו  
האלהים עשר ונכסים והשליטו לאכל ממנו ולשאת את־חלקו ולשמח בעמלו זה מתת  
I saw as good and appropriate to eat, to drink, and to enjoy good in all one's  
work that he does under the sun during his few days that God has given him. This is his  
portion. Also whenever God gives riches and wealth and allows one to eat of it and to have  
his portion and to have joy in his work, it is God's gift.'

The passage has two occurrences of the word חלק 'portion'. The first refers to the positive experiences of eating, drinking, and enjoying while working during one's life that God has given. The word has a positive connotation. The portion is dependent on God giving the days in which this portion exists. The referent is the activities of eating, drinking, and 'seeing good' (enjoying) while one works. I understand this as a reference to the positive experience of enjoying caused by eating and drinking, among other things. It is part of the sum of all experiences, and this sets it apart as *his* חלק.

The second occurrence of חלק 'portion' may refer to what one has, which may or may not be enjoyed. In this interpretation, it likely refers to the wealth a few words prior. The ability 'to take one's portion' (לשאת את חלקו), to enjoy some of one's riches, is a gift of God. It is also a real possibility that one cannot enjoy his wealth, as it may be lost (Ecclesiastes 5:12-12). Another possibility is to understand the taking of one's portion (לשאת את חלקו) to mean enjoyment of one's portion. Thus it would be synonymous with לשמוח בעמלו 'to have joy in one's work'. In this case חלק 'portion' would refer to joy. It is a gift of God whenever one has joy in his work.

Both referents of חלק 'portion' have been already established (see section 3.3.3 for experience and 3.3.4 for possessions). For the purposes of this study, it is not important to choose between the two alternatives. The referent is the wealth of which God allows him to partake or the joy derived from partaking of one's own wealth. Here חלק 'portion' is seen as God's gift, which implies God's acceptance. The word has a positive connotation in this text.

### 3.3.7 Ecclesiastes 9:5-7

כי החיים יודעים שימתו והמתים אינם יודעים מאומה ואין עוד להם שכר כי נשכח זכרם: גם אהבתם גם שנאתם גם קנאתם כבר אבדה וחלק אין להם עוד לעולם בכל אשר נעשה תחת השמש: לך אכל בשמחה לחמך ושתה בלב טוב יינך כי כבר רצה האלהים את מעשיך: 'For the living know that they will die and the dead do not know anything and they no longer have any reward. Indeed their memory is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy has already disappeared, and they will never again have a portion in anything that is done under the sun. Go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart for God has already accepted your deeds.'

The expression נשכח זכרם 'their memory is forgotten' refers to other people not remembering the deceased anymore, as someone's זכר 'memory' refers commonly to other people remembering someone in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars are divided over whether 'their love', 'their hate', and 'their envy' refer to the dead as those who love, hate, and envy (Fox 1999:293), or as those who are loved, hated, and envied (Fredericks 2010:208, Ogden 1987:150). With the latter interpretation the link to נשכח זכרם 'their memory is forgotten' in verse 5 is somewhat stronger.

The use of the word כבר 'already' is important for interpretation. It relates the two sentences temporally. The disappearing of love, hate, and envy precedes the forgetting of their memory. The moment of disappearing is the moment of death. Thus the verse does not describe the living losing these emotions towards the deceased (contra Ogden 1987:150). Either the experience of love, hate, and envy of others by the deceased has disappeared at death before their memory is forgotten by the living, or the love, hate, and envy the deceased had has disappeared before the living forget them.

Fox's (1999:293) view that the deceased do not love, hate, or envy, is possible. In Fox's view, the experience of these emotions is a portion in this world. In this view the portion includes negative experiences. Love, hate, and envy could also refer not to emotions but actions of love, hate, or envy. The words אהבה 'love' and שנאה 'hate' are possibly used about actions expressing love or hate in Ecclesiastes 9:1 (see section 3.6.3.21). In this case the deceased no longer express love, hate, or envy. The alternative view sees the deceased as no longer experiencers of what others do in love, hate, or anger. Others may still love or hate them, but it makes no difference to the deceased. Thus the options are that the deceased do not have the

emotions of love, hate, or envy (Fox), that they do not act in love, hate, or envy, and that they do not experience what others do in love, hate, or envy.

As the losing of love, hate, and envy precedes temporally the forgetting of the memory of the deceased, the mention of forgetting the memory is to be tied to what precedes closer than to what follows. As the dead are said to no longer have a reward, and then that their memory is forgotten, it is likely that being remembered is part of the reward (see Fox 1999:293). The dead are ultimately cut off from the living also in the sense that they are themselves forgotten. Generally speaking only a few are remembered a few centuries after their death.

It is noteworthy that Qohelet connects being remembered after death in this passage with reward. Also in Ecclesiastes 2:19 he mentions the unknown possibility that he will leave the results of his work to someone wise. This may be connected with his idea of doing good (for example in Eccl 3:12). He valued accomplishing something the later generations could value. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that they will. Ultimately they will forget the benefactor. This may be an example of an intergenerational viewpoint of leaving something of value to the next generation and being remembered by them. The portion (חֵלֶק) is personal and does not have this intergenerational aspect. Thus they are not used completely synonymously in this text. Both are denied permanence. The memory will be forgotten. If it is not in the case of a rare exception, even then the deceased would not have a portion of anything the living will do here.

There are two ways the referent of חֵלֶק 'portion' could be understood. Either it refers to (1) work specifically, referring to their participation in the work, or it also includes (2) their experience of the works of others. Here חֵלֶק 'portion' is used with preposition ב 'in'. The meaning of not having a portion in anything that is done is then that they do not participate in doing anything in interpretation (1) of the referent. In this case the whole would be all that is done under the sun, and they do not have any part in doing anything. In Ecclesiastes 2:10 where the source of the portion is mentioned, the preposition is מ 'from'. The meanings seem to be fairly synonymous. In interpretation (2) of the referent, the meaning is that they do not get to experience any portion of what is done under the sun. Both of these interpretations are relevant and true to what Qohelet is saying.

There does not seem to be any good reason to limit the meaning to the deceased not doing anything, as the experience of the actions and attitudes is active in the context. The reward is



linked to being remembered, and possibly the attitude (love, hate, envy) of others toward the deceased is mentioned. Thus interpretation (2) of the referent is to be preferred. Qohelet is saying that the deceased have no part in anyone's doing, whether as a worker or as an experiencer of the deeds of others. The parts of verse 6 are closer in meaning to each other and explain each other if the denial of existence of the love, hate, and envy of others is understood as the experience by the deceased of the actions of love, hate, and envy by others. This is quite possibly the correct interpretation.

If חלק 'portion' is considered to be exclusively positive in its connotation, the portion that the dead do not have would be a subset of the experiences in verse 6. The reasons to prefer this are that this is in close proximity to 9:9 (see section 3.3.8) where the connotation is exclusively positive, and that there are no other passages in the book of Ecclesiastes where the word includes a negative connotation. The logic would be that if the dead do not experience anything happening in this world, they are also cut off of the positive experiences. It is also possible to understand the portion to include experience of the hate of others in the verse 6.

The whole is all the works that are done under the sun or possibility of enjoyment of the works. The referent of חלק 'portion' would be the part of the whole that is experienced by the deceased, but its existence is denied (אין־להם). In this passage interpreting חלק with exclusively positive connotations or including negative connotations are both possible.

### 3.3.8 Ecclesiastes 9:9

ראה חיים עם־אשה אשר־אהבת כל־ימי חיי הבלך אשר נתן־לך תחת השמש כל ימי הבלך<sup>26</sup>  
 'See life with a woman you love  
 all the days of your futile life that he has given you under the sun, all your futile days, for it is your portion in life and in your work that you do under the sun.'

Qohelet exhorts to see life with a woman one loves all of one's futile days, as that is one's portion in life and work under the sun. If חלק 'portion' is connected back to the enjoyment ('seeing life'), as Ogden and Zogbo (1997:333) argue on the basis of the masculine pronoun, then the portion is not the life with the woman that may or may not be enjoyed, but rather enjoyment is commanded because it is one's portion. This implies that the word has a positive

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26 Seow (1997:302) considers כל ימי הבלך 'all your futile days' to be a vertical dittography and thus not part of the original text. He may be right. He notes that it is missing from several manuscripts.

connotation and that the portion is to be enjoyed. This raises the question of what the portion would be if life were not enjoyed. One possible answer is that it would not exist. One is to enjoy something as the portion if such an opportunity exists. The other answer is that the portion is the opportunity to enjoy, and this opportunity is wasted. The portion would still exist.

It is clear that enjoying one's portion can be accepted or rejected, as implied by the imperative. This makes the latter option more likely because the existence of the portion is assumed regardless of whether the command of enjoyment is obeyed. The word חלק should then be interpreted to refer to an opportunity to enjoy. The reference is to a part against the background of all opportunities that anyone may have to enjoy.

The exhortation in verse 9 is part of a chain of similar exhortations in verses 7 and 8. They belong to the same unit. In verse 7, Qohelet claims that God has accepted the enjoyment of one's portion. Thus Qohelet bases his exhortation to enjoy food and drink on God's acceptance of it. Food and drink are elsewhere linked to חלק 'portion' (Eccl 5:17). The enjoyment of one's portion is acceptable to God. The word חלק has a positive connotation in this text.

### **3.3.9 Ecclesiastes 11:2**

:תן חלק לשבעה וגם לשמונה כי לא תדע מה יהיה רעה עליהארץ: 'Give a portion to seven and to eight for you do not know what evil will take place on earth.'

Whybray (1989a:158-159) thinks that the verse speaks of spreading risk. Seow (1997:335) argues convincingly that the Hebrew does not mean 'to divide a portion among' but 'give a portion to'. Seow thinks that therefore the point is not about spreading risk. Rather the point is liberality. Accordingly, the referent of חלק 'portion' is something that can be passed on to others, whether material or not. Also here the connotation of the word is positive.

### **3.3.10 Conclusions on חלק**

The sense of the word is 'portion'. The usage of the word is consistent with the idea that the frame of the word includes a whole, of which a part is profiled. The whole is often left unmentioned in the text with no contrast between the portion and the whole. In the prototypical usage, the portion belongs to someone. Outside of the book of Ecclesiastes, נחלה 'inheritance' is often used as a synonym. The references in Ecclesiastes are immaterial

(such as the experience of joy in Ecclesiastes 2:10, 3:22, or the possibility of enjoying life in Ecclesiastes 9:9) or material (possessions in Ecclesiastes 2:21). The dead do not have a portion in anything done under the sun. They cannot participate or enjoy the results of work done under the sun.

The word has always or almost always positive connotations in the book of Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes 9:6 being the sole exception where in one interpretation alongside positive connotations (love) negative ones (hate, envy) are mentioned. Even here the interpretation with exclusively positive connotations is possible. The fact that one should enjoy his חלק 'portion' and the fact that it is God's gift imply that God will not judge negatively the enjoyment of one's חלק 'portion'. Rather, Qohelet's exhortation to enjoy one's portion is founded on God's acceptance of enjoying it.

As the word is used to refer to positive experiences and opportunities to experience them, and to possessions, it has some variety in its usage. These uses are within the basic sense of the word in the rest of the Biblical corpus. No positive indication that the word is used as a technical term was found. Rather the variety of the meanings in the book of Ecclesiastes strengthens the view that the word is not a technical term but represents a typical prototype category.

### **3.4 The word יתרון**

#### **3.4.1 Introduction**

The word יתרון 'profit' is used in the beginning of the book to ask the question of the profit of work. This sets the initial tone for the book and gives the first clue to the meaning of הבל 'futility'. The relationship of this word to חלק 'portion' helps understand Qohelet's concerns in more detail, which in turn helps gain a more nuanced understanding of the key word הבל 'futility'. The word יתרון 'profit' does not occur outside of the book of Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Old Testament. I will discuss each occurrence in the book of Ecclesiastes.

#### **3.4.2 Ecclesiastes 1:3**

מה־יתרון לאדם בכל־עמלו שיעמול תחת השמש: 'What profit is there for a human in all his work that he does under the sun?'

The thematic question in Ecclesiastes 1:3 is of the benefit of work (what one gets for his work). The context includes a worker, and יתרון 'profit' is a hypothetical outcome of the work. Its real existence is questioned by the rhetorical question. The source of the benefit is indicated by a prepositional phrase with ב, in this verse בעמלו, and the beneficiary is indicated by a prepositional phrase with ל, in this verse לאדם. In this verse יתרון 'profit' is at least a hypothetically possible result of work, but whether it materializes is questioned.

Many assume that the rhetorical question is answered in the negative (Crenshaw 1987:59-61, Murphy 1992:7, Fox 1999:165), often pointing out the connection to הבל 'futility' in the previous verse. On the other hand, Fredericks (1993:48-53) presents a few arguments that the question of advantage is answered in the positive by Qohelet. First, there is advantage in wisdom. Wisdom has יתרון 'profit' in itself and it can provide the same. For this he appeals to Ecclesiastes 2:13, 5:8 (Fredericks refers to 5:9 because he follows English versification), 7:11-12, and 10:8-10. In 2:9 wisdom has a supporting role in the search for wisdom.

Furthermore, he argues that יתרון 'profit' is used to ask and answer the question of advantage just as well as טוב 'good'. He appeals to Ecclesiastes 2:22-25 and 3:9-12. He also notes 5:10 (using the word כשרון, Fredericks's reference is to 5:11 following the English versification) and 6:8-9. Ecclesiastes 2:11 is the difficult verse for his view. He explains the conclusion in the verse as being of an exceptional nature. "As he [Qohelet] reacts to the limited value of his labor, he prematurely blurts out that there is *no* value" (Fredericks 1993:51-52). From the quote above, it becomes clear that Fredericks associates יתרון 'profit' with value.

It is true that wisdom has profit over foolishness (Eccl 2:13). It is also true that יתרון 'profit' is used to refer to temporal profit in the book of Ecclesiastes, as Fredericks argues, and as I note in the following sections. These considerations are not sufficient to answer the question.

Ecclesiastes 2:13 is not likely to be the answer to the programmatic question of Ecclesiastes 1:3. The value of wisdom over foolishness does not directly answer the question of the profit of work. Rather the relative value of wisdom is introduced to address its limitations (2:15), which does not save from the same lot with the fool (2:15), including death, or give a permanent memory of the person (2:16). This line of thought culminates in noting that all things are futile (2:17), an expression that parallels Qohelet's conclusion in 2:11, though without the word יתרון 'profit'. Also in 2:11 Qohelet notes specifically that he evaluated his works in the experiment, and inferred from it that there is no profit under the sun ( אין יתרון )

תחת השמש). This is a good form for the answer presented in 1:3, and it stands out marked with the discourse particle הנה.

The answer seems startling and unexplained, which may raise questions to the reader. However, Qohelet does not leave the matter here, but presents the reasons for the startling judgment in the rest of the chapter, noting that he will lose what he has gained, he will be forgotten and he does not know whether it will pass to a wise person or a fool. Therefore, under the criteria of permanence (of profit to himself), being remembered forever, and certainty (of profit to others), there is no profit. Thus Ecclesiastes 2:11 is a better candidate to answer the programmatic question than Ecclesiastes 2:13.

It is not likely that טוב 'good' is used to answer the question of יתרון 'profit'. If it were, it would result in a logical problem by making Qohelet's view internally inconsistent. Qohelet made an experiment with joy, and it was successful in producing joy (Eccl 2:10).

Nevertheless there was no profit in the works that produced the joy (Eccl 2:11). Joy is called good (Eccl 2:24, 3:12). Assuming with Fredericks that the question of profit is answered with the good, Qohelet's works in the experiment would have produced profit. Yet this contradicts Qohelet's statement in 2:11 that there is no profit under the sun. This generalization certainly includes his works under the sun in the experiment. My conclusion is that the question of profit is not answered by what is good. The view that the rhetorical question of Ecclesiastes 1:3 is answered in the negative has better support than the idea that it is answered in the positive.

In Ecclesiastes 1:3 'profit' fits the context well. Profit is expected of work, and work lacking profit may be called 'futile'. This explains the connection to verse 2. Yet this argument is weak in that it does not exclude other possible meanings for the word. Minimally it is to be noted that the word is used in the frame of a human working. Part of the frame is a system of values against which the result is evaluated as profitable or not. A possible antonym is הבל 'futile', here and also in Ecclesiastes 2:11. An important question is raised on whether work yields יתרון 'profit', and if not, why. Assuming that הבל 'futile' and יתרון 'profit' are used as antonyms, this theme is discussed by Qohelet in 2:15-23 in more detail. He argues that there is none, on the basis that he will have to leave the results of his work to another (2:18). This is universally true. It is made worse by no certainty that it will benefit even the next generation (2:19).

### 3.4.3 Ecclesiastes 2:11

ופניתי אני בכל-מעשי שעשו ידי ובעמל שעמלתי לעשות והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח ואין יתרון  
'And I turned [my attention] to all my deeds that my hands had done and to the  
work I had worked to do, and it was all futile and desire of wind, and there is no profit under  
the sun.'

In Ecclesiastes 2:10 Qohelet notes that his work resulted in joy and that it was his חלק 'portion' from his work. But when he turns to look at his work, it was הבל ורעות רוח 'futile and desire of wind' and not יתרון 'profit'. From this two inferences may be made. One is that הבל 'futile' and רעות רוח 'desire of wind' can be used as antonyms of יתרון 'profit'. The other is that joy can count as חלק 'portion' but nevertheless not be יתרון 'profit'. There is no יתרון 'profit' under the sun, but Qohelet's חלק 'portion' was under the sun ('in this life' as opposed to the netherworld, Seow 1997:104-106). Thus it is more demanding to call something יתרון 'profit' than חלק 'portion'. If a system of values is considered to be part of the frame of יתרון 'profit', then Qohelet had different criteria for חלק 'portion' and יתרון 'profit' in the context of the programmatic question.

The loss of the results of work at death is prominent in the rest of chapter 2. Therefore a good candidate for Qohelet's criterion is permanence for the profit of work. This, I think, is a good explanation for the different judgments on whether work produced חלק 'portion' or יתרון 'profit'. In other words, the permanence that is there in the use of יתרון 'profit' in Ecclesiastes 2:11 is best seen as a contextual effect rather than part of the semantics of the word. This contextual requirement is indicated in Ecclesiastes 2:15-21, only after Qohelet explained his conclusion of no profit in Ecclesiastes 2:11, and disclaiming the view that he nullifies the value of wisdom (Eccl 2:13-14). Thus he first expresses his result and then explains what he means by it, pointing to permanence as a contextual requirement for יתרון 'profit'.

### 3.4.4 Ecclesiastes 2:13 (twice)

וראתי אני שיש יתרון לחכמה מן-הסכלות כיתרון האור מן-החשך:  
'I saw that there is profit for wisdom over foolishness like there is profit for light over darkness.'

The source of profit is indicated here by preposition ל in the first occurrence and with a construct construction in the second. The point of comparison is indicated by מן, as expected. Qohelet claims that there is יתרון 'profit' that wisdom has over folly. It is said to be like the

יתרון 'profit' that light has over darkness. It is relative profit, but real nevertheless. Wisdom and light are not worthless. They help one understand, “have eyes in the head” instead of “walking in darkness” (Eccl 2:14). However, Qohelet is interested in the limitations of this benefit of wisdom (Eccl 2:14b-19). It will not save one from death (2:16), nor will it give permanent remembrance (2:16) nor certainty that his possessions will go to a wise person or a fool (2:18-19). Hypothetically, if wisdom saved one from death, we could say that there was profit that lasts. It is death that nullifies the possibility of יתרון 'profit' under the sun by wisdom.

The tension between Ecclesiastes 2:11 of no יתרון 'profit' under the sun and 2:13 of wisdom having יתרון 'profit' over foolishness may be explained by appealing to different perspectives. In 2:13 the perspective is not limited by duration. There is a real benefit wisdom has. However, if one looks at the profit from a longer time perspective, the real benefit gets nullified. Thus there is no יתרון 'profit' under the sun in the long run. The question is not about absolute יתרון 'profit' versus relative יתרון 'profit' but about whatever יתרון 'profit' there is at the end of the time frame concerned. Qohelet believed in the benefit of wisdom but he also believed that it is temporary, at least in this life (under the sun). Thus his works did produce profit in the joy he had, but it was temporary and not lasting. Qohelet used a contrast between חלק 'portion' and יתרון 'profit'. I suggest the contrast is along the lines of חלק 'portion' as something to be enjoyed moment by moment, and יתרון 'profit' as more focused on the outcome of what is done. There is no lexical requirement for the profit to be permanent. The expectation of permanence in chapter 2 is the result of relating it to the programmatic question and to Qohelet's perspective to it.

### 3.4.5 Ecclesiastes 3:9

What is the profit of the worker in what he labors? מה־יתרון העושה באשר הוא עמל:

In Ecclesiastes 3:9 the question is raised of what יתרון 'profit' a worker has for his labors. This question occurs right after a list of things that have a time for them. Here יתרון 'profit' and עמל 'work', 'labor' collocate. The very question reveals the expectation that work might produce יתרון 'profit', an expectation that is questioned rather than presupposed.

Qohelet links the discussion back to what he has discussed in chapters 1 and 2. In Ecclesiastes 3:10, there is a cohesive link to Ecclesiastes 1:13 (in 3:10 ראיתי את־הענין אשר נתן אלהים לבני האדם לענות בו: 'I saw the task God has given to mankind to be busy with'

כל-אשר נעשה תחת השמים הוא ענין 3:9 and in 1:13 '...all that is done under heaven. That is a bad task God has given to mankind.'). The link consist in God giving a task to people. The task in 1:13 is to research what is done under the sun. The discussion on times in 3:1-8 is contextualized as being relevant to the question of profit and the attempt to understand what is done under the sun.

In Ecclesiastes 3:11, Qohelet claims that God has made everything beautiful in its time, referring back to the catalog of times in 3:1-8. He has also put [a desire for] permanence (עולם) in human hearts. This is not a novel theme but links back to chapter 2 where Qohelet discussed why there is no יתרון 'profit'. The arguments included the universality of death (2:16) and the lack of ability to determine if the results of one's work are used wisely or foolishly after death (2:18-20). This points to Qohelet's desire to have a permanent profit for his labors. Permanence in the heart is easily understood as a desire for permanence by way of metonymy hinted at by the word לב 'heart'. This desire for permanence is something God has put in human heart.

Fox (1999:210) criticizes the idea that the word עולם in Ecclesiastes 3:11 means 'desire for eternity'. He says that the desire for eternity is irrelevant to the passage and foreign to the book and that Qohelet shows no interest in an afterlife. Fox misses the link to chapter 2 where the impermanence of the results of work is at issue. Thus permanence has been introduced to the context. Ogden (1987:55) and Seow (1997:163) understand the word basically the same way as I do even though they do not explicitly link the concept to chapter 2. Seow notes the link to Ecclesiastes 3:14 and uses the expression 'a sense of timelessness' to describe the sense of עולם 'eternity' (Seow's gloss) as used in the context.

Qohelet continues by saying that humans do not understand God's work from beginning to end (3:11). He also notes that there is no good other than to have joy and to do good while one lives (3:12). The relationship between the clauses is not clear. Perhaps one could hope to achieve יתרון, some permanent profit for one's labor, if one could understand God's work, and thus ensure that the results of one's work have permanent significance. That permanence is attributed to God's work, which remains forever (Eccl 3:14), but not to man's work. If there was a possibility to gain permanent profit in life, it would make sense to sacrifice enjoyment of God's gift (3:13) for that profit. But there is none, and man cannot know God's work and the proper timing when actions would be יפה 'appropriate' to ensure permanent value.



Therefore man is dependent on God whose work remains forever, and he has nothing better than to enjoy life as God's gift while he does good.

If my interpretation is correct, then Qohelet points to permanence as a feature of the kind of *יתרון* 'profit' he is seeking. This interpretation understands chapter 3 as a continuation of chapter 2, and sees two important links to earlier discussion: God giving man a task to do links to chapter 1 and desire of permanence links to chapter 2.

### 3.4.6 Ecclesiastes 5:7-8

אם-עשק רש וגזל משפת וצדק תראה במדינה אל-תתמה על-החפץ כי גבה מעל גבה שמר  
'If you see the oppression of  
the poor and distortion of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be surprised, for a  
high one over a high one watches, and higher ones are above them. And the profit of the land  
in all is a king to the tilled field.'

The gloss above represents the Masoretic text, which is somewhat problematic. *שמר* 'watch' takes *על* 'over', not *מעל* (Kugel 1989:35). Seow (1997:203) has a plausible solution. He redivides the consonants and ends up with *גבה מעל גבה שמרו גבהים עליהם* 'a high one is above a high one and high ones have watched over them' (my gloss). Either way, the text refers to higher people above the oppressed poor. In verse 7 Qohelet tells not to be surprised by oppression of the poor and denial of justice, as (*כי*) there are higher ones above them watching and *נעבד* *מלך* *לשדה* *נעבד* (with *qere*) 'profit of a land in all is a king of the tilled field'.

The passage is problematic and has resulted in a number of interpretations. The main questions are (1) who the high ones are, (2) what 'watching' means, (3) whether verse 8 should be emended, (4) whether *נעבד* is related to the field or to the king, and (5) what the meaning of *בכל* 'in all' is, and (6) what the general sense of the passage is.

(1) There are at least two answers given to the question of the identity of the high ones. Murphy (1992:51) thinks they are government officials. Bartholomew (2009:216) mentions the possibility of them being arrogant ones. Seow (1997:203-204) thinks the arrogant ones are those of higher socioeconomic or political status than the ordinary person. The basic meaning of the word *גבוה* is 'high'. Seow (1997:203) notes Kugel's (1989) argument that the

word does not have the sense of a high official in Hebrew, but as a substantive, it always means 'an arrogant one' or 'a haughty one' (Jb 41:26, Ps 138:6, Is 10:33, Ez 21:31).

It is not clear that the word commonly has the sense of 'arrogant' without further qualification. Job 41:26 does not seem to be a case of an attitude. Psalm 138:6 could refer to those in a high position, not necessarily arrogant in attitude. In Isaiah 10:33 the reference can be seen as rather to a high position than arrogant attitude. Ezekiel 21:31 speaks of a high one being brought low. There is no necessary reference to attitude. When an attitude is indicated, the word is usually qualified. Proverbs 16:5 speaks of כל־גבה־לב 'every high one in heart', and Ecclesiastes 7:8 speaks of גבה־רוח 'high one in spirit', Isaiah 5:15 speaks of עני גבהים 'eyes of the high ones'.

The meaning of 'high official' or 'arrogant' are not the only alternatives. I think that the word refers to one in a high social position. Seow (1997:203-204) thinks it is anyone of higher socioeconomic or political status than the ordinary person, not necessarily a bureaucrat. This includes many government officials. This interpretation fits the pattern of the examples above. The position in the context of Ecclesiastes 5:7-8 is one of sufficient influence to pervert justice. Nevertheless, reference to arrogance is implicit in the verse, as the high ones use their position to deprive the poor of justice.

(2) The watching has been understood in the sense of watching out for each other in an intricate network of corruption (Bartholomew 2009:217, see also Fox 1999:234), or in the sense of providing checks and balances (tentatively Ogden 1987:80-81). Ogden's idea is based on seeing the keeper as the antithesis of the plunder. If the כי clause about the high ones watching is connected to and strengthens the previous statement of corruption, it is more plausible that it describes why corruption is not surprising rather than what rectifies it, thus favoring the first view.

If the clause about high ones watching were seen as not related to the surprise (תמה) but being horrified (another gloss for תמה given by Koehler and Baumgartner 1999:1744), the sense of providing checks and balances would be more likely. Ogden himself takes the verb as indicating amazement. In this case the meaning is more likely not a healthy watching in the sense of checks and balances, and verse 7 speaks of corruption by the high ones each using their influence in a manner that disregards the rights of the poor, and this becomes part of the context of verse 8. If תמה is understood as 'be horrified', one expects some sort of

balance to corruption to follow by the other high ones. A horrifying thing may be surprising, but a surprise does not necessarily contain any horror. There is nothing in the context to direct the reader to understand תמה specifically as being horrified. I find it more likely that a network of corruption is in view in this passage.

(3) Seow (1997:204) thinks the Masoretic text of Ecclesiastes 5:8 is corrupt, perhaps hopelessly. He emends the text keeping the consonants (with qere). He reads it as יתרון ארץ בכלה ואם לכל שדה נעבד 'the advantage of the land is in its yield, that is, if the field is cultivated for [its] yield.' His translation is based on the word כל, from the root כיל or כול 'to measure, measure out' either as a noun or as an infinitive construct.

(4) Crenshaw (1987:119) raises the question of whether נעבד 'worked', 'tilled' is related to שדה 'field' or מלך 'king'. If it goes with מלך 'king', the idea is that the king is served by the field. Fox (1999:234) and Seow (1997:204) note that the only meaning attested to נעבד is 'tilled'. This is true for all three other occurrences (Dt 21:4, Ez 36:9, 34). The argument favors connection with the field rather than the king, even though one could wish for a larger corpus.

(5) Bartholomew (2009:217) lists several ways בכל has been understood: 'for all', 'by all', 'in all', 'on the whole', 'over everything', 'after all', and 'always'.

(6) Ogden and Zogbo (1997:167), without emending the text, take the בכל as '[it is] with all' or '[shared] by all'. They understand the preposition ל in the sense of “for the purpose or benefit of”. One of their suggested translations is “The benefits of a land are to be shared by all. A king exists for the benefit of tilled land.” If we take בכל as related to יתרון 'profit', and take the sense as 'for all', we have a contrast with the way the preposition is used in 1:3 indicating the source of the benefit (see section 3.4.2). Also the reference is somewhat different as here the יתרון 'profit' is a person (מלך 'king'), not an action. A metonymy is probable. The king is a source of benefit for all. But the sense of בכל could perhaps better be 'in all', 'in every way'.

I suggest tentatively that the idea is that devotion of the king to the field, its workers, and agriculture is beneficial in every way. In this interpretation, what is beneficial in every way is the concern of the king for those at the bottom of the socioeconomic food chain instead of milking as much benefit as possible for himself and the powerful to keep them loyal. If verse

7 is interpreted as checks and balances, the point may still be that king devoted to the farmer is a safeguard against corruption. This interpretation does not require the text to be emended.

The contribution of this verse to the study of יתרון 'profit' and its use in the book of Ecclesiastes is on somewhat shaky ground as the interpretation of the passage is difficult. Nevertheless, some things are rather clear. This usage does not seem to be related to the programmatic question. The profit exists and it is temporal. There is no concern about permanence. The rest of the details are more debatable. The profit is possibly related to reduction of corruption. Others take it in the sense that the king is a source of corruption and thus the one benefiting.

### 3.4.7 Ecclesiastes 5:15

:רוח ל'Also this is a painful וגם־זו רעה חלה כלעמַת שבא כן ילך ומה־יתרון לו שיעמל לרוח: situation that just as he came he goes, and what profit does he have that worked to the wind.' (Emending כל־עמַת to כלעמַת, with Crenshaw 1987:123, Koehler and Baumgartner 1995:842, and Seow 1997:207.)

The context (Eccl 5:12-16) describes a painful situation in which a person has riches and they are kept to his hurt (5:12). He eats in darkness (or lack, see Kugel 1989:38-40), a lot of pain, sickness and anger (5:16), as he hoards and keeps his wealth. This person loses everything in an unfortunate business. He even has a child but he has nothing to leave to him. Thus his riches were of no use. He did not enjoy them but on the contrary, suffered in accumulating them. Though he had an heir, he did not enjoy them either, because they were lost. Thus in every way, these riches were for the hurt of their owner. (Fox 1999:237-238.)

There is disagreement on whether verses 14-15 speak of the father or the son (Ogden and Zogbo 1997:177-178, Fox 1999:238). Either way, in verses 15-16, Qohelet finds it tragic that people lose in death (if not before like the father in his example) what they have toiled for in a painful way rather than enjoying the work. Death makes the potential for יתרון 'profit' to be lost as all the work is לרוח 'for the wind'.

The phrase לרוח 'for the wind' is interpreted as temporally limited by Fox (1999:238). Another alternative is to understand work for the wind as something that does not benefit the doer. This fits the context well. The satisfaction the person works for was not attained and thus the work proved to be futile. It never gives what it was expected to, not when worked

for, not when preserved, and not afterwards (as it is lost). Either way the phrase is understood, the work produces no יתרון 'profit' as the results are lost. This is in the context of the work having produced no temporal benefit, since it was not enjoyed in the first place. The remaining way it could be beneficial is that it would be so later. But since it is lost, this does not happen. Therefore there can be no יתרון 'profit'.

It is somewhat unclear whether Qohelet would have considered there to have been יתרון 'profit' if the father had enjoyed his riches and benefited from them. I suspect that not, on the basis of Ecclesiastes 2:11. Yet, it appears that Qohelet may have thought it possible that some of his readers might have thought so, as he adds another argument in verse 5:16 to the profitlessness of the work, that it was not enjoyed. In any case this strengthens the idea of verse 17 that enjoyment of work is important. In this example of Ecclesiastes 5:12-16, riches and working for them do not produce either temporal or permanent profit. It is a painful situation (רעה חלה) indeed.

### **3.4.8 Ecclesiastes 7:12**

כי בצל החכמה בצל הכסף ויתרון דעת החכמה תחיה בעליה: 'In the shadow of wisdom [it is like] in the shadow of money. The benefit of knowledge is that wisdom keeps alive the one who has it.'

The absolute form of the construct construction is used to indicate the source of benefit. Knowledge and wisdom are used synonymously. They benefit by keeping one alive. Ogden and Zogbo (1996:238) understand the advantage here as lasting. They consider that the advantage is not in any way earthly (1996:5). In their interpretation, the advantage of wisdom in this verse is linked with lasting benefit, whereas the advantage of money is appreciated (1996:238). I think that rather the point is that wisdom keeps one alive, but since even the wise die (Eccl 2:16), it is only temporally that wisdom gives life. The protection of money and wisdom are not contrasted in the text.

Wisdom and knowledge give benefit to the one who has them. Nothing is expressed about the duration of the benefit in the immediate context, but in the wider context, neither is permanent. Work and the thematic question are not active in the context. This verse serves as a good warning against a rigid interpretation of יתרון 'profit' as always indicating lasting benefit.

### 3.4.9 Ecclesiastes 10:10-11

אם־קִהָה הַבְּרֹזֶל וְהוּא לֹא־פָנִים קִלְקַל וְחִילִים יִגְבֵּר וַיִּתְּרוֹן הַכְּשִׁיר חֲכָמָה: 'If an iron [tool] is blunt and one does not sharpen it first, one will exert more strength. The appropriation of wisdom brings profit.'

The verse is somewhat difficult in Hebrew. The word used of the edge of a tool is not פָּנִים but פֶּה. The place of לֹא 'not' is before פָּנִים, which would be unexpected if the word referred to the edge of the instrument. Ogden and Zogbo (1997:370) emend to לִפְנֵים 'before' without manuscript support. Seow (1997:317) does not emend. He takes פָּנִים as equivalent to the more common לִפְנֵים in an adverbial sense 'in advance', not in the more traditional sense of 'edge'. His Biblical Hebrew examples (Ez 2:10, 1 Chr 19:10, 2 Chr 13:14) refer to the idiom פָּנִים וְאַחֲרָיו 'before and afterwards' or 'front and back', all in the spatial sense. His view may be possible but there is no certain proof that it is. One could wish for a larger corpus of Biblical Hebrew. Here I follow his view tentatively. The last part (וַיִּתְּרוֹן הַכְּשִׁיר חֲכָמָה) 'And profit – the appropriation of wisdom') is a nominal clause in Hebrew. The nouns have a metonymical relationship. It may be described either as a metonymy of cause for effect for the use of wisdom or as a metonymy of effect for cause for the profit.

Here יִתְּרוֹן 'profit' is used about benefits of applying wisdom to practical work. Thus it is very much a temporal profit related to whatever one is using the ax for. Ogden and Zogbo (1996:371) consider this to be lasting benefit. I don't find that plausible in this context.

### 3.4.10 Conclusions on יִתְּרוֹן

The word יִתְּרוֹן means 'profit'. The one who benefits is indicated by preposition לְ (Eccl 1:3, 10:11), or the construct construction (Eccl 3:9). The source of the benefit is indicated by preposition מִן (Eccl 1:3). In the absence of the one benefiting, the source of benefit may be indicated by preposition לְ (Eccl 2:13) or the construct construction (Eccl 2:13, 7:12). The source of benefit may be indicated by a nominal sentence (Eccl 10:10).

Wisdom gives יִתְּרוֹן 'profit' in Ecclesiastes 2:13, 7:12, and 10:10. The profit is qualified by the same lot of the wise and the fool in 2:13-15. Work does not produce יִתְּרוֹן 'profit' in Ecclesiastes 1:3 (depending on the answer to the rhetorical question), 2:11, 3:9, and 5:15. Ecclesiastes 2:11 precedes a context of common lot and death, and 5:15 is in the context of

death. Ecclesiastes 3:9 is in the context of man not knowing God's work and the desire for permanence.

Two kinds of usage of יתרון 'profit' were found at the thematic level. The book begins with introducing a rhetorical question about the profit of work. This question is expanded and answered in the negative using the argument of death nullifying any final profit or the argument of man not knowing God's work (Eccl 1:3, 2:11, 3:9). The theme of profit is also examined from a more temporally limited perspective (Eccl 2:13, 5:8, 7:12, and 10:10). Sometimes the two perspectives can both apply (Eccl 5:15).

It is clear that the word in itself does not mean lasting benefit. Temporal limitations come from Qohelet's programmatic question. When relating to this question, permanence is required, and death ensures that there is no profit. Otherwise, there are things that are profitable. In Ecclesiastes 5:15 the question of profit was expressed in a context of riches producing no benefit whatsoever, either temporally or permanently. The case is a good example of Qohelet's concern of lack of joy. Greed and workaholism may kill joy and bring no benefit. If the result of over-exerting oneself and giving up on joys of life would produce a lasting profit, it would be justified. However, it does not. Death makes it certain. Rather God's gift is for one to be able to have joy in one's work.

There may be less prototypical examples of programmatic profit. While not explicitly called profit, in his argumentation Qohelet mentions being forgotten (2:16) and not knowing whether he will leave his possessions to a wise or foolish person (2:18-19), in other words, whether the person will be able to use it for good. Thus personal appreciation by later generations or profit for the next generation are connected with the idea of profit. This kind of profit we could call less prototypical profit in light of the programmatic question.

Qohelet does not deny that profit exists (except in 2:11), but he qualifies it severely in contexts where the common human lot or death is discussed. Thus permanence is not a component of the meaning of יתרון 'profit'. However, permanence may be expressed by the context. The reason he denied the existence of profit in 2:11 is the lack of ability to escape the common lot with the fool, including death. Death limits the potential for profit. This is true both for work (Eccl 2:11, 5:15) and wisdom (Eccl 2:13). The profit of wisdom is positively expressed in passages where death is not part of the context (Eccl 7:12, 10:10). Whether there is profit beyond this life is not explicitly discussed.

In section 2.4.4 I noted that the views of Ogden and Fredericks contrast in how they see the programmatic question answered. In chapter 2, the existence of יתרון 'profit' is denied in the context of the common lot and death, but חלק 'portion' is affirmed. I see a contrast between the words in this text. The answer is there is no יתרון 'profit', explicitly spelled out in Ecclesiastes 2:11. This is because of the common lot and death. This does not deny that there are things to which Qohelet admits יתרון 'profit' of a more temporal and limited type. For his programmatic question he seeks a more demanding answer. No work can produce results that last. Therefore there is no profit that counts as an answer to his quest. This paints a distinction between an achievement-centered approach to work versus an enjoyment-centered approach to life while doing good.

The word יתרון 'profit' is used of a permanent profit at times, but not always. Lexically the meaning is not restricted to permanent profit. However, Qohelet sought for something permanent, and the result is that from that perspective, there is no יתרון 'profit'. There is יתרון 'profit' in wisdom, and even that is temporally limited because no one can take with him what he has achieved with wisdom. Furthermore, there are no guarantees it will profit anyone after him (Eccl 2:19).

## 3.5 The word שמחה

### 3.5.1 Introduction

The word שמחה has been understood as 'pleasure' or as 'genuine joy' in the book of Ecclesiastes, as noted in section 2.4.5. Consequently very different tones have resulted for reading the book. The question of whether joy is הבל 'futile' is important for understanding Qohelet's theology of הבל 'futility'. The noun שמחה 'joy' occurs eight times in the book of Ecclesiastes (2:1, 2:2, 2:10, 2:26, 5:19<sup>27</sup>, 7:4, 8:15, 9:7), the adjective שמח 'glad' once (2:10), and the verb שמח 'to be glad' eight times (3:12, 3:22, 4:16, 5:18, 8:15, 10:19, 11:8, 11:9). The basic meaning of the noun is 'joy', ranging from 'jubilation' (for example Jer 7:34 קול שמחה 'the sound of jubilation') and 'pleasure' (for example Prv 21:17) to genuine joy (for example Ps 4:8). As noted in section 2.4.5, there is scholarly disagreement about whether it is joy or pleasure in the book of Ecclesiastes.

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27 This form בשמחת has also been analyzed as an infinitive construct form with a feminine ending. The feminine ending ה becomes ת in the construct form. With this analysis, there are seven nouns and nine verbs in the book of Ecclesiastes.



Fox (1999:113-115) presents nine arguments why שמחה means 'pleasure' rather than 'genuine joy' in the book of Ecclesiastes.

(1) The verb שמח is often related to celebration and thus it has a behavioral aspect. It can refer to externals of pleasure. Also the noun שמחה is used to refer “to the sounds of merrymaking” in 1 Samuel 18:6.

(2) The diversions called שמחה may be trivial and even self-destructive (Prv 21:17, Is 22:13, Ps 137:3).

(3) In the book of Ecclesiastes שמחה refers to the sensation of pleasure in 2:10b (he refers to the adjective), 2:26, 5:19, 9:7, 10:19, and probably 4:16.

(4) In the book of Ecclesiastes שמחה refers to the means of pleasure, pleasant things and actions, merrymaking in 2:1, 2:2, 2:10b (he refers to the noun here), 7:4, and 11:9.

(5) In Ecclesiastes 2:11 Qohelet says that all the שמחה does not constitute happiness.

(6) Qohelet found a lot of שמחה and little happiness.

(7) “Qohelet could not reasonably call happiness or joy inane, absurd, and unproductive (2:1-2). Happiness and joy are inherently desirable states, whereas pleasure can be hollow.” (Fox 1999:115.)

(8) People do not need to be urged to be happy because everyone desires happiness. Urging people to embrace pleasure and to call this the best thing in life is not a truism.

(9) It is pointless to advice happiness because happiness is something people cannot impose on themselves.

Fox's arguments (1) and (2) are valid observations of the use of the word. Arguments (3) to (5) refer to specific passages that are discussed below. None of the passages requires the sense of 'pleasure' instead of 'joy' with the exception of Ecclesiastes 7:4. Instead of proving that elsewhere the meaning is 'pleasure', this shows that there is some latitude in the meaning of the word.

Argument (6) is not that easy to evaluate, as all we have is his book. Nevertheless, it is not clear that the book has to be read in such an emotionally negative sense. Qohelet made many

observations and had many thoughts, but he describes his feelings rather seldom (Whybray 1989a:28). Some descriptions are clearly negative, such as Ecclesiastes 2:17, but Ecclesiastes 2:10 is a positive expression of joy of the heart. Qohelet would have considered joy to be הבל as it is an experience under the sun (Eccl 2:11), and the testing of the heart with joy was called הבל (Eccl 2:1). If הבל 'futility' is not considered a term of emotional frustration mutually exclusive of genuine joy, there seems to be no reason to limit the kind of שמחה 'joy' to pleasure only in the book of Ecclesiastes. The sense of הבל is discussed in more detail in section 3.6.

Argument (7) requires further assumptions to hold. Even though happiness and joy are inherently desirable states, it does not follow that they cannot be absurd. It seems that argument (7) depends on an emotionally negative understanding of the sense of הבל.

Argument (8) about no need to urge happiness is hardly true. Ecclesiastes 4:8 describes a person with a very grievous mission in his life, to labor while depriving himself of happiness or pleasure for no good reason. The exhortation to value happiness is relevant to a person who does not see its proper importance relative to other pursuits in life. A person may behave in ways that are counterproductive to his happiness.

Argument (9) is also weak. There is a point in urging to pursue something everyone desires, especially if it includes some teaching about how to do it or how to avoid the opposite. Qohelet talks about finding joy in the common things in life, like eating and drinking. It is a good exhortation to the greedy person who thinks that he needs a great amount of wealth and goods to be happy and loses his happiness in his materialistic pursuit. The exhortation may seem not very relevant at a superficial level, which may cause to probe the meaning deeper and thus find relevance through the observation that one is actually blocking true joy instead of advancing it, whatever the intentions.

Fox has not made a convincing case that שמחה must be understood as 'pleasure' in the book of Ecclesiastes. The following sections comment on each occurrence of the word for joy, whether noun, verb, or adjective, in the book of Ecclesiastes. In these sections Fox's view that שמחה means 'pleasure' instead of 'joy' in the book of Ecclesiastes is tested.

### **3.5.2 Ecclesiastes 2:1-10**

In Ecclesiastes 2:1-10 the word for joy occurs four times. The noun occurs in 2:1 and 2:2, and the adjective and the noun both once in 2:10. Qohelet tests his heart with שמחה 'joy' (2:1)

and then he calls it הבל 'futile' and of laughter he says it is foolish (מהולל) and asks what שמחה 'joy' does (2:2). The two occurrences of שמחה 'joy' form a cohesive link.

The results of the test are discussed in Ecclesiastes 2:10-11. His heart had שמחה 'joy'. That is a result of his test. Further, he did not withhold any שמחה 'joy' from his heart (metonymy for source of joy or pleasure). The joy or pleasure was called 'portion' חלק but not יתרון 'profit'. Joy may be enjoyed as one's portion, but it does not count as profit. If my conclusion in section 3.4.10 holds that the programmatic question deals with permanent profit, it is clear that joy does not count. Not only is death a limit, but there is no permanence in joy because it can only be enjoyed one moment at a time and because having joy at one moment does not imply that one will have it after that moment. In this passage שמחה could refer to 'pleasure' or 'joy'.

Two things about the results of the test are apparent. Joy is limited in some way (Eccl 2:2, 11), and he succeeded finding joy (Eccl 2:10 לבי שמח 'my heart was glad'). If what he found was genuine joy, it might be that it is the sense also in 2:1. Either way, Qohelet found that joy is not יתרון 'profit', but חלק 'portion'. Joy is not permanent, and thus fails the criteria for permanent profit. Yet, the experiment was successful in producing joy, and elsewhere Qohelet recommends joy, and that of more simple experiences than his extravagant experiment with joy (compare Eccl 2:4-9 with 2:24 and 3:13).

There is nothing that requires us to interpret שמחה as 'pleasure', though the passage does not contradict that meaning either. Qohelet's test may be with pleasure or pursuit of a deeper joy (Eccl 2:1). The accomplishments of joy may be questioned just as well as those of pleasure (Eccl 2:2). It is possible that Qohelet did not withhold his heart from any source of joy (metonymy) of any kind, not limited to pleasure (Eccl 2:10). It is also possible that he found genuine joy and not just pleasure. As Qohelet does not limit שמחה to 'pleasure', it is preferable to read the text in a broader sense.

### 3.5.3 Ecclesiastes 2:26

כי לאדם שטוב לפניו נתן חכמה ודעת ושמחה ולחטה נתן ענין לאסוף לתת לטב לפני  
'To the one that is good before him, he gave wisdom and knowledge and joy, and to the sinner he gave the task of gathering and collecting to give to one who is good before God. Also this is futile and desire of wind.'

This verse has generated two basic approaches. One is represented by Crenshaw (1987:90) who thinks that the verse takes traditional categories of the wise and the sinner, and empties them of moral content. The sense becomes 'the fortunate' and 'the unfortunate'. The other approach is represented by Fredericks (2010:102-103) who argues that the categories of the sinner and the good before God are to be taken in the traditional sense. Fredericks notes biblical parallels to God taking something from the sinning fool and giving it to those he is pleased with (Prv 13:22b, Prv 28:8, Jb 27:16-17).

Fox (1999:189-191) takes a mediating position. The sinner is offensive to God, but not because of a moral failure or transgressing against the law. He notes that in 1 Kings 8:31 the word חוטה 'sinner' is used of one that has offended a plaintiff, but whether he has sinned has not been adjudicated yet. He notes that one can offend God by toiling endlessly. God wants man to enjoy life. This toil ends up being for someone else. Fox's approach is rather similar to that of Fredericks with the exception that Fox does not see endless toiling as a moral failure. Yet, if God is interested in motives, and if the endless toiling does not have right motivation, there is good reason to think that the sinner is used in a moral sense here.

If God gives things as a gift to enjoy, then the good before God receive his gift. They have wisdom, knowledge, and joy, as they know how to enjoy the gift. The one who is obsessed with work (Eccl 2:23) ends up giving up all he has worked for, either at death or before that, possibly without really having enjoyed it. The exhortation of the next verse is to joy. The two verses are related. Obsession with work can prevent joy. The wealth will go to others, possibly to one who is good before God and who can enjoy it. In such a case, the sinner has gathered to the one who is good before God. 'Genuine joy' works as the sense of שמחה as well as 'pleasure'.

### 3.5.4 Ecclesiastes 3:12

:יחיו להם לשמוח ולעשות טוב בחייו: 'I know that there is nothing good for them except to have joy and do good while they live.'

Preposition ב instead of ל has a parallel in Ecclesiastes 2:24 (Crenshaw 1987:98).

Preposition ל is used in Ecclesiastes 8:15. The plural form בם does not have concord with the singular suffix of יחיו. The singular and plural alternate in 3:9-13. The reference is a generic one. It refers to people in general. No emendation is necessary. (Seow 1997:164.) Having joy is called here the only good thing together with doing good. This has generated a

number of interpretations. I examine these along two questions: the relationship between joy and doing good, and the meaning of joy.

Fox (1999:212) considers the meaning of לעשות טוב 'do good' as 'doing pleasure'. Crenshaw (1987:98-99) suggests that the meaning is 'to fare well'. Seow (1997:164) considers the two expressions לשמוח 'have joy' and לעשות טוב 'do good' as rather synonymous, as he uses the parallelism to argue that 'doing good' has no moral connotations in this verse. He also considers לעשות טוב 'do good' as synonymous with לראות טוב 'see good' in the next verse (3:13). Fredericks (2010:118) challenges this position. His argument is that in Ecclesiastes 7:20 the moral interpretation is uncontested and that the moral interpretation is normal to other biblical references (Gen 26:29<sup>28</sup>, Ps 37:3, 27) and that Qohelet uses the antonym 'do evil' freely (Eccl 4:3, 4:17<sup>29</sup>, 8:11-12).

The parallelism between לעשות טוב 'do good' and לראות טוב 'see good' is not clear. They are two different idioms that need not be treated synonymously. In the absence of good parallels, it is better to take the sense of לעשות טוב 'do good' as not synonymous לשמוח 'have joy'. Rather two separate things are presented. It is natural to take לעשות טוב 'do good' in an ethical sense.

Fox's argument is that שמחה means 'pleasure' rather than 'joy'. I think most people would consider genuine joy better than pleasure. If Qohelet indeed tried to explain that pleasure is better than joy, or that genuine joy does not exist, he did not succeed in explaining it clearly. It is much more natural to take the expression in the sense of genuine joy.

If the reasoning above is correct, Qohelet is saying that there are two things that are of incomparable value (there is nothing better) for humans. It is having joy and doing good. He values work and doing good, but he is also concerned whether work is done with enjoyment. These two together constitute the best in Qohelet's evaluation. This is probably a good summary of some of Qohelet's central values.

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28 His reference is to Genesis 29:26, but the verse does not contain the word טוב 'good'. Here I emend the text conjecturally, suspecting that the numbers were transposed.

29 His reference is to Ecclesiastes 5:1 based on the English versification. I use the Hebrew versification for consistency.

### 3.5.5 Ecclesiastes 3:22

וראיתי כי אין טוב מאשר ישמח האדם במעשיו כי־הוא חלקו כי מי יביאנו לראות במה שיהיה:  
'And I saw that there is nothing better than that one has joy in his work, for this is his portion, for who will bring him back to see what will be after him?'

Qohelet's conclusion is expressed by three כי clauses. The first one is that there is nothing better than to have שמחה 'joy' in one's work. The second one is that it is one's חלק 'portion'. Qohelet made the same observation of portion already in Ecclesiastes 2:10. The third is a rhetorical question of who will bring him to see what is after him. It is likely that the first כי clause is the actual conclusion and the next two are supporting material for the conclusion.

In Ecclesiastes 3:12, Qohelet described two basic values of joy and work as parallel, but here he brings joy to the attention of the readers more forcefully, expressing work as the circumstance of the joy. It is work that is presupposed and enjoyment in it that is highlighted in Ecclesiastes 3:22. As חלק 'portion' is almost always (or always, depending on one's interpretation of Eccl 9:6) used in the positive sense in the book of Ecclesiastes and is approved by God (see section 3.3), this gives a powerful argument to value joy in work: it is one's portion.

The second argument to value joy in work is that it is not certain that someone will bring him back to see what will be after him. I take the rhetorical question in this case as expecting a negative answer. That is, no one will bring him back. In section 3.3.5 I argued that the expression 'after him' is to be understood as referring to what will happen on earth after his death. If one could know what will take place on earth after his death, he could perhaps work in such a way as to maximize benefit for those left here (Eccl 6:12). Murphy (1992:37) notes the link to Ecclesiastes 6:12 and claims that the reference is to what will happen on earth. The relevance to joy here could be that knowledge of the future could potentially diminish the value of joy now as then one could ensure that sacrificing joy now for some work and resulting accomplishment will not be wasted.

In this context, the expression 'for who will bring him to see what will be after him' is used to support the importance of joy in work. In chapter 2, Qohelet discussed losing the results of one's work. That was grievous to him (Eccl 2:17-18, 20). The permanence man desires is not found in man's work, and this is used as a basis for the value of joy in Ecclesiastes 3:12 (see section 3.4.5). Yet, if it were not so and if people

could enjoy the results of one's work after one's life, it would make sense to postpone joy by working so hard as to lose joy to gain more joy later. Thus there is a contextual fit for an interpretation where Qohelet argues that man cannot enjoy the results of his work after he is dead. The Hebrew phrase לראות במה שיהיה אחריו 'to see what will be after him' uses the word ראה 'to see', which is at times used also of non-visual experience (for example Ecclesiastes 3:13). This fits well with the idea that he will not experience what will happen on earth after his death. Thus he cannot enjoy the results of his work after his death. This interpretation takes the argument to be similar in essence to that in Ecclesiastes 2:18-24.

Whether this interpretation is plausible depends on the interpretation of the whole passage Ecclesiastes 3:16-22. A full discussion of the passage and also of this question is offered in section 4.2.1. At this point it is enough to note that the importance of joy is declared in clear terms 'there is nothing better', it is used with work in the background, and the idea of the individual death is used to support the value of joy.

### 3.5.6 Ecclesiastes 4:16

There was no end to אין־קץ לכל־העם לכל אשר־היה לפניהם גם האחרונים לא ישמחו־בו: 'all the people whom he led. Yet, those after him will not have joy over him.'

Later generations will not have joy over their former king even though he was popular in his time. The cause of joy is expressed with preposition ב. The point may be that popularity is temporal. The passage receives a fuller treatment in section 3.6.3.10.

### 3.5.7 Ecclesiastes 5:18-19

גם כל־האדם אשר נתן־לו האלהים עשר ונכסים והשליטו לאכל ממנו ולשאת את־חלקו ולשמח בעמלו זה מתת אלהים היא: כי לא הרבה יזכר את־ימי חייו כי האלהים מענה 'Also whenever God gives riches and wealth and allows one to eat of it and to have his portion and to have joy in his work, it is God's gift. For he does not remember much the days of his life because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.'

The verb form מענה has been variously understood. It could be the causative of ענה 'be busy' with the sense that God keeps [him] busy. Against this interpretation Delitzsch (n.d.:303) argues that the form should have been מענהו 'keeps him'. He suggests that it means answers [him] with the joy of his heart. For our purposes, not much depends on the choice. The sense of the passage was already discussed in section 3.3.6. Here it is enough to

note that the object of joy is expressed using the preposition ב and that joy is called joy of the heart. The ability to have this joy is attributed to God and it is seen as a gift. It is expressed with work in the background. Both 'genuine joy' and 'pleasure' fit the context, but out of the two, joy would be more of a gift than pleasure. It would be odd to exclude real joy and to limit the meaning to pleasure.

### 3.5.8 Ecclesiastes 7:4

לב חכמים בבית־אבל ולב כסילים בבית שמחה: 'The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning and the heart of the fool is in the house of joy.'

The house of joy is the place of fools. The reference here is to superficial merrymaking. It is preferable not to avoid awareness of death as the end of all the living (Eccl 7:2) and the grief associated with death by superficial distractions of pleasure and festivity. In this case שמחה does not refer to any deep joy, but superficial merrymaking. It is significant that the attitude to שמחה is quite different from passages where it is recommended. If שמחה refers to pleasure here, it is unlikely that it does the same in those passages. This forms an argument against Fox's view that שמחה in the book of Ecclesiastes is 'pleasure' rather than 'joy'. The word itself is capable of both meanings, but the contrast in usage here and elsewhere points to a contrast in meaning.

### 3.5.9 Ecclesiastes 8:15 (twice)

ושבחתני אני את־השמחה אשר אין־טוב לאדם תחת השמש כי אם־לאכול ולשתות ולשמוח: 'And I praised joy because there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat, drink, and have joy, and this accompanies his work during the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.'

The best thing under the sun is called joy. It is connected with eating and drinking, common little joys of life. This recommendation of joy comes after a judgment passage (Eccl 8:10-15 is discussed in section 4.2.5) like in Ecclesiastes 3:16-22. It is noteworthy that Qohelet presents joy again with work in the background.



### 3.5.10 Ecclesiastes 9:7

לך אכל בשמחה לחמך ושתה בלב־טוב יינך כי כבר רצה האלהים את־מעשיך: 'Go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a happy heart for God has already accepted your works.'

Here joy is used adverbially (בשמחה) and it is presented as accompanying eating. It is paralleled with בלב־טוב 'with a happy heart'. It is theologically significant that God's acceptance of works is explicitly mentioned and used as supporting the exhortation to enjoyment. The works referred to are those of eating and drinking or more generally all one's work. I think it is more probable that it refers more narrowly to eating and drinking, as that is the most active antecedent associated with the second person. The previous verse mentions work but in a general way in the passive voice (nifal). Either way, some qualifications have to be made.

Ogden (1987:151-152) denies that the verse means that God would sanction anything we determine to do, based on the argument that Qohelet locates enjoyment within the divine will. God wants people to enjoy his basic provisions, and given that premise, people should go ahead and enjoy them. Provan (2001:182) notes that those eating and drinking joyfully may be sure always that it is the will of God.

Elsewhere Qohelet expresses his belief that God will not unconditionally accept everything (Eccl 5:2-5), and he commends taking God's judgment into account (Eccl 11:9). Here God's prior (כבר) acceptance is mentioned (Eccl 9:7) in the context of words (eating, drinking) that are also elsewhere explicitly associated with passages praising joy (Eccl 2:24, 3:13, 8:15). The idea seems to be limited to enjoying God's provision rather than to be an endorsement of gluttony. Perhaps it is best to consider the work to refer specifically to the work of eating and drinking and enjoying it. It is noteworthy that God's acceptance is used to support the case for joy.

### 3.5.11 Ecclesiastes 10:19

לשחוק עשים לחם ויין ישמח חיים והכסף יענה את־הכל: 'Food is prepared for laughter and wine gives life joy and money keeps everyone occupied'.

Seow (1997:332-333, 340) notes two alternative ways to understand the verse based on two homonymous roots יענה. It could be an independent proverb with יענה in the qal conjugation

of the root 'answer'. The sense would be that money 'answers' the need for food and drink, which are provided by money. It could also be criticism of the political elite (Eccl 10:16-18). In this interpretation, *יענה* is in the hifil conjugation of the root 'to occupy', in the same sense as in Ecclesiastes 5:19 in one of the interpretations (see section 3.5.7). The elite prepares parties and is concerned about money they need to keep partying.

Fox (1999:310) criticizes the interpretation of *ענה* as based on the root 'answer'. Hosea 2:23-24 has been used to provide the link between senses 'answer' and 'provide', but the meaning is inappropriate in the first three sentences as God does not provide the heavens nor do the heavens provide the earth. Another argument of Fox's is that the sense that money provides food and drink is too trivial. While Fox agrees with Seow's interpretation of the verb, he does not see the sense as necessarily critical of the elite. Because of the difficulty of the sense 'to answer' meaning 'to provide', I opt for the sense that money keeps people occupied.

Here *ישמח* 'gives joy' is used transitively in the piel conjugation. In the previous verses, Qohelet was critical of partying at an inappropriate time. While he does not directly criticize joy or the joy-giving activities, he notes that people may pursue joy in inappropriate ways (10:16-18), and this verse fits the context well. Thus I understand that Qohelet is critical of partying and occupation with money. He is not critical of joy per se, but of the fact that it is accompanied by ill-timed partying.

### 3.5.12 Ecclesiastes 11:8-9

כי אם־שנים הרבה יחיה האדם בכלם ישמח ויזכר את־ימי החשך כִּיהִרְבָּה יָהִיו כָּל־שְׂבָא הַבָּל: שִׂמְחָ בַּחֹר בִּילְדוּתֶיךָ וְיִטִּיבֶךָ לִבְךָ בַּיָּמִים בַּחֲרוּתְךָ וְהֵלֶךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לִבְךָ וּבִמְרָאֵי עֵינֶיךָ וְדַע כִּי עַל־כָּל־אֵלָה יִבְיֹאֵךְ הָאֱלֹהִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט: וְהָסֵר כַּעַס מִלְּבָבְךָ וְהִעֲבֵר רָעָה מִבְּשָׂרְךָ כִּי־הִילַדְתָּ: 'For if someone lives many years, he should have joy in them all and he should remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that will come will be futile. Have joy, young man, in your youth, and be of a good cheer in the time of your youth and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes and know that for all this God will bring you to judgment. Remove vexation from your heart and put away unpleasantness from your body, for youth and young age are futile.'

Crenshaw (1987:183) argues that the dark days cannot be a reference to the old age, for there is no guarantee that one will live old. He suggests that the reference includes one's stay in *Sheol*. Seow (1997:348) disagrees about the reference to *Sheol*. He thinks that the reference is

to a time of misery and gloom. He notes the use of the phrase **כל־ימיו בחשך יאכל** 'he eats in darkness all of his days' (my gloss) in Ecclesiastes 5:16 and considers **ימי הרע** 'days of unpleasantness' (his gloss) of Ecclesiastes 12:1 as clarifying the expression. Seow's view is adequate to explain the text. Qohelet juxtaposes joy and remembering. He does not elaborate on their relationship but the thought may be that it is important to have joy now that it may be easy and as there will be many dark days of misery, joy may not be as easily available in the future. Nevertheless, one is to find joy in all of his years. 'Genuine joy' fits the meaning here well, though Fox's 'pleasure' is also possible if this text is looked at in isolation.

Longman (1998:260) does not think that a jussive interpretation of **יזכר** 'he should remember' makes sense, because he thinks it is contradictory to advice both to enjoy life and remember that one is going to die. I think it is better to treat **ישמח** and **יזכר** as parallel and in the same mood. The jussive makes good grammatical sense. If the days of darkness refers to gloomy days, the point is that one is to have joy, to whatever degree he can, all of his days, knowing (remembering) that there will also be many bad days. Qohelet's idea seems to be that if now is not a bad day, take in all the joy you can knowing that not all days will be great and if now is a bad day, accept that it is also a part of life. Also in a bad time it may be possible to find some joy. If there are bad years, one should still find some joy (**ישמח בכלם**). This advice is reminiscent of Ecclesiastes 7:14.

Bartholomew (2010:345) thinks that the **רע** that is put away from the body is evil, not pain. Seow (1997:350) takes it as unpleasantness, as one's experience of pain and misery. Seow's view has a better parallel to removing **כעס** 'vexation' from one's heart. Seow (1997:350-351) notes that the word **שחרות** occurs only here in Hebrew and that the ancients were confused about its meaning. Some take it as blackness [of hair] (from **שחר** 'black'), used as a metaphor for youth. It could also be related to **שחר** 'dawn'. Bartholomew (2009:345) translates it as 'the dawn of life'. Fox (1999:319) thinks that the metaphor 'dawn of life' would probably exclude young adulthood. He prefers the derivation from black, and considers black hair to be an antonym to gray hair, often used to refer to old age.

The relationship of Qohelet's exhortation to follow one's heart contrasts with Numbers 15:39 where Moses exhorts not to follow one's heart. Fredericks (2010:237) explains the Numbers passage by noting that there the desires were clearly unlawful and the Ecclesiastes passage by attributing the presumption that the "not-yet-old" are often responsible. Qohelet does note God's judgment in this very passage. This serves as a hedge to following one's heart. Qohelet

exhorts the youth to pursue joy and avoid unpleasantness knowing that there will be many days when it will not be as easy and also remembering God's judgment.

### **3.5.13 Conclusions on שמחה**

The word שמחה 'joy' can be used to refer to superficial merrymaking or genuine joy. Fox limits the meaning to pleasure. The superficial type of joy is seen in Ecclesiastes 7:4, but Qohelet's attitude there is different from the passages where he recommends joy. In the exhortations to value joy, Qohelet calls joy the best thing around. Whether pleasure or joy is understood is a matter of how one interprets Qohelet's frame of reference. Unless Qohelet was so depressed that he was unable to compare genuine joy and mere pleasure, he more likely appreciated genuine joy over pleasure. There is no reason to limit the meaning to exclude genuine joy. Genuine joy, rather than pleasure, is the best thing. Fox's view of limiting שמחה to 'pleasure' in the book of Ecclesiastes is unlikely to be correct.

Qohelet calls for a responsible attitude to joy. One is to pursue joy while doing good. One is to remember God's judgment in one's pursuit of joy. God approves the pursuit of joy. Qohelet does not so much recommend that one does things that give one joy (Ecclesiastes 11:9 is an exception), but that one has joy while doing good and that one enjoys the simple things of life, like eating and drinking. Elaborate partying leading to irresponsible decisions is condemned by Qohelet (see sections 3.5.8 and 3.5.11).

The exhortation for joy is significant. It implies that one has some control over enjoyment. One can enhance one's joy by the right attitude and wise decisions. Furthermore, it is no empty exhortation. One can exercise one's capacity for joy and contentment (cf Ps 131). Obsession with work can kill one's joy (see section 3.5.3). Qohelet considers one's attitude to work to be important. One can try to gain and preserve something for himself, only to fail ultimately. He will have to give it all up, some in this life and the rest at death. He cannot enjoy the results of his work after his death. One can also work with wisdom and moderation, do good, and have joy in his work. This is the approach God approves, and thus it is the appropriate approach also in light of God's judgment.

While people tend to value joy, they can still undermine their own joy by an achievement-centered approach to work motivated by a desire to gain secure profit. Joy, despite its value, does not give lasting profit, but it is a corrective to the achievement-centered approach to work. Qohelet has undermined the achievement-centered approach by pointing out its

limitations (see section 3.4). It does not bring the security one may seek by it, but it may kill joy in the process. Thus joy is a better alternative, as it recognizes the limitations of work and helps one avoid the trap of losing joy when working in order to gain what cannot be gained by work.

## **3.6 The word הבל**

### **3.6.1 Introduction**

As noted in section 2.4.8, הבל has been recognized as the key word in the book of Ecclesiastes. Understanding the word correctly is an important prerequisite to understanding the message of the book. The word is related to יתרון 'profit' in the beginning of the book (Eccl 1:2-3), and to יתרון 'profit' and רעות רוח 'desire of wind' in the conclusion of Qohelet's experiment with joy (Eccl 2:11). The problem with understanding הבל 'futility' in the book of Ecclesiastes is that its usage as a summary argues for a unified meaning, but no unified meaning has gained general acceptance. In the following sections, my own hypothesis is presented with its rationale for such a unified meaning, followed by testing its fit to each occurrence in the book of Ecclesiastes together with Fredericks's rival hypothesis, and a discussion of Qohelet's programmatic question including a discussion of how the author helps readers arrive at the right meaning for הבל, and a brief discussion of some possible reasons why scholars have had difficulty in arriving at this conclusion.

The word הבל has some clear meanings outside of the book of Ecclesiastes along with less clear ones. These have been well documented by Miller (2002:54-90). His categories are 'heat' or 'steam', 'breath', 'vapor within a living being', 'vaporous perspiration', 'noxious vapor', 'insubstantiality', 'insubstantiality emphasizing deception', 'transience', and stock metaphor. 'Vapor within a living being' has examples of הבל as causing the thickness of the urine of an ass and an embryo being הבל in the mother's womb. 'Vaporous perspiration' refers to steam coming off a person's body after a bath (Miller 2002:56). The word הבל is used as a synonym for רוח 'wind' in Isaiah 57:13 (Miller 2002:58-59). Transience is the meaning in Psalm 39:6, 12 (Miller 2002:75). The references to idols as הבל belong to Miller's category of stock metaphor.

The meanings that concern this study most are under Miller's categories insubstantiality, insubstantiality emphasizing deception, and transience. The category of insubstantiality collects examples of something vanishing quickly, something of little importance, speech or

thoughts that are in error, effort that is futile, help which proves unreliable (Miller 2002:62-70). They are something vanishing quickly, unimportant, unreliable, or futile. I see 'something vanishing quickly' as very close to 'transient'. It is significant that with effort, the sense is 'futile'. Miller gives Isaiah 49:4 and Job 9:29 as examples of this.

### 3.6.2 A new hypothesis

My hypothesis is that the word הבל means 'futility' (as a noun or 'futile' as an adjectival translation) throughout in the book of Ecclesiastes with the exception of possible instances unrelated to the thematic הבל and the summary statement. The word is introduced in the context of יתרון 'profit' of one's עמל 'work' in verse 1:3. The book studies the profit one gets from work and claims that there is none. This connection grounds the sense of הבל as 'futile' instead of 'transient', along with a better contextual fit in some passages to be discussed below. All is הבל 'futile'. This does not mean 'worthless' or 'meaningless'. Work can be worthy and meaningful even if it is futile.

Futility assumes a frustrated purpose. In this case the purpose is to gain יתרון 'profit', in life. In relationship to the programmatic question of the book of Ecclesiastes, for something to count as profit, it must be permanent. A temporal profit is more than nothing, as Qohelet acknowledges. He calls it חלק 'portion', but not יתרון 'profit' when he is discussing the programmatic question. In Ecclesiastes 2:13 wisdom is more profitable than stupidity as it brings a temporal benefit, but wisdom still fails to be profitable in the stricter sense, because death nullifies its profit.

Thus any attempt to gain permanent profit in life may be called futile. All work may then be called futile from this perspective, even if the worker does not purpose to gain permanent profit. By this I mean that the author or Qohelet, not the worker, sets the perspective from which futility is judged. By metonymy of effect for cause, whatever frustrates the possibility of profit may also be called הבל 'futile'. Thus death, for example, would be הבל 'futile'. If there is something that causes profit, even temporal, to fail at times, and thus it makes the permanence of profit uncertain, it can also be called הבל 'futile'. Thus injustice is a good example of הבל. A time in life, such as youth, that does not provide an opportunity to profit, can be called הבל 'futile' (Ecclesiastes 11:10).

The hypothesis is that there is a single underlying meaning for הבל and that it is futility in attempting to gain permanent profit in life with the possible exceptions of occurrences not

related to the summary statement. The possibility to gain permanent profit for work is the programmatic question of the book. This is defended in section 3.6.4. This meaning is extended by way of metonymy to things which destroy the permanence of any potential profit one may find in life and to things that do not offer any potential to gain permanent profit in life. The abstract sense that covers all these senses is *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit, (1) as that which fails to accomplish this, or (2) as the cause or (3) circumstance of the failure*. When all is called הבל in the summary statement, it means that there is no permanent profit (*All is associated with failure to gain permanent profit*). The scope of the word 'all' refers to human work and all it can achieve. It does not refer to God's judgment, which settles the ultimate value of every human work. Examples of הבל 'futility' are examples of a failed attempt to achieve permanent profit or examples of things which cause such a failure.

The programmatic question with its requirement for permanence is not contextually very active at every occurrence of הבל. Even if still qualifying for the definition, the context may point to a broader understanding. It would not be unexpected to have some occurrences of הבל outside of this definition, because even though the summary requires a unified meaning, there may be occurrences where the word is used not directly related to the main point in thematically backgrounded passages. Whether הבל is used outside of this definition is an open question that is assessed in the discussion to follow.

To accommodate for these qualifications, I reformulate the first version of the hypothesis. The reformulated hypothesis is that *the meaning of the word הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes (with possible exceptions when there is good reason to believe that the use is unrelated to the summary statement) falls within the general sense of 'futility', and in most occurrences within the meaning "that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit, (1) as that which fails to accomplish this, or (2) as the cause or (3) circumstance of the failure"*. I use this enumeration of submeanings when discussing each occurrence in the book of Ecclesiastes.

The word הבל means 'futile' when used in combination with work (Jb 9:29, Is 49:4, Miller 2002:68-69, 190). The part of my hypothesis that is specific to the book of Ecclesiastes is that the futility is seen against the background of an attempt to gain permanent profit. The question of permanent profit in life is an important one. While people may intellectually acknowledge the truth of its impossibility, nevertheless these same people may live not thinking about death and the limitations of life in a real sense. What they know intellectually

is disconnected from their value system as expressed in their life decisions. People accumulate all kinds of profit only to lose them. People may overwork neglecting their other values in order to achieve what they lose it in the end. Thus the message of the book of Ecclesiastes is very relevant even to those who might feel this summary statement is too self-evident.

This hypothesis contrasts with each of the views reviewed in section 2.4.8. The basic meaning of the word in the book of Ecclesiastes is not 'enigmatic', 'absurd', 'temporary', or 'meaningless', but 'futile'. The idea that הבל means 'futile' is not new but actually very ancient. Jerome translated the word as 'vanity' (see section 2.3.2.2). He understood vanity to imply lack of value. Others have understood הבל in the sense of 'meaningless' (see section 2.4.8.2.5). The sense of 'meaningless' is quite close to 'futility' or 'vanity' as the meaning of הבל. However, there is a crucial difference that differentiates my hypothesis from these views. I do not see 'futility' as implying 'meaninglessness' or 'valuelessness'. Futility would imply lack of value of all endeavors only if all would be futile with respect to every goal of any value. This extrapolates the meaning too much.

My hypothesis claims futility only in the context of gaining permanent profit. Gaining permanent profit would be a goal of value, but it is not the only goal of value Qohelet had. He also valued joy, rest, and wisdom, to name some of his other values. Thus there are values Qohelet affirmed, and this is not contradicted by the affirmation of futility. It is the contextualization of futility to gaining permanent profit and excluding general meaninglessness and valuelessness from the implications of futility that is new in my hypothesis. Also new is the way I categorize the three metonymically related submeanings.

There is also another hypothesis that I will study and compare with the hypothesis of הבל meaning 'futility' that should not be discounted without further argument. That is הבל as 'transient', a view promoted by Fredericks (1993 and 2010). This hypothesis was presented in section 2.4.8.2.4. I believe it deserves a more thorough testing than the brief discussion offered there. Therefore I test it together with my hypothesis. These two hypotheses are not that far apart. One claims that all work is futile in achieving something permanent, and the other claims that all results of work are transient. At times the difference is clear, though at other times it is not easy to tell the two apart. Both hypotheses are tested for their applicability to each of the occurrences of the word in the book of Ecclesiastes.



### 3.6.3 Testing the hypotheses

#### 3.6.3.1 Ecclesiastes 1:2

:הבל 'Futility of futilities, said Qohelet, futility of futilities. All is futile.'

The word הבל occurs 5 times in Ecclesiastes 1:2. Here הבל is introduced by saying that all is הבל. As the word is not very specific in meaning, the reader is likely to narrow down its meaning by the immediate context. If that fails or the subsequent text challenges the initial assumption, the reader may revise or clarify the assumption later on. Thus a good initial hypothesis is that the meaning of הבל is narrowed by verse 3, unless there is something to indicate otherwise.

Verse 3 asks a rhetorical question on the עמל of יתרון. I take יתרון to mean 'profit' and עמל to mean 'work'. So then, we may hypothesize that the writer is saying that all work is futile in producing profit. Yet, the rhetorical question is not the same as a negative answer, as Fredericks (2010:71) notes. The theme is only introduced and the precise meaning of הבל cannot be determined yet with any certainty.

Miller (2002:100-101) argues that הבל is not limited to work here but includes all matters of human experience Qohelet will describe. This is true as far as it goes. He also notes that within the body of the work כל 'all' generally is used restrictively in reference to the subject matter at hand. Because of the link to work in verse 3, I think the main reference is to the futility of work, but Qohelet did not argue that experiences produced any more יתרון 'profit' than work. Miller (2002:104) agrees with my main point here that here הבל refers to futility, though he uses the word 'insubstantiality' with reference to the metaphor of 'vapor'. I see no reason to think the metaphor is a live one here.

This occurrence of הבל 'futility' is followed by a passage on incessant activity in nature against a backdrop of stability. The activity is tiresome (1:8). The question is implicitly raised, what benefit there is in activity that does not cause any permanent result. Likewise people toil a lot, and certain things remain the same. Especially there is nothing qualitatively new (1:9-10) when looked at a level of abstraction high enough. No matter what people do, there is nothing new that might change this situation. This passage challenges the potential profit of labor in that labor will never get finished for good so that a qualitatively new

situation arises in which renewed labor is no longer needed. Thus labor does not yield any permanent profit. People are like nature in unfinished activity. Here the meaning is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this.*

If the meaning is 'transient', the sense is that all is transient, which raises the question of profit. The 'all' is limited, as for example God is outside the referent (Fredericks 2010:69-70). Yet work in itself is not described as transient. Rather activity is described as incessant in 1:4-9.

### **3.6.3.2 Ecclesiastes 1:14**

:רוח ורעות הכל הבל ורעות רוח: 'ראיתי את-כל-המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח: I saw all the deeds done under the sun and they are all futile and desire of wind.'

The word **הבל** occurs once in Ecclesiastes 1:14. In 1:13 Qohelet complains that God has given a painful (**רע**) task for people to occupy themselves with, the study of work. Then he gives his conclusion that it is all **הבל ורעות רוח** 'futile and desire of wind'. The expression **רוח ורעות רוח** 'desire of wind' presumably helped the original readers in understanding futility. Unfortunately for us, the meaning of the phrase is somewhat uncertain. See the discussion in section 3.7. If the meaning is 'desire of wind' and 'wind' is a metaphor for transience, it points to the reason for futility. People work and thereby produce something transient. Thus ultimately it is futile, though possibly quite beneficial in the short run.

The futility of work may be understood in one of two senses. One is that there is an impossible attempt behind work: to make a profit out of life. While Qohelet exaggerated in claiming that all work is an attempt to achieve the impossible (in Eccl 4:4 he claims similarly that all work is based on envy), it is true that there is a mindset of trying to gain profit from life by working hard, yet never asking the hard questions of why. Qohelet challenges this mindset head on (see for example Eccl 4:4-8). The profit-orientation to work is briefly discussed in relationship to enjoyment-orientation in section 3.8.

The other sense is that Qohelet evaluates all work from the goal of making a profit, his own criterion, not necessarily that of the worker. So here **הבל** fits well with the idea of futility. This conclusion is similar to that of Miller (2002:106-107), though he adds 'foulness' as a multivalent meaning that is suggested but not emphasized. Here the meaning is (1) *that*

*which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this.*

If the meaning of הבל is understood as 'transient', the meaning of כל-המעשים is 'all the results of work' rather than 'all work' (metonymy of cause for effect). All work is hardly called transient here as Qohelet has just emphasized the incessant activity in nature. The fact mentioned earlier (1:10) that there will be no memory left for later generations supports transience.

### **3.6.3.3 Ecclesiastes 2:1-11**

The word הבל occurs twice in this passage (2:1 and 2:11). In 2:1 Qohelet calls his attempt to test himself with joy הבל 'futile'. He lists things he did. It is noteworthy that the experiment with joy was successful in producing joy, yet it was unsuccessful in producing יתרון 'profit' (Eccl 2:10-11, see also section 3.4.3). In Ecclesiastes 2:11 Qohelet considers all that he had achieved and he notes that it was הבל 'futile' and רעות רוח 'desire of wind'. He was attempting to gain something by his pursuits, but he failed in that. His work was futile, but he had a good time in the process. Though not explicitly stated, it is possible that what he attempted to gain was יתרון 'profit', as this is what he notes he did not get. In any case, that is how he evaluated the results of his experiment. Thus the words הבל 'futile', רעות רוח 'desire of wind', and יתרון 'profit' explain each other here. Here the meaning for both occurrences is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this.*

If הבל is understood as 'transience', the referent of הבל in 2:1 is likely to be the joy rather than the test. In 2:11 the thought is that because all the results of Qohelet's works were transient, they could not produce any profit.

### **3.6.3.4 Ecclesiastes 2:15-16**

ואמרתי אני בלבי כמקרה הכסיל גם־אני יקרני ולמה חכמתי אני אז יותר ודברתי בלבי שגם־זה הבל: כי אין זכרון לחכם עַם־הכסיל לעולם בשכבר הימים הבאים הכל נשכח ואין: 'And I said in my heart that what happens to the fool will also happen to me. So why have I become so overly wise? And I said in my heart, this also is futile, for there is no remembrance for the wise with the fool in that already in the coming days all will be forgotten forever and the wise will die like the fool.'

In this section the word הבל 'futility' occurs once, in verse 2:15. Qohelet notes that there is more profit for wisdom than foolishness even though he has claimed that there is no profit (Ecclesiastes 2:13 and 2:11, see also sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4). In Ecclesiastes 2:14-15 Qohelet claims to have become excessively wise and that the wise and the foolish have the same lot. This may not be limited to death (Wright 2015:252-256), but it includes death, as 2:16 talks about the common death. 'This' he calls הבל 'futile'. Fox (1999:184) notes two possibilities for the antecedent of זה 'this'. It is that the fool and the wise both die, or more likely (according to Fox) it is 'Qohelet's becoming wise'. A third possibility is that the futility is expressed by the following כי clause. Against the last option is the fact that expressions גם־זה הבל 'also this is futile' or גם הוא הבל 'also it is futile' are either certainly or likely cataphoric everywhere else in the book of Ecclesiastes (2:1, 2:19, 2:21, 2:23, 2:26, 4:4, 4:8, 4:16, 5:9, 6:9, 7:6, 8:10, 8:15), with 8:10 being probably the most debatable of these examples.

Thus understood, the following כי phrase explains the assertion or expands on it. Though he has the same lot as the fool, Qohelet is particularly concerned about that lot including lack of being remembered and dying. Thus Qohelet realized that his effort in gaining wisdom would be nullified by the common lot with the fool, including death, and thus wisdom would not give him real profit. In verse 16 Qohelet complains that the wise and the fool will not be remembered permanently, but they will be forgotten. Verse 16 explains the futility by noting that one cannot gain profit by being remembered by future generations, as one will be forgotten. Thus there is not even permanent profit in the sense of being appreciated forever. As death will ultimately cause Qohelet not to be remembered, all he can achieve is futile. If Fox's view of the antecedent as 'Qohelet's becoming wise' is followed, the meaning is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. If the antecedent is that both the fool and the wise die, the meaning is (2) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the cause of the failure*.

If the sense of הבל is understood as 'transience', the referent is likely 'wisdom', and the common lot shared by the wise and the fool, which includes death, will cause Qohelet's wisdom to fade and thus cause its transience. Also the fact that it will be forgotten will make its memory transient.

### 3.6.3.5 Ecclesiastes 2:17-23

ושנאתי את־החיים כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש כ־הכל הבל ורעות רוח: ושנאתי אני את־כָּל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁאֲנִי עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ שֶׁאֲנִיחֵנוּ לָאָדָם שִׁיְהִי אַחֲרָי: וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ הַחֹכֶם יִהְיֶה אוֹ סָכֵל וַיִּשְׁלַט בְּכָל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁעֲמַלְתִּי וְשִׁחַכְמַתִּי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הַבֶּל: וְסִבּוֹתַי אֲנִי לִיאֵשׁ אֶת־לְבִי עַל כָּל־הָעֵמֶל שֶׁעֲמַלְתִּי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעֲמָלוֹ בַּחֲכָמָה וּבַדַּעַת וּבַכְשָׁרוֹן וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמַל־בּוֹ יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ גַּם־זֶה הַבֶּל וְרַעָה רַבָּה: כִּי כָל־יָמָיו מִכָּאֲבִים וְכַעַס עֵינָיו 'And I hated life, for the work done under the sun was painful to me for it is all futile and desire of wind. And I hated all my work that I had labored under the sun because I have to leave that to one that comes after me. And who knows if he is wise or foolish, but he will have control over all [the results of] my work that I have worked for in wisdom under the sun. Also this is futile. So I made my heart despair over all the work I had done under the sun. There is one whose work is done in wisdom and knowledge and skill and he will leave his portion to one who has not labored for it. Also this is futile and very painful. All of his days his work is painful and vexing. Even at night his heart does not rest. Also this is futile.'

The word הַבֶּל occurs four times in this passage (2:17, 2:19, 2:21, 2:23). In Ecclesiastes 2:17 Qohelet complains that he hated life because the work done under the sun was רַע עָלַי, 'painful to me'. He concludes that הַכֹּל 'all' or 'they all' is הַבֶּל 'futile' and רַעוֹת רוּחַ 'desire of wind'. Here the antecedent is to be limited to הַמַּעֲשֶׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ 'deeds done under the sun'. Qohelet hated life because all work is futile and no work can produce profit. Miller (2002:109) takes הַבֶּל to include both meanings of foulness and futility. He suggests that perhaps the futility of wisdom is disgusting.

The realization that wisdom does not even make any permanent profit possible, let alone guarantee it (Eccl 2:15-16), hit Qohelet so hard that for a time he hated life (Eccl 2:17). He had worked expecting to receive profit, but there would be no permanence of profit in any of his achievements labored in wisdom. This is so because he will have to leave all of it to another (Eccl 2:18) at death if not before. Furthermore, the other will have control over what Qohelet has worked for (Eccl 2:20), making it uncertain if it is of real benefit even for the next generation. Wisdom will not help make the profit under the sun permanent, as he will die just like the fool (Eccl 2:15). The fact that leaving for another what he has worked for was the cause of Qohelet's hating life can be explained against the background of Qohelet having pursued permanent and certain profit. The profit was to be permanent because the possibility

of losing it bothered him. It was to be certain because it bothered Qohelet that the one who will control the results of his work may be foolish or wise, thus depriving him of certainty and possibly thereby permanence of the benefit for those after him. It also bothered him that he would not be remembered (2:16).

The futility of work is accentuated by losing the results to not just anyone but to one who has not worked for it. This contrasts one working for something and getting a proper reward, albeit temporal, for it, and one who does not even have to work for it. The fact that one may receive the reward of work without working for it points to the lack of correlation between work and its results. Work is more futile if its reward may be received without work. Another aggravating circumstance of the futility is that the work is not enjoyed. It is **מכאבים וכאס** 'painful and vexing'.

The referent of **הבל** is 'the deeds done under the sun' of verse 17. The pursuit of wisdom in verse 15 is possibly included in the deeds. The sense of **הבל** is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. Miller (2002:109) sees 'foulness' as a significant component of the meaning of the word **הבל**. If **הבל** is not considered a live metaphor with Miller but rather as an ordinary polysemous word, it is possible that foulness is not indicated so much by the word **הבל** as by the context. Of course, futility tends to have a negative connotation anyways, so Miller's association with foulness is plausible.

Miller (2002:109-110) evaluates **הבל** as signifying foulness in Ecclesiastes 2:18-23. It is evident that Qohelet considers the situation foul, as he uses a number of expressions with a strong negative connotation, such as **ושנתי אני את-כל-עמלי** 'I hated all my work' (2:18), **גם-זו הבל ורעה רבה** 'also this is futility and a great pain' (2:21). Miller takes this as evidence that the sense is 'foulness'. The logic holds if the metaphor is considered a live one, but there is no compelling reason to do so. If **הבל** has 'futility' as part of its semantics, the foulness is expressed by the other negative words in the context and with the inherently negative connotation of 'futility'. The normal sense of **הבל** as 'futile' in the context of the book of Ecclesiastes is not changed.

The fact that Qohelet does not know whether he will leave his possessions to a wise or foolish person constitutes the futility in 2:19. It is not the fact that someone else will have them, as that is mentioned as another futility in 2:21. In 2:21 what constitutes futility is that

one must leave his possessions to another. In 2:22 the question is asked what a man will get for his work. In 2:23 the worker is described as one whose days are painful (כל־ימיו) (מכאבים), he is vexed (כעס) and is not able to rest because of work. It is this pain that is called הבל 'futile'.

In Ecclesiastes 2:19 and 2:21, the sense is (2) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the cause of the failure*. In 2:23, the likely referent is the pain and restlessness of the worker, a situation brought about by the very effort to gain profit. That pain is futile because the purpose of tolerating pain and restlessness in helping achieve profit is frustrated. This is sense (3) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the circumstance of the failure*.

In this passage several key concepts are revealed. First, Qohelet was looking for profit that was permanent. Second, his discourse, at least at this point, was concerned with work done in wisdom and great effort, but the work itself was not enjoyed but rather caused restlessness. Third, in this passage Qohelet expresses the pain associated with diligent work and losing its rewards.

If the sense of הבל is taken as 'transience', the results of Qohelet's works were transient (2:17), especially as far as he was concerned, since he would pass them over to someone else (2:18). In 2:19 the referent is not likely Qohelet's possessions, which were already called הבל in 2:17, as they are introduced by גם 'also' in 2:19. So the referent is likely the fact that someone else has Qohelet's possessions. For him also it is transient. Yet this introduces a relatively irrelevant note to the thought. In 2:20 Qohelet is still concerned about his leaving his possessions. Thus here sense 'futile' fits somewhat better. In 2:21 the referent is the fact of leaving one's possessions. This should be understood metonymically: it causes possession to be transient. In 2:23 there is a note of comfort. The pain of the worker is transient.

### 3.6.3.6 Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

אין־טוב באדם משיאכל ושתה והראה את־נפשו טוב בעמלו גם־זה ראיתי אני מיד האלהים היא: כי מי יאכל ומי יחוש חוץ ממני: כי לאדם שטוב לפניו נתן חכמה ודעת ושמחה ולחוטא 'There is nothing better for one than that he eats and drinks and lets himself enjoy good in his work. Also this, I saw, is from God's hand. *Who eats and who frets without me? To the one who is good before*

*him, he gave wisdom and knowledge and joy, and to the sinner he gave the task of gathering and collecting to give to one who is good before God. Also this is futile and desire of wind.'*

In this passage the word **הבל** is used once in verse 26. In the passage **שיאכל** has been emended to **משיאכל** with Fox (1999:189) and others. Seow (1997:139) suggests that the emendation is unnecessary. He explains the **ש** as perhaps standing for **כי**. I am not aware of any instances of this, and it seems unlikely. Without the emendation the sense would be 'there is nothing good in or for a man that...'. The sections in italics (verse 25 and the beginning of verse 26) are introduced with the interpretive marker **כי** (Follingstad 2001). The italics are used to mark this in the translation. The relationship of the sections to the preceding is not made specific by the particle. The interpretive marker may account for the otherwise strange change of person in **חוץ ממני** 'without me'. This is a quote put in the mouth of God, and presented as a rhetorical question.

In the quote the verb **יחוש** 'fret' is used. The verb has caused considerable discussion. Seow (1997:140) opts for 'glean' on the basis of Arabic. Fox (1999:189) keeps the attested biblical (and postbiblical) meaning 'fret'. While it is very possible that the verb had meanings not attested in extant Hebrew, it is safer to resort to meanings that are known. If 'fret' is considered to be the meaning, the point is that man is dependent for every action and experience, whether pleasurable (eat) or not (fret), on God and his permissive will. Thus the sentence further supports the truth of the previous verse.

What is called **הבל** is a matter of controversy (Miller 2002:110-112). Miller presents five possibilities: (1) The enjoyment Qohelet recommends is **הבל** 'futile'. (2) The toil of the sinner is **הבל**, 'futile'. (3) The urge to seek God's favor in order to achieve the benefits described in verse 26 is **הבל** 'futile'. (4) Qohelet's concerns in the time poem of chapter 3 are **הבל** 'futile'. (5) Toil in general, a summation of 1:12-2:26, is **הבל** 'futile'. This is because one's toil ends up for the benefit of the one God (arbitrarily) prefers. This is Miller's preferred interpretation. (All glosses are mine.)

Option (3) is weak in that the urge is not explicitly presented in the text. Option (4) is weak in that an introductory **הבל** is rare, as Miller (2002:112) notes. He notes cataphoric references in Ecclesiastes 4:7, 5:15, 8:10, and 8:14 as support for the possibility of (4). In each of these examples there is some marking of cataphora (an introductory formula in 4:7, the connecting **ו** 'and', which may connect units rather than end one in a conclusion in 5:15, the word **אשר**



'that' in 8:11 connecting to הבל and an introductory formula in 8:14). In Ecclesiastes 2:26-3:1 there is no element binding the verses together, and the phrase is introduced with גם 'also'. Thus Miller's rejection of option (4) is reasonable.

Against Miller's option (5) is the connection with גם 'also'. It is easier to interpret it as a reference to another instance of הבל 'futility' rather than a summary. Option (1) is possible, but nowhere else does Qohelet connect a recommendation of joy to הבל in this way. Also the beginning of verse 26 intervenes between the referent and the reference. For these reasons, I think the referent is the God-given task of gathering something just to lose it to another, which is Miller's option (2). This connects the phrase with a near antecedent.

The fact that the sinner has to give the results of his work to someone else is certainly an example of failure to produce any permanent profit. Whatever temporal profit one may accumulate for himself, it may be lost in life. Qohelet comes back to this theme. The futility of the passage is from the viewpoint of the sinner who works only to lose what he has worked for, as it passes to one who is good before God. If the referent is the God-given task of gathering something just to lose it to another, then the sense is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. The cause of the failure is that the worker loses it to another. The options that Miller presents favor also the same meaning (1) with the possible exception of option (4), which he does not present in detail.

It is noteworthy that this passage is right after the expression of diligent work with wisdom that produces pain, vexation and restlessness, and the characterization of such work as הבל 'futile' against a background of attempting to gain permanent profit. The two thoughts are related in that it is not worth to attempt the impossible and to lose all joy in the process. Rather accepting futility frees one to enjoy. It is precisely because work is הבל 'futile' in producing יתרון 'profit' that one should turn one's attention away from attempting to secure profit (perhaps to enjoy it later) to enjoying the actual work.

If הבל is understood as 'transience', and the referent is the God-given task of gathering for someone else, הבל is to be taken metonymically as 'that which makes something transient', and the transient thing is the possession given to someone else.

### 3.6.3.7 Ecclesiastes 3:19

כי מקרה בני־האדם ומקרה הבהמה אחד להם כמות זה כן מות זה ורוח אחד לכל:  
'The lot of the human and the lot of the quadruped is the same. As one dies, so does the other, and they both have the same spirit and the human has no advantage over the quadruped for all is futile.'

The word הבל occurs once in the verse. The context of this passage is discussed in full in section 4.2.1. Here I discuss it only in relation to the meaning of הבל. The word occurs once in this passage and it connects the statement that all is futile to the common death of the human and the animal and specifically the lack of מותר 'advantage' in death. The phrase הכל הבל 'all is futile' is connected to the previous sentence by the particle כי. It does not mark a logical relationship. The logical relationship must be inferred from the content. For the general sense of all being futile, the meaning is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. The generalization is to be taken in the same sense as in Ecclesiastes 1:2. The common death is a cause of the futility as it is death that makes everything futile. Thus the relationship is that of a cause (death) and effect (futility).

Understanding הבל as 'transience' fits the passage well. Miller (2002:114-115) understands the reference to be to the lack of enduring substance. Thus he takes it somewhat to the temporal realm. Understanding הבל as 'transience' is a good possibility for the word in isolation, but I think it is better to take it in the same sense as elsewhere, and not follow Miller in giving the word several senses. There does not seem to be any local reason to use הבל differently from the thematic הבל. Fredericks (2010:122) does not give the word several senses and he argues that the sense is 'temporary' since the whole point of the comparison is that both the animal and the human are temporary. This is reasonable.

### 3.6.3.8 Ecclesiastes 4:4

וראיתי אני את־כל־עמל ואת כל־כשרון המעשה כי היא קנאת־איש מרעהו גם־זה הבל ורעות:  
'And I saw all the work and all the skillful deeds of the worker that it is [motivated by] one's envy of another. Also this is futile and desire of wind.'

The word הבל 'futile' occurs one in this verse. The work made because of envy or work that produces envy is called הבל 'futile'. Miller (2002:116) notes that for interpreting הבל, the

question is not important, but he opts for work motivated by envy. This is probably correct as it is more relevant to the next verse describing laziness and overwork, as work motivated by envy is a cause of overwork. The futility is clarified by the phrase רעות רוח 'desire of wind', possibly an expression noting the transience of what is envied.

Miller (2002:116) connects this passage to those who could comfort the oppressed (4:1) if they were not busy competing. According to him, the work done in envy produces nothing of value. In this he assumes a value component to the meaning of הבל. Work motivated by envy is called הבל ורעות רוח 'futile and desire of wind'. All work is הבל 'futile', but work done motivated by envy is especially so. Fox (1999:220) notes that "Driven by this unhealthy impulse, toil and ambition are inherently self-destructive and self-defeating." Despite whatever positive one may achieve by work motivated by envy, it does not produce permanent results. The referent is work motivated by envy. The sense is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*.

Qohelet calls all work as motivated by (or producing) envy. That is certainly a hyperbole. The hyperbole is somewhat lessened if we take עמל 'work', 'toil', 'trouble' in a negative sense. Nevertheless, the hyperbole is a significant one. Qohelet focuses on one viewpoint and notes its prevalence. If הבל is understood as 'transience', the referent is the results of work done in envy. They are transient, just like the results of all work. Realizing the transience may help the envious person give up his envy. The meaning fits the passage well.

### 3.6.3.9 Ecclesiastes 4:7-8

ושבתי אני ואראה הבל תחת השמש: יש אחד ואין שני גם בן ואח אין-לּו: ואין קץ לכל-עמלו גם-עֵינָיו לא־תִשְׁבַּע עֶשֶׂר וּלְמִי אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמַחֲסֵר אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִטּוֹבָה גַּם־זֶה הַבֵּל וְעֵינָיו רַע הוּא: 'Again I saw a futility under the sun. There is one who does not have another, neither a son nor a brother. There is no end to all his work. Even his eyes do not get enough riches. For whom then do I work and deprive myself of good? Also this is futile and a painful business.'

The word הבל occurs twice in this section, once in both verses. The first refers to the example of toiling for oneself only and not being content. The lone workaholic does not seem to stop to ask the crucial question of profit. He keeps on working in vain as there is no one to benefit from his toil, no son or brother, and yet he is never satisfied by the riches he gains. This caused Qohelet to wonder about his own work and the consequent deprivation of good (Fox 1999:222). In this passage both occurrences of הבל may refer to the work of the lone

workaholic. The גם 'also' links this example to the previous one in 4:4. This work produced no profit, since the worker is not satisfied and so is no one else close to him. This was also ענין רע, 'painful task'.

Alternatively the latter הבל 'futility' in Ecclesiastes 4:8 refers to Qohelet's own work and deprivation of good. Miller (2002:118) comments that here Qohelet declares toil which is done for personal benefit to be הבל like in Ecclesiastes 2:18-23 he called הבל toil which results in benefit for another. If the referent is considered to be the workaholism of the worker, the meaning here is (2) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the cause of the failure*. If the referent is the work itself, the meaning is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*.

If we understand הבל to mean 'transience', finding the referent is not quite easy. If it is the unhappy toil, its transience is hardly ענין רע 'painful business'. It would rather be a note of comfort. While logically consistent with the text, it is abrupt. A better possibility for the referent might be the work of the workaholic. Its results are transient. Yet it is hardly the results that are called 'painful business'. In this interpretation there is syllepsis as the referent changes from results of work to work itself. In this passage, 'transience' does not seem to be a good fit as the sense of הבל.

### 3.6.3.10 Ecclesiastes 4:13-16

טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל אשר לא ידע להזהר עוד: כי־מבית הסורים יצא למלך כי גם במלכותו נולד רש: ראיתי את־כל־החיים המהלכים תחת השמש עם הילד השני אשר יעמד תחתיו: אין־קץ לכל־העם לכל אשר־היה לפניהם גם האחרונים לא ישמחו־בו כי־גם־זה A youth who is a commoner and wise is better than an old and foolish king that no longer knows how to receive a warning. He left prison to become a king though he had been born poor in his reign. I saw all those alive who were walking under the sun with the next youth who would be in his stead. There was no end to all the people whom he led. Yet those after him will not rejoice over him. Also this is futile and windy thinking.'

In this passage the word הבל occurs once in the conclusion to the story of the wise commoner. A commonly discussed exegetical question is who the second youth is. Bartholomew (2009:192) identifies him with the youth who came from prison. He is second in the sense of being the next. Others understand the second youth to be another youth, the one who would replace the first youth (Longman 1998:146-147, Seow 1997:191-192). Seow

(1997:185) agrees with Bartholomew about השני being the next, but he counts the youth from prison as the first whereas Bartholomew counts the old foolish king as the first.

Fox (1999:226) sees three youths. He takes the רש 'poor man' as the second youth. This is irrelevant to the story as he is not referred to later on or used in any way, and therefore probably incorrect. Fox's (1999:225) argument is based on an attempt to make sense of כי גם, which is not clearly concessive according to Fox (1999:286) but rather introduces a concomitant fact. Fox (1999:225) argues that גם כי does not make sense as causal ('for also'), as nothing would be added by saying that the youth that came from prison was born poor. The argument fails to convince. The added detail need not be seen as causal. The particle כי does not mark causality. Another detail of the story is introduced reinforcing the humble beginnings of the youth.

On the identity of the השני הילד 'the next youth', Fox (1999:226-227) notes that Qohelet never uses yiqtol for simple past tense and that the temporal perspective is at the time when the first youth is still reigning. On the basis of these arguments Fox concludes that 'the next youth' introduces a new character in the story. Yet Qohelet said only that the youth left prison to reign, not that he became king immediately. He could be the second in the kingdom on his way to kingship or the next king at the time of Ecclesiastes 4:15. Qohelet observes all the people with the next youth, notes that he would become king and that later generations would not rejoice over him.

The temporal locus of the story is when the youth was out of prison and popular but not yet king. Qohelet projected the time when he would be king and that those after him would not rejoice in him. He describes a situation where his wisdom is not appreciated or even remembered by the later generations. If השני הילד 'the next youth' refers to the person who is next in line for kingship, it can refer to the youth that left prison, and there is no need to introduce yet another youth rather abruptly.

It is not quite clear what the antecedent of זה 'this' is, of which futility is predicated in verse 16. Fox (1999:227) calls it the situation of "one ruler passing on his power to the next with little rhyme or reason in the process". While one may agree with Fox that the referent is the situation, the question is what aspect of the situation is highlighted. Miller (2002:119-120) understands the story as one of a wise youth who becomes a ruler and is then cast aside by fickle followers. He takes the רעיון רוח synonym to go with הבל to indicate the fact that the

efforts of such a wise one are of no lasting result. Wisdom proved insubstantial due to human fickleness.

If the point of the story is the fickleness of popularity and the lack of appreciation of wisdom by the later generations, the story illustrates the lack of permanent profit in appreciation by the later generations. It is by no means certain even if one is wise and popular while alive. In this interpretation, the referent is the lack of appreciation of the wise leader by people and the sense of הבל is (2) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the cause of the failure*. No permanent profit from appreciation by the later generations is guaranteed, because that appreciation may never come, as illustrated by the story.

If the point of the story is to point out the futility of the youth's leadership efforts, and part of the answer is the failure of the later generation to appreciate him, the expectation of appreciation must be seen as a factor in the leadership efforts of the youth or perhaps more likely as a criterion of evaluation by Qohelet. The appreciation is negated by the next generations, and this accentuates the futility. Then the referent is the popularity of the leader and the sense is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. To desire appreciation or popularity is to desire something fickle and transient. The reason Qohelet was convinced that later generations will not have joy over the youth may be based on his political acumen or on his view that later generations will not remember him (Eccl 1:11, 2:16).

It is possible that רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' influenced the original readers' identification of the referent and caused them to favor the referent of the popularity of the youth. Because the sense of the phrase is tentative (see section 3.7), there must be caution in identifying the referent, so my conclusion of the referent here is tentative, but I favor reference to popularity. If the sense of הבל is taken as 'transience', the referent is the popularity of the young leader.

### 3.6.3.11 Ecclesiastes 5:6

כי ברב חלמות והבלים ודברים הרבה כי את־האלהים ירא: 'In a lot of dreams and futilities and a lot of words. Revere God.'<sup>30</sup>

The word הבל occurs once in the verse. The Hebrew is difficult here, but supported by the Septuagint. Seow (1997:197) suggests that חלמות והבלים 'dreams and futilities' forms a

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<sup>30</sup> Both sentences begin with particle כי here left untranslated.

hendiadys. He translates “For vacuous dreams are in abundance, and there are words aplenty. But as for you, fear God!” (Seow 1997:193). However, it is not clear that ברב means 'to be in abundance' as a predicate. Fox (1999:233) emends, which is somewhat risky given that there is support for the text in the Septuagint and, according to Seow (1997:197), it is substantially supported by Syriac Peshitta and Vulgate. Fredericks (2010:128) translates: “Indeed, in the middle of many fantasies and brevities, and many words, truly fear God.” In Fredericks's proposal there are two כִּי particles in one sentence. It is better to recognize two sentences. Bartholomew (2009:207) translates “For with many dreams come enigmas and many words. Instead, fear God.” This makes sense of the syntax.

Miller (2002:122-123) connects the verse with Ecclesiastes 5:2, which he interprets as “just as the dream (insubstantial) comes with much business, likewise the fool's voice (which is insubstantial) is accompanied by a lot of words.” In verse 6 הבל builds on verse 2: “In the midst of insubstantial (R) foolish activity (S), one finds excess of speech. Unlike the fool, the one who fears God will keep words to a minimum.” He takes the sense (or reference (R) in his terminology) of הבל to be 'insubstantial' here, and the referent (or subject (S) in his terminology) to be 'foolish activity'.

I provisionally suggest that חלמות והבלים 'dreams and futilities' forms a hendiadys ('futile dreams') and the second waw has the sense of 'also': 'in a lot of futile dreams, there is also a lot of words.' The dreams are not profitable but with them come lots of foolish words (following Miller in connecting the sense with 5:2). The reason for this is probably that some people believe in their dreams too much. Without an assumption such as this, it is difficult to see the causal link. Qohelet discouraged people from taking their dreams too seriously.

As the dreams offer no profit temporally or otherwise, but rather prompt rash vows and foolish talking, they are futile in sense (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. However, it is not clear that the programmatic question serves to limit the futility in this context. The sense in this context is rather *that which fails to give any profit*, if we connect it with harmful and rash vows. The thematic הבל is a hyponym of this meaning. This futility of dreams and loquaciousness is followed by an exhortation to revere God. It is likely contrastive. If הבל is understood as 'transience', the referent is suggested to be reckless words by Fredericks (2010:140). They are transient in value. The referent could still be dreams as dreams are very transient and thereby of less value.

### 3.6.3.12 Ecclesiastes 5:9

אהב כסף לא־ישבע כסף ומי־אהב בהמון לא תבואה גמ־זה הבל: 'The lover of money is not satisfied with money nor [is] he who places his love in abundance [satisfied] with produce. Also this is futile.'

The word הבל occurs once. The Hebrew is peculiar in having preposition ב before the object of loving. Seow (1997:204-205) explains this by way of analogy with other verbs, such as 'believe', 'trust', 'rejoice', 'delight' (glosses mine). Following this interpretation, I try to express the force of the analogy by translating the expression with 'places his love in'. Fox (1999:235) explains the lack of verb in the latter part of the parallelism as an ellipsis of ישבע, which is in the first part of the parallelism. This is plausible, and I follow this interpretation.

Ogden and Zogbo (1997:170-171) understand the referent of זה 'this' to be to “the fact that people keep longing for the security that wealth appears to offer”. Their interpretation is in line with their understanding of הבל as 'enigma'. With this understanding of the referent, the sense according to my hypothesis could be (2) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the cause of the failure*. Thus understood, the longing makes one unable to achieve the profit of enjoying the wealth. Miller (2002:124) takes הבל to refer to wealth in verse 5:9. He takes the sense as 'futility', which is a subtype of his category 'insubstantiality'. In this interpretation of the referent, the sense could be (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*.

As the verse mentions satisfaction, we might want to modify the sense of futility accordingly: *that which fails to produce satisfaction* (for the referent as wealth) or *that which causes the failure to get satisfaction* (for the referent as the fact). Lack of even temporal satisfaction exemplifies a failure to get any profit, not even temporal. The following text elaborates on the limitations of possession, which would favor interpreting the referent as wealth. On the other hand, the continuation fits also a reference to the fact that wealth does not satisfy a lover of money, as the limitations of wealth are described. If the sense of הבל is understood as 'transience', the referent is wealth rather than fact. This sense fits the passage well.



### 3.6.3.13 Ecclesiastes 6:1-2

יש רעה אשר ראיתי תחת השמש ורבה היא על־האדם: איש אשר יתן־לו האלהים עשר ונכסים וכבוד ואיננו חסר לנפשו מכל אשר־יתאוו ולא־ישליטנו האלהים לאכל ממנו כי איש  
There is a painful thing that I saw under the sun, and it is a big thing on a human. God gives a man wealth and riches and honor and he lacks nothing from what he desires, but God does not allow him to consume of it, as a stranger consumes it. This is futile and a painful sickness.'

The word הבל occurs once in this passage, in 6:2. Miller (2002:125) thinks that in 6:2 הבל may refer to 'no satisfaction', but more likely to the fact that one is deprived of the satisfaction provided by possessions. The situation is called הבל וחלי רע, 'vapor and an evil sickness' (Miller's 2002:125 gloss, italics his). I think Miller is right in interpreting the reference as one to the whole situation, though the situation in the text is described as one being deprived of his possessions so that someone else eats of them. Satisfaction does not appear in the text until the next verse (6:3). The fact that one is deprived of possessions causes the possessions not to be permanent profit. The sense in 6:2 is (2) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the cause of the failure.*

If הבל is understood as 'transience', the passage is difficult. If the referent is to the fact of being deprived from possessions, it would be such a radical viewpoint that it is not likely to be introduced in passing. It would entail a time when possessions would be permanent. I find such an introduction of a major idea too abrupt. Neither do I find the referent to 'much satisfaction' likely because it would be cataphoric. Another option would be עשר ונכסים וכבוד 'wealth and riches and honor'. But that is hardly חלי רע 'painful sickness'. Fredericks (2010:153) understands the example to be "one further example of the transitory nature of the fruits of one's labors". This view requires different referents for הבל 'transient' and חלי רע 'painful sickness'. Wealth would be transient and its transience painful. A more straightforward reading with the same referent for both co-ordinated nouns is to be preferred. This passage is problematic for the hypothesis of 'transience' as the meaning of הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes.

### 3.6.3.14 Ecclesiastes 6:3-4

אם־יוליד איש מאה ושנים רבות יחיה ורב שיהיו ימי־שניו ונפשו לא־תשבע מן־הטובה וגם־קבורה לא־היתה לו אמרתי טוב ממנו הנפל: כי־בהבל בא ובחשך ילך ובחשך שמו

:יכסה 'If a man gets a hundred children and lives many years and he is not satisfied by all the good and he does not get a burial, I say that the stillborn is better off. It comes into futility and goes into darkness [or goes in want]<sup>31</sup> and its name is covered in darkness.'

The word הבל occurs once, in verse 4. It is used as an adverbial בהבל. The adverbial בהבל is used only once elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, in Psalm 78:33. There it refers to the end of some of the rebellious in the exodus generation that perished in the wilderness. Fox (1999:243-244) takes the reference of הבל in 6:4 to be the unfortunate man rather than the stillborn, but in 6:5 the reference is to the stillborn. This makes for awkward reading (Miller 2002:126) as the subject changes with no textual indication of it to help the reader follow the text. It is better to understand the one that comes in futility to be the stillborn.

Miller's interpretation of הבל is 'ignorance' as a subcategory of his category of 'insubstantiality' (Miller 2002:127-128). He notes five uses of הבל associated with 'ignorance' (Jb 35:16, Ps 94:11, Jb 27:12, Jer 10:8, Jer 23:16). He argues for his view on the basis of the association with ignorance in 6:5 and the occurrence of חשך 'darkness' in 6:4. Seow (1997:212) gives two possibilities: the stillborn comes into the world in vain or only for a moment. All of these views appear as possible.

In the context there is a person that has a long life and many children, but is not satisfied. He is depicted as being in a worse condition than a stillborn. The context is not that of work or profit from work. Also the adverbial usage and the preposition ב set this instance apart from all other instance in the book of Ecclesiastes. Thus it would not be strange to have a meaning of הבל not covered by the summary הכל הבל 'all is futile' here.

Yet also futility is possible here. As the stillborn has no life after birth, he cannot really do anything. His being born is thus futile for the stillborn. Thus meaning (1) is applicable: *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*, but as an adverbial should be modified somewhat: *in a manner that fails to gain permanent profit*. The stillborn is contrasted to the hypothetical man who has achieved something socially valued: a hundred children and a long life. The hypothetical man is not satisfied, and so the stillborn with no achievements, whose life was futile, is preferred by Qohelet. The contrast is even more poignant if we take the expression in a broader sense: *in a*

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31 Kugel (1989:39-40) argues that the first חשך is not חשך 'darkness', but חשך 'restraint' or 'want'. He may be right. He understands the passage in the sense that the stillborn enters without substance (בהבל), dies in penury (בחשך) and after death his name is covered in darkness.

*manner that fails to gain profit.* I think this is to be preferred to meaning (1) as being more relevant.

If הבל is understood as 'transience', the sense adverbially would be 'in a transient manner'. This would fit the text as the stillborn does not really get to spend any time in this life outside of the womb. Zero time is very transient. However, it is not a very prototypical example of transience, as the transient usually lasts at least some time. Also Kugel's (1989:39-40) suggestion is possible: the stillborn enters the world without substance or with emptiness. I understand this in the sense that he has nothing as he comes. This passage is a good candidate for a use of הבל unrelated to the summary statement.

### 3.6.3.15 Ecclesiastes 6:7-9

כל־עמל האדם לפיהו וגם־הנפש לא תמלא: כי מה־יותר לחכם מן־הכסיל מה־לעני יודע: 'All work human work is for one's own mouth and the appetite is not filled. What is the benefit of the wise over the fool? Why should the oppressed know how to walk before the living? Seeing with eyes is better than passing of life [or roaming of the soul]. Also this is futile and desire of wind.'

The word הבל occurs once in this passage, in verse 9. The phrases הַל־נֶפֶשׁ 'passing of life' or 'roaming of the soul' and מֵרֵאָה עֵינַיִם 'the sight of eyes' have been variously understood. Bartholomew (2009:237-238) understands the meanings to be life (מֵרֵאָה עֵינַיִם) and death (הַל־נֶפֶשׁ). Seow (1997:214-215,228) understands the meanings to be what one has (מֵרֵאָה עֵינַיִם) and death (הַל־נֶפֶשׁ). Fox (1999:246) understands the meanings to be immediate experience of pleasure (מֵרֵאָה עֵינַיִם) and wandering of the appetite (הַל־נֶפֶשׁ).

The referent of זה 'this', of which futility is predicated, may be הַל־נֶפֶשׁ 'roaming of the soul', מֵרֵאָה עֵינַיִם 'seeing with eyes', or כל־עמל האדם 'all human work'. The choice is not easy. Fox (1999:246) suggests tentatively that it is the preferred item of the comparison, מֵרֵאָה עֵינַיִם 'sight of eyes'. Miller (2002:129-130) understands the referent to be 'human effort' (toil, wisdom, pleasure) in 6:7. The sense of רְעוּת רוּחַ 'desire of wind' may be relevant to the choice. Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes it always refers to work (see section 3.7.4). This consideration favors reference to כל־עמל האדם 'all human work'. Against this is the fact that it is a fairly distant antecedent.

Ecclesiastes 6:7 describes work for one's own mouth that does not bring satisfaction. Verse 6:8 presents the question of what benefit the wise has over the fool. Fox (1999:245) limits the statement in this context to the issue of having satisfaction. The wise and skilled amasser of wealth has no more satisfaction than the incompetent worker. The latter part of the verse questions the need for the oppressed to know how to behave in some manner, possibly lead (Fox 1999:245-246, Seow 1997:214). Seow (1997:227) places this in the context of the vulnerability of the wise before insatiable oppressors. The skill of behaving right does not save them.

Fox (1999:245-246) notes similarity of expression *להלך נגד החיים* 'going before the living' to *לכל אשר־היה לפניו* 'to all that he was before' in Ecclesiastes 4:16, an expression of leadership. It is thus possible that the useless skills of the oppressed are leadership skills. Leadership skills are useless because the oppressed are not followed. It is in this context that Qohelet says that it is better to see with one's eyes than to have 'a wandering desire', or as Seow (1997:214-215) interprets, 'passing of life', referring to death.

If the reference is to death and seeing with eyes refers to having something concrete, the thought is that it is better to be content with what one has than to be greedy to the point of someone losing his life. Then he says *גם־זה הבל ורעות רוח* 'this also is futility and desire of wind'. The idea that life is to be preferred to losing life (Bartholomew's view) appears to be less relevant in the unit (6:7-9) than the idea of satisfaction. Ecclesiastes 6:7 talks about the soul not being filled by work for oneself. It raises the question of profit the skilled worker ( *חכם* 'wise') has over the incompetent one ( *כסיל* 'fool') and the question of why the oppressed should know how to behave (6:8).

The view of taking *מראה עינים* as 'what one has' and *הלך־נפש* as 'wandering desire' is possible. In this view there is no death in the unit and the reference of *הבל* may be having the concrete (Fox's suggestion). That is futile, but preferred to greediness and desiring that which one does not have. The referent could also be 'wandering desire'. In this view, the wandering desire is futile, and therefore one would do well to focus on what he has. In other words, it is better to enjoy one's portion than to pursue the futile.

This fits the wider theme of the book well. Qohelet claims that all human work is for the worker himself but it does not satisfy (6:7). This raises the question of what the advantage of wisdom is or why the oppressed should know how to live (6:8). It is better to have something

concrete and to be content with it than to live in roaming desires, even though the concrete is futile, too (6:9), or because the roaming desires are futile. The reference to 'all human work' in 6:7 seems too remote to be the antecedent in this view. The sense would be fairly close to 'wandering desire', which would be a cause for the 'human work for one's own mouth'. This being mentioned just before the הבל passage, it seems a more likely referent than 'all human work'.

The view of taking מראה עינים as 'what one has' and הלך־נפש as 'death' and the question of 6:8 of the benefit of right behavior by the oppressed also helps connect the thoughts of the unit reasonably. First there is complaint that though man works for himself, he is not satisfied (6:7), which raises the question of the value of skilled work (6:8a) and the question of the usefulness of skills, perhaps more specifically leadership skills, when one is oppressed by the unsatisfied, and notes how satisfaction with what one has is better than oppressing someone to the point of death.

Thus understood the passage speaks of the danger of discontentment and the value of contentment. Whatever the discontented are pursuing as they work for their own mouths (6:7), it is הבל 'futile' and רעות רוח 'desire of wind'. Thus understood the referent of הבל is כל־עמל האדם 'all human work' in 6:7. It is described to be for one's own mouth. The description excludes altruistic works from consideration. Rather it describes work by a discontented person for himself. Understanding רעות רוח 'desire of wind' to always refer to work favors this view of taking הלך־נפש as 'passing of life' referring to death over taking it as 'wandering desire'.

Whether the referent is כל־עמל האדם 'all human work', מראה עינים 'the sight of eyes', or הלך־נפש in the sense of 'the wandering of the appetite', the sense is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. The association with רעות רוח 'desire of wind' may bring out the cause as transience, depending on the interpretation of the phrase, to be discussed in section 3.7. The meaning of 'transience' fits הבל in this passage well, as the concrete is not just futile but also transient. If the reference is to all human work, then the idea is that the results of all human work (metonymy) are transient.

### 3.6.3.16 Ecclesiastes 6:10-12

מה־שהיה כבר נקרא שמו ונודע אשר־הוא אדם ולא־יוכל לדין עם שהתקיף ממנו: כי י־ש־דברים הרבה מרבים הבל מה־יתר לאדם: כי מי־יודע מה־טוב לאדם בחיים מספר ימי־חיי What happens has already a name and it is known what a person is, and he cannot win an argument over one stronger than he. There are many things that increase futility. What advantage does the person have? Who knows what is good for the person in life the few days of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who will tell the person what will be after him under the sun?'

The word הבל occurs twice in the passage, in 6:11 and in 6:12. The first occurrence is unusual for the book of Ecclesiastes in that it is used as an object. Miller (2002:131) interprets הבל to have the sense of insubstantiality in the phrase י־ש־דברים הרבה מרבים הבל 'there are many words~things increasing הבל' (gloss mine). He sees an allusion to Ecclesiastes 4:17-5:6. If words are futile, increasing them increases futility. Longman (1997:177) also prefers 'words' over 'things' for דברים. Fredericks (2010:159-160) prefers 'things'. According to him, the idea of limiting the reference to words is based from limiting verse 6:10 to verbal contentions. He translates "many things increase impermanence" (Fredericks 2010:158) and suggests that it could refer to both things and words (Fredericks 2010:164). He suggests it is a double entendre, but this is unnecessary for his interpretation as words are things. The stronger one may refer to God, but need not (Ogden & Zogbo 1997:209).

If the point is that there are many things that cause futility, 'futility' is used as a metonymy for things that are futile in sense (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. Things such as death, injustice, misplaced effort, and hazards of life at times cause effort to be wasted and the profit to be lost. Thus many things cause work to be futile. The many things (דברים הרבה) are futile in sense (2) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the cause of the failure*, placing a number of things closer to the prototypical sense (1) of הבל 'futility'.

The second occurrence Miller (2002:132) understands in the sense of 'brevity', being guarded by the word צל 'shadow'. These indicate the brevity of life. This is in line with Fredericks's (2010:164) interpretation. They both note that there are expressions of brevity in the context (for example הבל 'few days of his הבל life'). Transitoriness of life and

ignorance of the future make knowing what is good difficult. Seow (1997:234) thinks that the expression אחריו 'after him' may mean also 'afterwards'. If it means 'after him', it does not refer to what happens to him after he dies, but what happens on earth after he dies. This is because of the phrase תחת השמש 'under the sun', meaning in this life.

In this interpretation, Qohelet considers that what is good for one to do in life may depend on what happens on earth after one dies. This indicates an intergenerational viewpoint to what is good. If the meaning is 'afterwards', the point is more general. Ignorance of the future makes it difficult to know what to do. This would be relevant. Seow does not give good examples that אחריו can mean 'afterwards'. He suggests it comes from the meaning of 'end' (2 Sam 2:23) and metaphorically 'future' or 'end'. While this argument is weak, the idea of one's earthly future makes more sense in Ecclesiastes 7:14 where the same idiom is used. Both meanings make good sense here.

It is possible that הבל here refers to transitoriness. As noted in the introduction to section 3.6, it is one of the meanings of the word. The life is described in the sentence as brief by calling its days few. This raises the question of their relationship. If they are close synonyms, the sense is 'few days of his brief life'. If they represent a different viewpoint, the sense is more likely in line with how הבל has been used so far, or at least it has the connotation of futility.

In light of the strong thematicity of the word, I prefer the latter and suggest that the sense is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. The life is futile in being unable to achieve any permanent profit. The question this description calls for is the very question asked in the verse, how one is then to use his life. The question is made more acute by the ignorance of future. One cannot even know for sure what would benefit later generations. So in both occurrences sense (1) fits the context well.

If הבל is understood as 'transience', the claim is that there are many things that increase transience and that life is transient. Increasing transience probably would mean cutting time short. The sense fits the text well.

### 3.6.3.17 Ecclesiastes 7:6

כי כקול הסירים תחת הסיר כן שחק הכסיל וגם־זה הבל: 'Like the voice of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of a fool. Also this is futile.'

The word הבל occurs once in this section, in 7:6. Miller (2002:133) takes the referent of הבל to be words, including traditional wisdom teaching (following Lohfink), but also notes that sense of insubstantiality is compatible with several interpretations. He sees an allusion to 6:11. Fox (1999:253) lists four possible referents: (1) “the fools' merriment”, (2) “the proposition that the wise man's rebuke is better than the fool's merriment”, (3) “the rebuke of the wise man” (Eccl 7:5a), and (4) “hollow and ineffective words” (Eccl 5:6, 6:11).

Fox (1999:253) argues against referent (1) that it is too obvious, and against (2) that the word הבל is never used to invalidate a proposition. He suggests that there may be text missing between verses 7:6 and 7:7 that might make the connection more clear. The suggestion is based on a space in one manuscript (4QQoh<sup>a</sup>). Referents (1) and (4) do not seem to be very different as the merriment and the words of the fools are associated. The words are not really mentioned in the context but סיר 'song' and שחק 'amusement' are. I suggest that this is the referent. Also Fredericks (2010:169) takes the הבל judgment to refer to verse 6 alone.

The purpose of the הבל expression is to motivate why it is better to listen to the rebuke of the wise than the amusement of fools. The amusement of fools is, like the thorns under the pot, futile. The thorns do not give much heat, but burn fast. Foolish amusement does not bring anything lasting, and thus its benefits are short-lived, and thus not profitable. Therefore the rebuke of the wise has benefits that last longer, even though they are not permanent either, at least within this life excluding divine judgment from the scope of evaluation. The referent is שחק הכסיל 'the amusement of the fool'. The sense of הבל could be (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this* but in light of the comparison to rebuke of the wise, which is also futile in the same sense (its benefits may last longer, but are not permanent), it is better to understand הבל in a more general sense of 'futility'. Also if the sense of הבל is understood as 'transience', the referent is amusement of the fool. The sense 'transience' also fits the text.

### 3.6.3.18 Ecclesiastes 7:15

Both I have seen in my futile days, there is a righteous person that perishes in his righteousness and there is a sinner that lives long in his evil.'

The word הבל occurs in this passage once. Qohelet notes that the idea that righteousness always protects righteous people in this life and that a sinner will always die young is simply



not true. The idea that Qohelet rejects is reminiscent of Job's friends' theology. He has seen an exception to this with respect to both the righteous and the wicked. The observation was made בימי הבל 'in my futile days'. This is reminiscent of 6:12 where the days of human life are called הבל.

Miller (2002:135) notes that 'brevity' would weaken Qohelet's case, and therefore Miller opts for an omnivalent sense consisting of insubstantiality, foulness, and transience together. Seow (1997:252), on the contrary, has little doubt that הבל refers to ephemerality here. In Ecclesiastes 6:12, I interpreted the sense to be (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. Here I think the sense is (3) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the circumstance of the failure*.

Qohelet has observed failure to gain permanent profit throughout his life, and crucially in observing the righteous perish and the wicked live long. They are examples of futility, not only in making profit transient, but also uncertain in duration. That the wicked live long is an example that righteousness is not an absolute requirement for a long life. Thus Qohelet calls his life הבל 'futile' by metonymy because in his life he has witnessed so much הבל 'futility'. If the sense of הבל is understood as 'transience', Qohelet simply calls his life transient. Also this sense fits the text well.

### 3.6.3.19 Ecclesiastes 8:10-11

ובכן ראיתי רשעים קברים ובאו וממקום קדוש יהלכו וישתכחו בעיר אשר כן־עשו גם־זה הבל: אשר אין־נעשה פתגם מעשה הרעה מהרה על־כן מלא לב בני־האדם בהם לעשות רע: 'Then I saw wicked ones buried and they came and from a holy place they would go and they were neglected in the city because they did so. Also this is futile. Because the sentence of an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the heart of people in them is full to do evil.' (Masoretic text, to be emended below.)

The word הבל occurs once in verse 10. These two verses raise a number of questions. The text as it stands is difficult. Murphy (1992:79) stays close to the text and translates: 'Then I saw the wicked buried. They used to come and go from the holy place! But those were forgotten in the city who had acted justly.' Longman (1998:218) criticizes Murphy's interpretation for assuming too subtle a shift to the righteous as it is not signaled by the text at all. Whether there is some textual signal depends on the interpretation of the word כן, which can be understood in the sense of 'in this manner' or 'in a right manner'. This is noted by

Murphy (1992:81), but apparently missed by Longman (1998:218) who thinks that the Murphy supplied the adverb at the end when it is not in the Hebrew text. However, the text is ambiguous and the ambiguity weakens the textual signal if that line of interpretation is followed. Bartholomew (2009:287) notes that by far the most common meaning of כן is 'thus, so', hence 'in this way', rather than 'justly'.

Fredericks and Bartholomew also stay close to the Masoretic text, but they understand the adverb כן in the sense of 'in this way'. Fredericks (2010:188) translates: “But in such cases I have seen the wicked buried, even the ones entering and leaving from a holy place, and they are forgotten in the city where they did these things”. Bartholomew (2009:289) translates similarly: “Then I observed the wicked buried. They used to go in and out of the holy place, but they were forgotten in the city in which they acted in this way”.

This line of interpretation has not convinced everyone and emendation is popular. Some think the Masoretic text makes no sense as it stands (Ogden 1987:135, Seow 1997:284). The ובאו 'and they came' is difficult. It does not form a good parallel with יהלכו 'they would go'. The latter is preceded by an adverbial of location whereas the former stands alone. No location for coming is indicated. The verbal forms contrast. The yiqtol form follows ובאו, which is odd regardless of whether it is understood as a w-qatalí or w-qatálí form. Emendation is supported by the LXX (εἰς τάφους εἰσαχθέντας 'brought to the graves').

Fox (1999:283-284) emends קברים ובאו 'buried and they came' to קברים מובאים 'brought to the burial area'. Seow (1997:284) emends it to קבר מובאים 'brought to the grave'. Fox defends the plural on the basis of Job 21:32f. The LXX also has the plural. Seow thinks that the mem was attached to קבר through dittography, which was then “corrected” to the plural קברים, which in turn caused a repointing to a passive participle. This made the original מובאים impossible. It was “corrected” to a finite verb to parallel יהלכו 'they would go'. For the meaning of the verse, the difference between Fox's and Seow's emendations is small.

Fox's emendation could have arisen with the text at some point losing the final mem of מובאים through haplography. As a result, the text made no sense and was reanalyzed. Because of the similarity of yod and waw in the Aramaic script, the final yod was interpreted as a waw. To make the forms morphologically correct, it was thought that there had been a dittography of the initial mem in מובאים after קברים. This gives the Masoretic קברים ובאו with all forms morphologically correct and the syntax looking somewhat right,

though leaving the text with problems. This hypothesis requires the Aramaic script at the time the error was introduced.

The LXX favors Fox's emendation, though the support is not that clear as the plural τάφους may have been chosen to match the plurality of the wicked being buried. On the other hand, the LXX of Ecclesiastes is literalistic to the point of at times making no sense in Greek (such as σύν + accusative used to translate את). This weakens the possibility that the translators changed a singular form to a plural, though I have made no systematic study of the translation of number in the Septuagint translation of the book of Ecclesiastes. To choose between Seow's and Fox's emendations is not important for our purposes.

Driver (1954:230-231) emends the verse to read ובכן ראיתי רשעים קרבים ובאים מקום קדוש יהלכו וישתבחו בעיר אשר כן-עשו: 'and then I have seen wicked men approaching and entering the holy place, walk about and boast in the city that they have done right'. In this emendation there is no burial. In light of internal difficulties of the Masoretic text and the textual support of the LXX, I think the next should to be emended. Another textual question is whether וישתכחו 'and they were forgotten' or 'and they were neglected' should be emended. The LXX translates it as ἐπηθέθησαν 'were commended', which probably represents וישתבחו 'and they boasted'. The confusion of כ and ב is not surprising. Crenshaw (1987:154) glosses this as 'and were praised'.

Considering the ambiguity of כן, there are five main approaches. (1) The wicked died and were neglected or forgotten in the city, even though they used to come from the holy place (Fredericks 2010:194<sup>32</sup>). (2) The wicked were honored in a funeral procession that started at a holy place and those that did right were neglected or forgotten in the city (Fox 1999:284)<sup>33</sup>. (3) The wicked were buried and praised in the city where they did their evil deeds and religious posturing (Longman 1998:218-219). (4) The wicked frequented holy places and boasted that they had done right (Driver 1954:230-231, Crenshaw 1987:153-154). (5) The wicked pretended righteousness while the righteous were forgotten by the community in which they had acted justly (an alternative interpretation presented by Crenshaw 1987:154).

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32 Fredericks (2010:188) translates 'even the ones entering and leaving from a holy place'. Thus he construes the clause as identifying or giving more information of the wicked, but he does not specify the relationship of the clause to its context.

33 Fox interprets it as 'neglected'.

The verse is connected with verse 9 by the word **ובכן** 'then'. In verse 9 Qohelet reports his observation of someone using authority to hurt another. Interpretations go in two directions. Either he presents some alleviation to the problem (interpretation (1)) or a further elaboration of problem (interpretations (2)-(5)). In verse 8, Qohelet noted that evil does not save its practitioner. Fox (1999:281) argues that the word 'evil' it should be emended to **עשר** 'wealth' because no one would expect to escape because of wickedness and because **בעל** 'possessor' is more natural with wealth.

These arguments are not convincing. The word **רשע** 'evil' is attested by the Masoretic text and the LXX. Many people in history have tried to escape a hard situation through evil (see for example the story of David killing Uriah to cover up his adultery in 2 Sam 11). The word **בעל** is also used of one that has a property, such as **שכל** 'prudence, insight' in Proverbs 16:22. The sense that evil does not save the evil person fits the context well. The death of the wicked could be seen as a continuation of that theme in interpretation (1). This idea fits well the co-text from 8:2 on.

The preceding text is further discussed in section 4.2.4, but I note some relevant points here. Qohelet exhorts to keep the king's command, and not to do evil because the king's word is mighty. The one who keeps the command will not experience a harmful thing (8:5 **לא ידע** **רע** **דבר**). For everything there is a time and custom (8:6 **לכל-חפץ יש עת ומשפט**), and [therefore] evil is heavy on people. As people do not know the future (8:7), and people do not rule over death, and as evil will not save its practitioner, it is better to do what is right. Qohelet gives examples where man has little control, that is over the king's judgment (8:4), over knowing the future (8:7) or being delivered by wickedness (8:8). He advises against doing wrong in 8:3 and notes the consequences of evil in 8:6. In verse 9 he notes hurt caused by authority. While there is a small break between verses 8 and 9, they are still connected by the anaphoric **זה** 'this' in verse 9. The idea of the wicked dying fits the theme well. We need not take **הבל** as evidence that Qohelet is complaining that something is wrong with the world (interpretations (2), (3), and (5)). What Qohelet thinks is futile is what the wicked did.

There is debate on whether the **זה** 'this' of the **הבל** statement in verse 10 is anaphoric or cataphoric (Miller 2002:138-139). Fox (1999:284-285) argues that the **אשר** of verse 11 would begin a new section and lack a discernible function if it were to be interpreted as anaphoric. He argues that verse 11 is not causally related to verse 10 and a causal **אשר** is never prospective. Miller (2002:139) disagrees about causal **אשר** never being prospective,

and he gives Genesis 42:21 as an example. The example is not quite convincing, as the אשר clause is easily interpreted as a regular relative pronoun ('whose distress we saw'). In this interpretation it is unrelated to the על-כן clause following it.

However, I think Miller is right on the possibility of אשר being prospective. The אשר of Ecclesiastes 8:11 may function to mark the referent of על-כן in the same verse in similar manner to the אשר in Isaiah 54:9 in its relationship to כן. Cataphoric reading for אשר in verse 11 (and anaphoric for זה 'this' in verse 10) seems to be the better view because in the other view, what is הבל is that the sentence of an evil deed is not executed quickly. In the context the possibility of profit through evil has been raised, but not the possibility of profit through failure of executing a sentence quickly.

Seow (1997:286-287) agrees that the אשר and על-כן of verse 11 go together. He argues that the Masoretic punctuation is suspect, as מהרה is almost always adverbial ('sentence for evil work is not carried out quickly') rather than predicative ('since sentence is not carried out, the work of evil is quick'). He suggests that the Masoretic punctuation may have been influenced by misunderstanding פתגם as an absolute instead of the construct.

I suggest provisionally that we read verse 10 as ובכן ראיתי רשעים קברים מובאים וממקום קדוש יהלכו וישתבחו בעיר אשר כן-עשו גם-זה הבל: 'and then I saw the wicked being brought to graves and they used to go from the holy place and boast in the city that they had done so. Also this is futile.' The provisional sense is that Qohelet observed the wicked being brought to graves. The wicked used to (yiqtol) come from the holy place and boast about it (yiqtol) in the city. All their boasting, hypocrisy, and wickedness was הבל 'futile'. It would not save them, as their time for burial had come. The sense is then (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this.*

The passage is difficult. If my tentative interpretation is followed, it is noteworthy that Qohelet calls evil הבל 'futile' in a context where he encourages the reader to value doing right. He attempts to influence values by talking about the futility of the values he wants the reader to avoid. Evil people may oppress and boast, but they will die, their evil will not save them ultimately and their boasting is futile. It is better to do right rather than to seek uncertain and temporal gains through evil or to be vexed by the injustice when people who do so. In the alternative hypothesis that הבל means 'transience', the boasting, hypocrisy and wickedness of the people referred to was over when they died. The text fits the hypothesis well.

### 3.6.3.20 Ecclesiastes 8:14

יש-הבל אשר נעשה על-הארץ אשר יש צדיקים אשר מגיע אליהם כמעשה הרשעים ויש רשעים שמגיע אליהם כמעשה הצדיקים אמרתי שגם-זה הבל: 'There is a futility that happens on earth that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the evil and there are evil people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said this is also futile.'

The word הבל occurs twice in this verse. First the scenario is introduced as a הבל scenario, and at the conclusion it is declared הבל. Fox (1999:287) understands the verse to be about undeserved length or brevity of life. Seow (1997:288) translates אשר מגיע אלכם literalistically as 'whom (one) treats them' and more freely (1997:276) as 'who are treated'. I see no need to restrict it to treatment and understand it as 'what happens to them'.

The situation is that on earth, things happen to the wicked as if they had done righteous deeds, and to the righteous as if they had done wicked deeds. This denies that on earth people get what they deserve. When righteousness and wickedness do not produce corresponding results, the certainty of profit by acting right is denied. The referent is the fact that this happens. The sense is (2) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the cause of the failure*. If the sense of הבל is understood as 'transience', the referent is either the state of affairs that injustices occur or the injustices themselves. Thus the idea is either that there will be a time when the reversals of justice will no longer take place or that the injustices are temporal and are rectified in the future. The passage receives a fuller treatment in section 4.2.5.

### 3.6.3.21 Ecclesiastes 9:1-2

כי את-כל-זה נתתי אל-לבי ולבור את-כל-זה אשר הצדיקים והחכמים ועבדיהם ביד האלהים גם-אהבה גם-שנאה אין יודע האדם הכל לפניהם: הכל כאשר לכל מקרה אחד לצדיק ולרשע לטוב ולרע<sup>34</sup> ולטהור ולטמה ולזבח ולאשר איננו זבח כטוב כחטא הנשבע כאשר: 'I put all this in my heart to examine all this that the righteous and the wise and their work are in God's hand. Man knows neither love nor hate. Both are before them. Both [happen] alike to all. The same meets both the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, and the clean and the unclean, and one who sacrifices and who does not sacrifice, the good and the sinner alike, the one who takes oaths like the one that fears oaths.'

<sup>34</sup> This word is emended on the basis of the LXX. See Fox (1999:292).

The word הבל does not appear in the Masoretic text, but it has been emended on the basis of the LXX in verse 2 for example by Fox (1999:291). The emendation reads הכל לפניהם הבל 'all before them is futile'. He understands the sense as 'everything one sees is absurd'. Murphy (1992:224-225) thinks that the Masoretic text makes sense as it stands but is very awkward. Seow (1997:299) says that it is difficult to argue one way or the other. If the emendation is accepted, the sense becomes that both 'love' and 'hate' that is before all people, is הבל. Miller (2002:143) takes it in the sense of 'foul' and possibly also insubstantiality of thinking (mystery).

If we do not emend, we need to make sense of the Masoretic לכל כאשר לכל. In the co-text Qohelet has just noted that man knows neither love or hate and both are before him. This is best taken in the temporal sense, that is people will experience both love and hate. That they do not know either probably means that man does not know how and when they will be realized. As Seow (1997:298) notes that the expression has גם 'also' and not אם 'if'. Thus the unknown is not *whether* there will be love or hate, but the love or hate itself. From this Seow makes the conclusion that the love and hate are related to “their works” and that when people die, their passions go with them to the unknown. I don't think this is a necessary conclusion.

The text says that man does not know (יודע) which is easier to read as a present state of unawareness rather than a future one. There is no indication of a future reference, for which ידע (yiqtol) would be more natural. The phrase הכל לפניהם 'both are before them' elaborates on the meaning of what is not known. I take the sense to be that people do not know love or hate because both are temporally before them and thus they does not know how and when they will experience them.

The form לפניהם is plural, and thus it does not have concord with האדם. This may be due to the plural forms in the earlier part of verse 1. Right after this sentence is הכל כאשר לכל. The first הכל is likely a reference to the love and hate of the previous verse, thus better understood as 'both' than 'all'. There is no verb, the sense is probably 'happen' or something similar. Thus the meaning of the phrase would be 'both happen like they do to everyone'.

After this statement, Qohelet explains that it is tragic that all have the same thing happen to them. What the same thing (מקרה אחד) is that happens to all is debated. It has been understood as a reference to death (Seow 1997:304 and Fox 1999:292), or as a reference to the same things happening to all (Fredericks 2010:207, Wright 2015:252-256). Favoring the

idea that it refers to the same things happening to all is that it ties the text together with the preceding co-text. In Eccl 8:14 the lack of distinctions has been mentioned. In Eccl 9:1 the unknowability of the future experiences of love and hate is mentioned and in verse 2 it is mentioned that both love and hate are experienced by all. It is easy to see the rest of verse 2 as an elaboration: no matter what one's behavior is, they still will experience the common experiences of life. Death is introduced in 9:3. A similar structure is found in 2:15-16. Death is part of what happens to all, but the common lot need not be limited to death. In both texts, death is a specific example of what the common lot is.

So the flow of thought is that Qohelet observed God's work (8:17) and concluded that man cannot understand what happens on earth. Then he considered how the righteous and the wise are in God's hand, noting that it involves experiences of love and hate, and they are not known in advance. On top of this, everyone dies, no matter what they do or don't do, and that is tragic. All of these are descriptions of human limitations, ultimately leading up to an exhortation to live an active and joyful life (9:7-10).

The alternative, emended text, changes just one letter with one minute difference, from הכל to הבל. The change causes the verses to be segmented to sentences differently and parsed differently: הכל 'Man knows neither love nor hate.' גַּם־אֱהָבָה גַּם־שִׂנְאָה אֵין יוֹדֵעַ הָאָדָם 'כֹּאֲשֶׁר לְכָל מְקָרָה אֶחָד לְצַדִּיק וְלָרָשָׁע 'All (or both) before them is futile.' לְטוֹב וְלָרָע וְלִטְהוֹר וְלִטְמָא וְלִזְבָּח וְלֹאֲשֶׁר אֵינָנו זֹבֵחַ כְּטוֹב כְּחַטָּא הַנִּשְׁבַּע כְּאֲשֶׁר שְׂבוּעָה יֵרָא 'Like all, the same meets the righteous, and the wicked, the good and the bad, and the clean and the unclean, and one who sacrifices and who does not sacrifice, the good and the sinner alike, the one who takes oaths like the one that fears oaths.'

If this path of interpretation is taken, הבל may be taken in the same sense (1) as in 1:2: *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. A second alternative is to take the goal in this case to be avoiding death as it is active in the subsequent co-text. A third alternative is to link it to trying to figure out what is happening on earth (8:17). The referent is either 'all' in the sense that all that these people will do, or 'love and hate'.

Contextually, the most recently activated effort is that of trying to understand (8:17, 9:1). The first alternative is supported by the globally activated effort of gaining profit, according to the hypothesis being tested. There is no indication of trying to avoid death, though death is



lamented. The reference is to הכל 'all' or 'both'. The thought that love or hate is futile does not seem to be very relevant contextually. Thus 'all' is more probable as the reference. It relates better to the global theme of all being futile than only to the effort to understand.

Thus I suggest that the best interpretation of the emended text parallels the הכל הבל of Ecclesiastes 1:2. Even so, it breaks the thought somewhat in the middle of Ecclesiastes 9:1-3. Being a highly thematic word, it is not surprising that a copyist may have made the mistake of changing הכל to הבל, but it led to a poorer contextual fit. On this basis I think that the Masoretic text is closer to the original than the LXX, and the text is not to be emended. This argumentation of mine is dependent on the suggested meaning for הבל, and would have to be re-evaluated if this meaning is rejected. Miller (2002:143) takes הבל here in the sense of 'foul' and possibly also insubstantiality of thinking (mystery). If we take הבל in the sense of 'transience' and consider it present in the text, then 'all before them' is called transient.

### 3.6.3.22 Ecclesiastes 9:9

ראה חיים עם־אשה אשר־אהבת כל־ימי חיי הבלך אשר נתן־לך תחת השמש כל ימי הבלך כי  
:See life with a woman you love all  
the days of your futile life that he has given you under the sun, all the days of your futility, for  
this is your portion in life and your work that you do under the sun.'

The word הבל occurs twice in this verse in the Masoretic text. It is used in the expressions 'all the הבל days of your life' and 'all your הבל days'. Some LXX manuscripts omit the second occurrence. This is due to either haplography in the LXX textual tradition or dittography in the Masoretic text. With the second occurrence the futility becomes quite marked. If the life is unable to produce profit, so are the days of that life. The expression 'the days' stands in a metonymical relationship to 'whatever happens during those days'. The sense for the 'whatever happens' in both occurrences is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. However, if 'the days' is taken as the referent instead of 'whatever happens', the sense is (3) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the circumstance of the failure*. Meanings (1) and (3) stand in a metonymical relationship, and it matters little whether we place the metonymy in הבל 'futility' or in ימים 'days'.

Miller (2002:144-145) argues that here הבל symbolizes all that Qohelet has been constructing, transience, insubstantiality, and foulness, as this is not a guarded use of the

metaphor. He draws a parallel with the vapor days of Ecclesiastes 7:15. He is probably right that the expression is to be taken in the same sense as in the summary in 1:2. If the reason for not enjoying one's wife, and life in general, is the mindset of trying to gain profit out of life, the idea of futility of profit fits the context very well. The whole life is futile as far as any permanent profit is concerned. Also the sense of 'transience' fits the text.

### 3.6.3.23 Ecclesiastes 11:8

כי אם־שנים הרבה יחיה האדם בכלם ישמח ויזכר את־ימי החשך כ־הרבה יהיו כל־שבא הבל: 'If one lives many years, he should rejoice in them all and remember the days of darkness for they will be many. All that comes is futile.

The word הבל occurs once in this passage. The expression ימי החשך 'days of darkness' has been understood as a reference to difficult times, particularly those of old age, or as a reference to death itself. Ogden and Zogbo (1997:410) favor the latter because otherwise they understand Qohelet to have suggested that everyone will have a long life as an elderly person. They see irony in life being linked with years and the state of death with days. They think that the word 'many' does not suggest that the state of death will come to an end, but rather that it is permanent. Fox (1999:317) agrees that the reference is to death. He thinks that Qohelet recommends to remember death to be persuaded to lay hold of the pleasures that will divert our thoughts from death. The advice as understood by Fox is self-defeating.

Seow (1997:348) defends the idea that the expression 'the days of darkness' does not refer to death, but to a time of gloom and misery. He refers to Ecclesiastes 5:16 as a parallel. Furthermore he thinks that the author probably has old age in mind, but not only that but all the difficult times that may come in life. It is this latter addition that saves his interpretation from Ogden and Zogbo's critique. Qohelet is not promising many days of darkness as an elderly person, but many days of darkness, many of which may be in old age. Furthermore, the promise need not be exceptionless. It may be a generalization. The average person will face many difficult days in his lifetime. In addition to the parallel of Ecclesiastes 5:16, this interpretation is made stronger by no need to appeal to irony in contrasting years and days.

Qohelet's exhortation is then to rejoice in all of one's years alive being aware that there will be difficult times. All that comes, whether difficult times or not, are הבל 'futility', in that none is able to furnish permanent profit. If they were, it would make more sense to pursue whatever is not הבל 'futile'. The futility along with the days of darkness point to the

importance of valuing the joy that is available. The sense is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. If the sense of הבל is understood as 'transience', the days are called transient. This meaning fits the text well.

### 3.6.3.24 Ecclesiastes 11:10

:Remove vexation from  
your heart and put away pain from your body for youth and dawn are futile.'

The word הבל occurs once in verse 10. In the preceding co-text Qohelet recommends joy in one's youth and remembering divine judgment. Then in verse 10, שחרות and ילדות are called הבל. The meaning of the latter term is not well known, but the first means youth or childhood. Seow (1997:350) notes that the ancient versions are confused about the meaning of שחרות. It could come from the sense of blackness, from שחר 'black' or 'dawn'. Seow (1997:351) thinks the word may be related to an Arabic word meaning 'first period or stage of youth'. He believes that regardless of the etymology, the audience would have connected the word with 'dawn'.

Miller (2002:147) thinks that the meaning of שחרות is 'transient'. This fits the context, but the meaning is uncertain. If youth is transient, it must be enjoyed as young. Miller's suggestion also fits the larger argument. In a hypothetical world where youth were not transient, profit might also be permanent as people might not lose it in death. Thus the transitoriness of youth is a cause of the futility of all attempts to gain permanent profit. If this connection is pressed, the meaning is (3) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as the circumstance of the failure*.

A second alternative is to take the youth as a time (among other times) when one is unable to gain profit. This gives the sense (3) as referring to the time of youth, or the sense of (1) as referring to whatever happens in one's youth (see also section 3.6.3.22). Therefore one is to enjoy youth instead of trying to gain permanent profit. This interpretation would not change the sense of הבל. A third alternative is to take הבל in the sense of 'transience' and not to link this occurrence of הבל to the summary statement that all is הבל. Of these three alternatives, the second is probably the best. It connects the statement to the argument of the book and takes שחרות as some kind of synonym for ילדות.

### 3.6.3.25 Ecclesiastes 12:8

:הבל הבלים אמר קהלת הכל הבל: "Futility of futilities" said Qohelet, all is futile.'

The word הבל occurs three times in this verse. Together with Ecclesiastes 1:2 these verses bracket the body of Qohelet's words. Both verses summarize the contents of Qohelet's teaching. Therefore the sense is to be understood similarly. The sense is (1) *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit as that which fails to accomplish this*. Nothing will produce permanent profit in life. In the alternative hypothesis, this passage, like the summary statement in 1:2, calls all things transient.

### 3.6.3.26 Discussion of the hypotheses

Two hypotheses were tested for the meaning of הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes. One is Fredericks's view that it means 'transience'. The other is mine. It is that *the meaning of the word הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes (with possible exceptions when there is good reason to believe that the use is unrelated to the summary statement) falls within the general sense of 'futility', and in most occurrences within the meaning "that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit, (1) as that which fails to accomplish this, or (2) as the cause or (3) circumstance of the failure"*.

The testing of my hypothesis showed it to be promising in that it was able to explain every instance of the word in the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes 6:4 is a good candidate to be unrelated to the summary statement. Ecclesiastes 5:6 and 7:6 are good candidates to have a more generic sense of 'futility'. In 5:9 the near context may indicate another point of comparison than gaining permanent profit, namely getting satisfaction. All other occurrences fall within one of the three submeanings related to *that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit*. The hypothesis also satisfies the a priori assumption that there should be an abstract meaning that covers every instance related to the summary.

Yet there is a serious potential objection to my hypothesis. The preceding discussion has argued that the hypothesis is plausible in light of the way the word is introduced and used as a summary of the argument of the book. It has also argued that the hypothesis is compatible with each occurrence of the word in the book of Ecclesiastes. Even if these arguments are successful, this does not demonstrate that the hypothesis is textually supported. The hypothesis is dependent on the key assumption that the argument of the book is related to a

quest of permanent profit. This must be demonstrated and not just assumed, or otherwise the key assumption is imposed on the text rather than derived from it.

Specifically, what must be shown is that the author of the book indeed wanted the reader to understand the requirement of permanence in order for profit to be counted as relevant to his programmatic question and that the lack of permanence is enough to make an effort הבל 'futile'. This is done by summarizing the arguments Qohelet used in concluding that there is no profit or that something is futile. This question is taken up in the next section (3.6.4).

The alternative hypothesis, Fredericks's, that הבל means 'transience', was also examined. It fares well in quite a few passages. In others it causes some tension in the text (see sections 3.6.3.5, 3.6.3.9, and 3.6.3.13). Because of these difficulties, I consider 'futility' to be a more likely alternative than 'transience' for the meaning of הבל as used in the book of Ecclesiastes.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes helps the reader note the intended meaning for הבל 'futility' in the beginning of the book by connecting it with יתרון 'profit', possibly by connecting it with רעות רוח 'desire of wind', and arguing for futility and lack of profit by lack of distinctions, death, loss of remembrance after death, and the passing of possession (Eccl 2) and in connecting permanence with God in contrast to man (Eccl 3). The intended meaning makes sense in the context of overwork and wrong attitude toward work, and in the context of greed and contentment, discussed in Ecclesiastes 5:9-6:5.

The meaning of הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes has been a subject of much scholarly controversy. Scholars have recognized the need for a unified meaning, but found it difficult to come up with a candidate. If my hypothesis is indeed the right answer, why has it been so hard to find? I suggest that there are several reasons. (1) At times scholars have worked too hard to expose contradictions and too little on harmonization. (2) Qohelet does not define the word directly but indirectly through his argumentation. (3) The book has many Hebrew expressions that are not very well known to modern scholars. We have only a fragment of ancient Hebrew at our disposal. This has made it more difficult to exegete a number of passages and to trace the flow of thought in the book.

### **3.6.4 The programmatic question**

Parts of the preceding discussion on the meaning of הבל have assumed that the programmatic question of the book of Ecclesiastes is whether there is any permanent profit

for work. This claim should be textually supported. While the book does not explicitly spell it out, the claim is supported by several points in Qohelet's argumentation. (1) The programmatic question is expressed in Ecclesiastes 1:3. (2) Futility and profit are used as antonyms. (3) That something is not profitable or that something is futile is argued for on the basis that the potential profit is transient. (4) The answer to the programmatic question is given in the negative, there is no profit under the sun. The criteria for profit are too strict. Permanent profit qualifies as a criterion too strict for work to qualify. (5) The conclusion Qohelet makes is that one is to value joy in light of the futility. The last two points support the argument for the programmatic question indirectly by showing that it fits the context. The first three points relate to the argument more directly. All these points are discussed in this order.

(1) The book begins with the statement of the futility of all and continues with a question of the profit of work in 1:3. This sets the context for the reader for the rest of the book. Profit and futility are connected again as antonyms in Ecclesiastes 2:11, and futility is the thematic word of the book. The question of profit is raised in 3:9, and using different vocabulary in 2:22. The thematicity of הבל 'futility' also makes יתרון 'profit' more thematic if they are used as antonyms.

(2) Futility and profit are used as antonyms. They are associated in the beginning of the book (Eccl 1:2-3) with work in the frame<sup>35</sup>, and in discussing the theme in Ecclesiastes 2:11. They are used antonymically in 2:11 in Qohelet's conclusion of his experiment. Work is usually expected to produce some sort of benefit. This applies also to things used in work, such as wisdom or skill. The potential profit of these is discussed in the book (2:13-15, 2:21). Qohelet does not deny that these produce some profit (2:13), but not of the kind he is looking for (2:11). They are futile because they do not protect him from death (2:16). Things that might be considered profit are discussed in Qohelet's argument on futility in chapter 2. In Ecclesiastes 2:14-15 the accumulation of wisdom is considered futile in light of the same lot. In 2:16, the potential for appreciation by those left after death is denied by the transience of the memory. In 2:18-19 the potential benefit for the later generations of the results of Qohelet's work is made uncertain in that the one who will rule over them may be a fool.

(3) Futility is argued for on the basis of transience. The profit has to be permanent in order to count for the programmatic question, as argued in section 3.6.3.5 (Eccl 2:17-23). Death will

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<sup>35</sup> Frames are introduced in section 3.2.

negate the possibility of profit, as argued in sections 3.6.3.4 (Eccl 2:15-16), and 3.6.3.7 (Eccl 3:19). The fact that transience is a cause of futility explains why Fredericks's understanding of הבל as 'transience' in the book of Ecclesiastes works fairly well, though not in all cases (see sections 2.4.8.2.4 and 3.6.3.26). (4) The programmatic question is answered in the negative. This was argued in section 3.4.2 and touched on in section 3.4.3.

(5) The commendations of enjoyment sometimes follow a statement of futility (2:23-24, 8:14-15). Futility is a basis of the value of joy. Qohelet connects working too hard out of greed with the loss of joy (Eccl 4:8). People attempt to do the impossible as they work for profit knowing but not fully realizing that the very profit is temporal and uncertain. Thinking of death may help correct the values one has and help one see value in joy in the common little things like eating and drinking. Qohelet warns that one may have the wrong attitude (Eccl 4:4, 4:8) and overwork (4:6) and lose rest or enjoyment in the process (4:6, 4:8). Thus his emphasis on the transience and uncertainty surrounding the results of work serves as a corrective to workaholicism and serves to make people improve their value system. The very fact that Qohelet values joy even though he considers it futile (2:1) serves to remind that הבל does not imply valuelessness.

### **3.7 Expressions רעות רוח and רעיון רוח**

#### **3.7.1 Introduction**

Expressions רעות רוח and רעיון רוח have been generally regarded as synonyms, as noted in section 2.4.7. These expressions are relevant to the study of the meaning of הבל 'futility' as they co-occur with it a number of times. Quite possibly they were one of the authorial clues to help the reader find the correct meaning of הבל 'futility', but unfortunately for the modern interpreter, the corpus of their occurrences is too small to draw firm conclusions of the type the native interpreter of the times the book was authored in would have drawn quite easily.

#### **3.7.2 Introductory remarks on רוח 'wind'**

Expressions רעות רוח and רעיון רוח share the word רוח. The word has two basic meanings: 'wind' and 'spirit'. It is not my purpose to do an exhaustive study on the meaning of רוח. Yet a small study of some metaphorical uses of the sense 'wind' gives helpful background information to the discussion of the phrases רעות רוח and רעיון רוח.

החכם יענה דעת־רוח וימלא קדים בטנו: הוכח בדבר לא יסכון ומלים לא־יועיל Job 15:2-3 'Does the wise answer with the knowledge of wind and his inside with east wind, rebuke with a message that is not useful and with words that do not benefit?' Here 'wind' is associated with not being useful or beneficial. Because the word is associated with קדים 'east wind', רוח 'wind' is probably used as a live metaphor, and we are not dealing with polysemy.

Job 16:3: 'Is there an end to words of wind or what provokes you so that you answer?' Here 'wind' is used to express the uselessness of words.

Proverbs 11:29: 'The one who harms his household will inherit wind and the fool is a servant to one who has a wise heart.' Inheriting wind is not inheriting any possessions. According to Waltke (2004:512), 'wind' is used as a metaphor for being left with nothing. 'Wind' is used in contrast to something that might be inherited.

Proverbs 27:16: 'The one who shelters her [a contentious woman] shelters wind and oil touches his right hand.' Here the contentious woman is compared to wind and oil. Oil makes slippery and wind cannot be controlled. The reference is to the uncontrollable nature of the contentious woman. Waltke (2005:383-384) views the wind in this verse as a destructive storm.

Isaiah 57:13: 'When you cry out for help, let your idolatries [precise meaning unknown] save you. Wind will take them all and breeze will carry them away.' Here רוח 'wind' and הבל 'breeze' are used synonymously. The קבוצים 'idolatries?' are easily removed as a breeze will carry them away. Both words are used in a metaphor of wind blowing something light away referring to that which does not last and fails to be useful when help is needed.

Jeremiah 5:13: 'and the prophets will become wind and the one who spoke is not in them. This is what will be done to them.' This may be a wordplay between two senses of רוח: 'wind' and 'spirit'. The prophets do not have God's Spirit as their inspiration and they do not have his word in them. They will thus become (or turn out to be) metaphorically wind, possibly meaning that their prophecies amount to just hot air, to use a modern expression. It is a metaphor for uselessness.

Jeremiah 22:22: 'all your shepherds are shepherded by the wind and your lovers go to captivity.' The metaphorical wind will shepherd the



shepherds (metaphor for leaders), taking them away as they go with the wind. The metaphor of wind refers to God's judgment in which their lovers (metaphor for allies or synonym for their shepherds or their leaders) are taken in captivity.

Hosea 12:2 אפרים רעה רוח ורדף קדים כל־היום כזב ושד ירבה וברית עם־אשור יכרתו ושמן  
'למצרים יובל': Ephraim associates with the wind and pursues the east wind all the time. He multiplies lies and violence and makes a covenant with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt.' This phraseology is highly significant as it may parallel רעות רוח. The expression רעה רוח has been understood in different ways. If it means 'feeding on wind', it means that Ephraim attempts to be nourished by nothing. Some think the expression refers to Ephraim following after wind or trying to catch it (Gesenius 1857:773, Stuart 1987:189). If the sense for רעה is 'to shepherd', Ephraim attempts to shepherd wind. Shepherding the wind may be a straining and fruitless task (DeRouchie 2011:12) or an attempt to do the impossible.

Yet another explanation is that it refers to רעה 'to get oneself involved, mixed up with' (Koehler and Baumgartner 1996:1262, Stuart 1987:185 and footnote 2.a). The reference is to political alliance with Assyria and Egypt, assuming that sending olive oil refers to an attempt to gain an ally (Stuart 1987:188; Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000:758-759). So the sense of רעה 'to be companion' fits the idea.

The parallel line has רדף 'to pursue'. 'Pursuing the east wind' probably means pursuing something one cannot catch or something that is not worth catching. The question remains how the two lines of synonymous parallelism are related. Ephraim wants to associate with wind. As wind goes away quickly, so does the potential advantage of these alliances. This is similar to pursuing the east wind in that Ephraim pursues potential advantage that proves to be nothing, a connotation of 'wind'. In this interpretation the second line of the parallelism explains the nature of the association.

The alternative interpretation of רעה as 'to feed on' has the problem that it is not certain that רעה 'to graze' can take the thing eaten as a direct object. The direct object may denote the place of grazing, as in Jeremiah 50:19. The most common object by far is what is shepherded with the subject being the shepherd. There is a metaphorical use of the mouth of the fool that רעה foolishness in Proverbs 15:14, which might make a case that רעה can mean 'to feed on something'. The sense could be that the speech (mouth) of the fool is associated with insolence. See Waltke (2004:625) for different views and further potential examples. They

understand the root to mean 'feed on'. It is thus debatable whether אפרים רעה רוח can mean 'Ephraim feeds on wind'. Certainty is not achievable using the Biblical Hebrew corpus alone.

'Shepherding wind' as an expression of pursuing the impossible may not be as relevant in the context of alliances as associating with an elusive ally, as it is not quite clear what the impossibility would be in the context. To figure that out would take more processing effort than to figure out the association with elusive allies, as they are mentioned in the very text under consideration. If the expression is understood to refer to a straining and fruitless task, the meaning fits somewhat better. Then the attempt at an alliance with Egypt and Assyria is fruitless.

A third alternative is to assume a third root רעה. It could be 'desire' on the basis of an Aramaic borrowing. The meaning is possible also here. The Biblical Hebrew corpus is too small to give certainty on the issue. Probably 'wind' represents a vain hope of help, referring to a political alliance with Assyria and Egypt.

Micah 2:11: 'לוֹאִישׁ הֵלַךְ רוּחַ וּשְׁקֵר כָּזַב אֶטֶף לֶךְ לִיִּן וּלְשָׁכָר וְהָיָה מִטִּיף הָעָם הַזֶּה: 'If a man walking after wind and falsehood had told lies: "I will speak to you in ecstasy for wine and beer", he would be the speaker for this people'. Here walking after wind and falsehood are associated. Walking after wind probably means instability, unless the meaning is 'spirit'.

Wind is used to represent (1) useless words or knowledge (Jb 15:2, 16:3), (2) nothing (Prv 11:29), (3) impermanence (wind will take away Is 51:13), (4) something that cannot be controlled (Prv 27:16), (5) a vain hope of help (Hos 12:2), and possibly (5) uselessness (Jer 5:13). This brief study backs up what Seow (1997:122) has noted: "Wind is frequently a metaphor for things that have no abiding value or are insubstantial..." "wind' indicates futility or meaninglessness..." This study has not examined the range of meanings of רוח or their frequency or collocations in which they occur but noted a few metaphorical uses.

### 3.7.3 Introductory remarks on the root רעה

Both expressions רעות רוח and רעיון רוח have a noun derived from a root רעה. The word רעות is formed by the affirmative -ut. It is an affirmative of the abstract. (Joüon and Muraoka 1996a:265.) Alternatively the word is borrowed from Aramaic רעו, and the final ת marks the construct form. The word רעיון has the affirmative -ān, which in Hebrew became ון. In lamed-he verbs the yod of the stem was sometimes preserved and sometimes not. Joüon and Muraoka (1996a:262) give several examples of a noun formation with this affirmative.

There are at least two Hebrew roots רעה. The most common verb רעה is a polysemous word meaning 'to graze' when used of cattle and 'to shepherd' when used of shepherds.

Metaphorically it means 'to lead'. Another verb רעה means 'to be companion'. This verb is found for example in Proverbs 29:3 (אִישׁ־אֱהָב חִכְמָה יִשְׂמַח אָבִיו וְרֵעָה זִזוֹנוֹת יִאֲבֹד־הוּן:) 'he who loves wisdom makes his father glad and the companion of prostitutes loses wealth') and Proverbs 13:20b (וְרֵעָה כְּסִילִים יִרְעָה 'the companion of fools suffers harm').

There is a group of occurrences of a verb רעה with abstract qualities as an object: אֲמוּנָה 'trustworthiness' (Ps 37:3), אִוִּלּוּת 'foolishness', 'insolence' (Prv 15:14). Koehler and Baumgartner (1996:1260) discuss the meaning of these under the same heading with the occurrences with רוח 'wind' (Hos 12:2), and אֶפֶר 'loose soil' (Isaiah 44:20). It is debatable whether this is רעה 'to graze' (Koehler and Baumgartner 1996:1260), רעה 'to be companion', or yet another רעה. Perhaps the sense is better derived from רעה 'to be companion'. One is metaphorically a companion of trustworthiness or foolishness if the quality is characteristically expressed in behavior. Isaiah 44:20 אֶפֶר 'loose soil' is probably not what is eaten but the place where the idolater metaphorically grazes. That would then be רעה 'to graze'.

A possible third root רעה has the meaning 'to desire' or 'to pursue' (Koehler and Baumgartner 1996:1262). This root is thought to be a borrowing from Aramaic רעי, a cognate of the Hebrew רצה 'to be pleased'. The corresponding Hebrew noun form is רִצּוֹן 'pleasure', 'favor', or 'will' (Koehler and Baumgartner 1996:1282-1283). If this Aramaic root is seen behind the expression רעות רוח or רעיון רוח, it is a borrowing from Aramaic to Hebrew, and not of a direct Hebrew origin. In Talmudic Hebrew רעיון meant 'greed', 'ambition', and 'desire' (Jastrow 1996:1487). This is Aramaic borrowing. In Talmudic Aramaic רעותא means 'pleasure', 'will', 'good will', and 'ambition' (Jastrow 1996:1486).

If Aramaic is considered to be the background of the expression רעות רוח in Ecclesiastes, the meaning is 'will of wind' or more likely 'desire of wind' (see section 2.4.6 possibility (2)). It would then be probably desire of that which is not substantial or permanent. If Aramaic borrowing is the background, then we have a third root רעה in Hebrew through borrowing. Likewise if Aramaic is the source of רעיון רוח, and the Aramaic sense of רעיון 'thought' is preserved, the sense is 'thought of wind' or 'thinking of wind', with wind indicating the nature of thinking, not the content of thought. To disambiguate between the two, I use the gloss 'windy thinking'. Fox (1999:45) argues that no distinction is to be made between רעות and רעיון because the verb root produces verbs for both senses of desiring and thinking. This is not sufficient to argue that the noun formations do not make this distinction.

So far I have collected the following possibilities for the meaning of רעות רוח.

(1) Feeding on wind (רעה 'to graze'). Assuming that 'wind' means nothing, it means not to get anything for oneself. It could also refer to lack of satisfaction, as eating wind will not make one full. Whether this is possible depends on whether the object of רעה can be a patient (the thing eaten) in addition to a location (see discussion in section 3.7.2 on Hos 12:2).

(2) Shepherding wind (רעה 'to shepherd'). This probably means straining in a fruitless task or attempting to do the impossible. Whether this meaning is possible depends on how to nominalize רעה 'to shepherd'. We do not have many occurrences in our corpus. In Ezekiel 34:10 the construct infinitive רעות is used rather than רעות with the וֹת formative. This is not conclusive. The Biblical Hebrew corpus is not sufficient to evaluate this.

(3) Associating with wind (רעה 'to be companion', 'to associate'). 'Wind' may refer to that which is transitory or insubstantial. The meaning is perhaps 'doing something that amounts to nothing' or 'associating with the transient'. The root was used in connection with behavior with abstract nouns as noted in section 3.7.3. Here likewise we do not know for certain how the noun would be formed as the Biblical Hebrew corpus is not sufficient. In the context of my hypothesis for the meaning of הבל for the book of Ecclesiastes, the sense of רעות רוח could be 'associating with a vain hope of permanent profit' or 'associating with the transient'. The sense of association with the word is related to companionship or friendship and with abstract nouns it is used metaphorically as something characterizing the person. The meaning

of being characterized by a metaphorical wind requires some processing, which decreases the likelihood of this interpretation.

(4) Desire of the wind (transitory or insubstantial) (רעות borrowed from Aramaic רעו 'will', 'pleasure', a nominal form corresponding to the Aramaic verb רעי 'to desire'. The meaning could be 'desiring the transient or insignificant'.

The wind I take to be a metaphor for the transient. I will apply and test this meaning to the occurrences in the book of Ecclesiastes, but it must be remembered that this meaning is based on tentative arguments.

### **3.7.4 The expression רעות רוח**

#### **3.7.4.1 Introduction**

The expression רעות רוח occurs seven times in the book of Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The occurrences are 1:14, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 4:4, 4:6, and 6:9. It is almost always used in conjunction with הבל 'futile', a key word for the book of Ecclesiastes. The sole exception is 4:6.

#### **3.7.4.2 Ecclesiastes 1:14**

ראיתי את-כל-המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח: 'I saw all the deeds done under the sun and they are all futile and desire of wind.'

The referent is כל-מעשים שנעשו תחת השמש 'all the deeds done under the sun', taken up anaphorically by הכל 'all'. The expression רעות רוח 'desire of wind' occurs with הבל 'futile'. A plausible interpretation is that all work is motivated by a desire of what really is transient. This sense is also quite compatible with my thesis on the meaning of הבל 'futility', as the futility is based on the transience of the results of work. If this is the right interpretation for רעות רוח 'desire of wind', it is a textual signal the author used to guide the reader to the right interpretation of the word הבל 'futility' in pointing to the temporal dimension as the cause of the futility, thus helping the reader note the implicit expectation of a permanent profit. Also 'shepherding the wind' as straining in a fruitless task is possible.

### 3.7.4.3 Ecclesiastes 2:11

ופניתי אני בכל-מעשי שעשו ידי ובעמל שעמלתי לעשות והנה הכל הבל ורעות רוח ואין יתרון  
'I turned to all my deeds that were made with my hands and all the work that I  
worked to do. All of it was futile and desire of wind and there is no profit under the sun.'

The referent is all of Qohelet's work. The expression רעות רוח is associated with futility and lack of profit. Qohelet attempted to gain profit and failed in this though he succeeded in his attempt to derive joy from his experiment. There was a measure of failure, and the meaning of רעות רוח 'desire of wind' could well refer to desire of that which is not permanent. That is the direct cause of the futility of what he achieved.

Here the expression רעות רוח does not refer to attempting to do the impossible. In the context Qohelet made an experiment of joy. The test was successful, so it could not have been impossible. This passage argues against the view that רעות רוח is shepherding the wind as an example of attempting to do the impossible. Neither was the experiment necessarily straining or fruitless. Here 'desire of wind' as a reference to desiring the temporal fits better than 'shepherding the wind'.

### 3.7.4.4 Ecclesiastes 2:17

'And I ושנתי את-החיים כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש כי-הכל הבל ורעות רוח:  
hated life, for the work done under the sun was painful to me, for it is all futile and desire of  
wind.'

'All', limited to 'all deeds done under the sun', is called futile in producing permanent profit and also רעות רוח 'desire of wind'. All work is motivated by a desire to achieve something, which ends up being transient. The passing of it to another is explicit in the next verse and the transience of the memory of it is explicit in the previous verse. This expression רעות רוח 'desire of wind' probably helps the reader focus on Qohelet's desire for something permanent. The sense 'desire of wind' suits this purpose.

### 3.7.4.5 Ecclesiastes 2:26

אין-טוב באדם משיאכל ושתה והראה את-נפשו טוב בעמלו גם-זה ראיתי אני מיד האלהים  
היא: כי מי יאכל ומי יחוש חוץ ממני: כי לאדם שטוב לפניו נתן חכמה ודעת ושמחה ולחוטא  
'There is nothing נתן ענין לאסוף ולכנוס לתת לטוב לפני האלהים גם-זה הבל ורעות רוח

better for one than that he eats and drinks and lets himself enjoy good in his work. Also this, I saw, is from God's hand. *Who eats and who frets without me? To the one who is good before him, he gave wisdom and knowledge and joy, and to the sinner he gave the task of gathering and collecting to give to the one who is good before God.*<sup>36</sup> Also this is futile and desire of wind.'

The referent is perhaps the task of gathering just to lose. The task is motivated by a desire of what really is transient. In this interpretation זה 'this' refers to the task of gathering, and רעות 'desire of wind' is a metonymy for that which is motivated by a desire of wind, and the referent is the task of gathering. The transience is relevant in the verse as it speaks of losing the very thing one has gathered to another.

### 3.7.4.6 Ecclesiastes 4:4-6

טוב מלא כף נחת ממלא חפנים עמל ורעות רוח: הכסיל חבק את־ידיו ואכל את־בשרו:  
וראיתי אני את־כל־עמל ואת כל־כשרון המעשה כי היא קנאת־איש מרעהו גם־זה הבל ורעות  
:רוח. 'And I saw all the work and all the skill of the worker that it is [caused by] one's envy of another. Also this is futile and desire of wind. The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. It is better to have a handful with restfulness than two fistfuls with work and desire of wind.'

The expression רעות רוח 'desire of wind' occurs twice in this section. The referent of both is work caused by envy without rest. Transience of the results of the work is relevant in the context of envy. As Seow (1997:179-180) notes, rest and toil are not usually measured with handfuls. He understands נחת 'rest' and עמל ורעות רוח 'work and desire of wind' adverbially (glosses mine). Fox (1999:221) understands the nouns metonymically: it is better to have a handful of that which is gotten through calm, moderate activity than two fistfuls of that which is gotten through toil.

Fox and Seow end up with almost identical sense even though they understand the grammar differently. Here רעות רוח 'desire of wind' is parallel with עמל 'work' and opposed to נחת 'restfulness'. In the preceding co-text, Qohelet speaks of envy as a motivation for work (4:4). The second occurrence of רעות רוח 'desire of wind' is a relevant reminder that the desire motivating the toil of the workaholic is a desire for something that is actually transient.

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<sup>36</sup> The italics represent the Hebrew כי as an interpretive marker.

### 3.7.4.7 Ecclesiastes 6:9

טוב מראה עינים מהלך־נפש גם־זה הבל ורעות רוח: 'Seeing with eyes is better than passing of life [or roaming of the soul]. Also this is futile and desire of wind.'

The referent is either having something concrete or a roaming desire to have something or to 'all human work' in verse 7, as discussed in section 3.6.3.15. The sense of the transience of desire is relevant to both of these alternatives.

### 3.7.4.8 Conclusions on רעות רוח

With the possible exception of Ecclesiastes 6:9, the referent is always work. The sense of the expression could be 'desire of the transient'. Alternative (1) 'feeding on wind' is dependent on the premise that the content of what is eaten may be expressed by an absolute form in a construct chain. It is possible though not certain that the expression may be so used. In any case it is not common. Alternative (2), 'shepherding the wind' is not a good fit for Ecclesiastes 2:11. Alternative (3) 'companion of the wind' suffers from complexity. Of the limited set of suggestions studied in this section, this leaves alternative (4) 'desire of wind' in the sense of desiring the transient. This sense fits each of the occurrences. The view rests on the assumption that the expression is borrowed from Aramaic.

## 3.7.5 The expression רעיון רוח

### 3.7.5.1 Introduction

The expression רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' occurs twice in the book of Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The occurrences are 1:17 and 4:16. The word רעיון occurs also in Ecclesiastes 2:22 as part of the expression רעיון לבו and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. In the Aramaic Bible the word has several more occurrences: Daniel 2:29, 2:30, 4:16, 5:6, 5:10, and 7:28. The meaning of the word in Biblical Aramaic is 'thought' and in the Dead Sea scrolls the meaning of 'attitude' is found (Koehler and Baumgartner 2000:1983). The root has also the meaning 'desire' (Koehler and Baumgartner 2000:1982). In Talmudic Hebrew רעיון means 'greed', 'ambition', and 'desire' (Jastrow 1996:1487). Windy thinking refers to thinking thoughts whose content is transient.



### 3.7.5.2 Ecclesiastes 1:17

ואתנה לבי לדעת חכמה ודעת הוללות ושכלות ידעתי שגם־זה הוא רעיון רוח: I gave my heart to know wisdom and knowledge, foolishness and folly. I got to know that this is windy thinking.'

The knowledge that Qohelet would gain from his research is transient as it does not save him from death. So the sense of thinking of the transient fits the text well. Also the sense of 'will of the spirit' fits. The referent is Qohelet's study. The following verse indicates pain as a consequence of wisdom, and this may contribute to the attribution of windy thinking. Rather than produce permanent profit, the search for wisdom produced transient thoughts and pain.

### 3.7.5.3 Ecclesiastes 2:22

What does a human have כי מה־הוה לאדם בכל־עמלו וברעיון לבו שהוא עמל תחת השמש: in all his work and thinking of his heart that he does under the sun?'

This passage does not allow for the meaning of 'grazing' or 'shepherding'. If the meaning of רעיון is the same as elsewhere in this book, it does not come from רעה 'graze' or 'shepherd'. In this passage עמל 'work' and רעיון לבו 'thinking of his heart' are parallel. Possibly רעיון לבו 'thinking of his heart' further defines or expresses a viewpoint to עמל 'work' or is otherwise a description of עמל 'work'. The לבו 'his heart' characterizes the רעיון 'thinking' as internal. A similar collocation is found in Daniel 2:30. Thus the work referred to here explicitly includes mental work. The context is negative, as the next verse expresses that his days are full of pain. This may be a description of a human working, including mental work, and being very unhappy in the process.

### 3.7.5.4 Ecclesiastes 4:16

אין־קץ לכל־העם לכל אשר־היה לפניהם גם האחרונים לא ישמחו־בו כיגם־זה הבל ורעיון: There was no end to all the people, to all those whom he led. Yet, those after him will not have joy over him. Also this is futile and windy thinking.'

The referent of רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' is the story, but it is not clear what aspect (see section 3.6.3.10). If the referent is the popularity of the leader, then the transience of it is highlighted by characterizing it as thinking of the temporal as the later generations do not rejoice over him despite his popularity at one time.

### **3.7.5.5 Conclusions on רעיון רוח**

All the occurrences of the expression רעיון רוח are compatible with the meaning 'windy thinking' with wind understood not as the content of thinking but as the nature of thinking and wind as a metaphor for the transient. This means thinking thoughts whose contents are transient or spending mental effort, the profit of which is transient. This view rests on the assumption that the expression is borrowed from Aramaic.

### **3.7.6 Difference in meaning between רעות רוח and רעיון רוח**

Expressions רעות רוח 'desire of wind' and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' have often been considered synonymous (see section 2.4.7). However, the expressions differ in distribution. Whenever the reference is to עמל 'work', expression רעות רוח is used. The referent of רעיון רוח in Ecclesiastes 4:16 is somewhat uncertain, but if it refers to leadership effort, it comes close to being a reference to work and may constitute an exception, though the word is not explicitly used (see section 3.6.3.10). Even in this case, it could be argued that leadership is largely mental work. Anyway, it is more likely that it refers to the popularity of the wise leader, if the identification of the sense of the expression in section 3.7.5 is correct. In this case the passage does not violate the rule.

Expression רעיון רוח is used to refer to mental activities (research and possibly popularity) while רעות רוח is not thus used. In Ecclesiastes 2:22 the reference may be to mental activity along with עמל 'work', together comprising physical and mental work. They appear to be in complementary distribution in the book of Ecclesiastes when the reference is to work. It seems that whenever the reference is to physical work, רעות רוח is used, and whenever to mental work, רעיון רוח is used. Yet it must be noted that the interpretation of the referent in Ecclesiastes 4:16 and 6:9 is tentative, and so must this conclusion also be. If this distinction holds, it may have been a feature that helped the original readers to identify the referents in question. The normal sense of the corresponding Aramaic words reinforce this distinction.

## **3.8 The argument of the book of Ecclesiastes summarized**

The message of the book of Ecclesiastes as far as the aspects studied above may be summarized as follows. No permanent profit is possible in this life. This makes all work futile with respect to the goal of securing permanent profit. Yet people work as if it were possible, depriving themselves of joy in the process. People should rather face their mortality

and the futility of all work, and enjoy life while doing good and taking God's judgment into account.

The argument of the book of Ecclesiastes is related below in the order it occurs in the book. There are lots of controversial details in the book, and not all of them have been covered in this study. My purpose is not to give a definitive interpretation of each passage, but rather show in a summary way one reading of the book that is consistent with what has been argued above, and in doing so, to summarize the book. Researching and arguing for each detail is outside the scope of this study.

The book begins with a statement that all is futile just before a question on the profit of work (Eccl 1:1-2). This is followed by a description of the perpetual work in nature (1:4-7), an expression of insatiability (1:8) and an observation that nothing new will come about (1:9-10). The memory of everyone will be forgotten (1:11). This introduction lays the foundation for Qohelet's argument by arguing that perpetual activity will continue unfinished and one cannot make a permanent name for himself. Then Qohelet introduces himself and his quest as being to study what is done under the sky or under the sun, and the conclusion is given that it is all futile, and the situation cannot be remedied (1:12-15). Qohelet notes his claim to wisdom and the limitations of wisdom (1:16-18).

In chapter 2, Qohelet begins his experiment with joy and notes that joy is futile (2:1-2). He describes his investigations and his achievements, including the experiment that was successful in producing joy (2:3-10), yet he reaffirms his conclusion of the futility of it all, specifically linking it to the lack of profit (2:11). He acknowledges that wisdom is not altogether profitless, but it is not enough to save the wise from what happens also to the fool (2:13-14). This causes Qohelet to note that his own quest for wisdom was futile (2:15). Thus his quest for wisdom, though successful in achieving wisdom, would not be successful in averting what he ultimately hoped to avoid, ultimately death. Thus wisdom was not enough to count as profit.

He notes the fact that no memory is left for the later generations in this context, thereby hinting that a memory might serve as profit of some kind (2:16). These thoughts lead Qohelet to hate life because all work under the sun is futile (2:17). The realization that there is no achievable profit was painful. Furthermore, Qohelet's achievements may not end up for the good of the next generations, as a fool may rule over the results of Qohelet's work (2:19).

Generally speaking, having to leave one's achievements behind to another is a cause of futility (2:21-22).

Not only is work called futile, but it often involves pain and restlessness (2:23), thus depriving the worker of joy. However, joy from simple things like eating and drinking along with work is the best thing. In this man is dependent on God who will give joy to the wise but to the sinner he gives activity, the results of which will go to benefit another (2:24-25). For the sinner, this is futile.

By the end of chapter 2, Qohelet has called all work futile, including amassing wisdom, based on three arguments: (1) it will not save him from a common lot with the rest of humanity, including death, (2) he will not be remembered forever, and (3) he will have to give its results to another, who may not be wise. For work not to be futile, the results need to be permanent. This is a conclusion from the observation that Qohelet argued for futility on the basis of losing what one has. The temporal benefit is called חֵלֶק 'portion', but that does not qualify for יִתְרוֹן 'profit'. The introduction of contingency (whether the person he leaves his possessions is wise or foolish) into the argument points to certainty being an element in work not being futile, though it does not appear as central a feature for categorization as permanence.

In chapter 3, Qohelet notes that all things have a proper time (3:1-8). God has put a desire for permanence in man's heart, but he also frustrates this desire by hiding his plan from mankind (3:9-11). If one were to understand proper time in God's plan, some work might be profitable and one could make an argument for striving for permanent profit for later generations that continues ultimately forever. However, people are ignorant of God's plan and timing. They have no security that they indeed can make permanent profit for mankind. They are left with the opportunity to value joy and to do good without really knowing the ultimate outcome (3:12). That is God's gift (3:13). What is eternal is God's deeds rather than man's (3:14).

Qohelet notes a corrupt court, and notes that God will judge and that the corruption exists so that by it God exposes what people are like and shows to them their similarity with quadrupeds (3:16-20). What this consists of will be taken up in section 4.2.1.4.2. Verse 21 introduces a potential objection to the conclusion Qohelet is about to make, which is that the best thing is to have joy in one's work. The conclusion is supported by the idea that one will

not see what will be after his time, and thus he will not enjoy the benefits of his achievements. Qohelet is building a case for joy as opposed to striving for achievement.

In chapter 4, Qohelet addresses the suffering of the oppressed (4:1-3). He notes that the stillborn is better off than the oppressed. Then he discusses overwork (4:4-12). He notes that work is the result of envy, and that (such) work is futile (4:4). He notes in passing that the other extreme, laziness, is not good (4:5), and recommends moderation (4:6). Then he gives yet another argument against overwork that is associated with lack of appreciation for social ties (4:7-12). Such overwork and loneliness is futile. He recommends company. He further notes (4:13-16) that later generations will not appreciate even the wise leader with a remarkable achievement of rising all the way to kingship despite humble beginnings. This furnishes an argument not to overwork in the hope of making a great name for oneself as popularity is transient.

In chapter 5, Qohelet discusses rash vows as opposed to reverence for God (4:17-5:6), preferring the latter. He notes oppression, and notes that the devotion of the king to the cultivated land helps remedy some of it (5:7-8) and notes that possessions do not ultimately satisfy or necessarily give an advantage over the manual worker (5:9-11). Rather they may deprive one of sleep. Qohelet saw a painful scenario of someone being deprived of his possessions (5:12-16) by an unfortunate incident. From this he generalized that possessions are lost at death. The incident left the person spend his life irritated and sick. This argues against the need to overwork for possessions that may be lost so the riches ended up hurting the owner. Qohelet balances this by noting that riches may be a blessing when God lets one to benefit from them. It is God's gift when he does so, as his days are spent in a more pleasant manner (5:17-19).

In chapter 6, Qohelet discusses a person who has it all, but he loses his possessions to another and notes that the loss is a painful example of futility (6:1-2). A stillborn is preferred to a hypothetical man that has a hundred children and lives long, but is not satisfied (6:3-5). A hypothetical long life with no enjoyment will result in death just like a short life (6:6). This constitutes an argument to value joy over achievement. Then Qohelet notes how work for oneself may not give the satisfaction it may be expected to give (6:7). This raises the question of why work with wisdom (6:8). It is better to be content with what one has than to strive for a dream, because of futility of all work (6:9). Man is limited in what he can do to overcome the problem of futility (6:10-11). All this raises the question of what to do in life (6:12).

In chapter 7, Qohelet describes some values by way of comparison (טוֹב ... מֵ (better ... than')). It is noteworthy that these do not directly answer the question raised in 6:12, but as deeds are based on values, they are indirectly related. Qohelet notes the value of reputation and the relative value of death over birth (7:1). Though no reason is given in 7:1, the startling thought may be continued in 7:2-4. Death is better in that it reminds the living of their end. Being faced with death helps one re-evaluate his values. The words of the wise are to be valued over the words of the fool (7:5-6). The wise may become foolish or corrupt (7:7). Patience is better than pride (7:8), anger remains with fools (7:9), the wrong kind of nostalgia is foolish (7:10), and wisdom is advantageous (7:11-12). Yet, the problem that hinders one from giving a definitive answer to the question posed in 6:12 is that no one can straighten what God has made crooked (7:13). Qohelet's answer is to enjoy when one can and when times are bad, to understand that God has given also those days (7:14). This understanding helps one appreciate the good days even more as one realizes that there will be worse days, too. Qohelet notes that there is no strict correspondence between consequences and character (7:15). Therefore excessive effort at doing everything right is to be avoided along with wickedness (7:16), which may lead to premature death (7:17). Reverence for God protects from both perfectionism and wickedness (7:18). Wisdom is better than power (7:19). Everyone does wrong (7:20), and one is not to care of all bad words just as he has also dishonored others (7:21-22).

Qohelet had studied all of this with wisdom and realized that he fell short of it and that he could not understand what happens, possibly indicating both behavioral and intellectual aspects of wisdom (7:23-24). As he sought to understand wisdom and foolishness (7:25), he found the type of woman that is more bitter than death and that becomes a trap for the sinner (7:26). This may be related to his personal shortcoming in wisdom, if he is one of the sinners that is entrapped by the woman. Though he did not find the wisdom and explanation he sought, he did find something (7:27-28), that is one person among a thousand, but no women. While it is not clear what the criterion was, if he was seeking an explanation (perhaps the accounting of verse 25), perhaps he found himself as the source of his entrapment. The ultimate culprit was not really any other of the thousand people, and especially not any woman that might become a trap but himself. He found that God made people right and they seek many explanations (7:29).

In chapter 7 Qohelet mentions a few things relating to wisdom and notes that no one follows it perfectly. He sums up his search for wisdom that he did not find understanding of what happens. Wisdom was thus elusive behaviorally and intellectually. Yet originally God made people right and they seek many explanations.

In chapter 8, Qohelet notes the value of obedience to the king and of not doing evil (8:2-5) because of the king's might and because there is a proper time and manner for everything and the consequences of evil are heavy (8:6). Furthermore, man does not know the future and cannot avoid death or be saved by means of evil (8:8). So he noted the times that one rules over another to his hurt (8:9). The religious posturing and hypocrisy of the wicked was futile and did not save them from death (8:10). The lack of swift judgment encourages evil, even though ultimately everything will be well for one that fears God but not for the wicked who will ultimately die (8:11-13). Yet on earth there are inversions of this picture (8:14). So there is nothing better than to have joy and to work (8:15). Perhaps the point is specifically that the inversions exemplify the futility, which is a cause for there being nothing better. Qohelet studied what happens on earth and noted overwork and looked at God's work and concluded that no one can figure out what happens on earth (8:17).

In chapter 9, Qohelet turns his attention to God's protection of the righteous and the wise. One does not know how and when they experience love and hate, but they will experience both just like everyone (9:1-2). Everyone will experience the same kinds of events, irrespective of what they do or what they are like. This is so despite God's protection. This is painful, and often people live their lives before death in a foolish manner (9:3). Life is better than death, as those alive know they will die, and they can enjoy life with its rewards unlike the dead who are forgotten (9:4-5).

The dead no longer experience love, hate, or envy, and they do not participate in earthly life in any way anymore (9:6). Therefore one is to have joy and enjoy life now, as God has accepted that (9:7-9). Furthermore, one is to lead an active life as the window of opportunity to work will close at death (9:10) and one does not know the time of death (9:11-13). Then he notes that wisdom is a great thing that can save even a city, but the wisdom of a poor person may still be not appreciated or heard (9:13-17). Thus one sinner may cause a great deal of damage (9:18).

In chapter 10, Qohelet discusses foolishness in leadership. He notes that a small foolishness may spoil a lot of wisdom (10:1), and that the wise and the fool behave in opposite ways (10:2), the fool expressing his foolishness (10:3). Qohelet advises how to behave before authorities (10:4) and notes wrong decisions by people in authority (10:5), the overturning of social roles (10:6-7), dangers in work (10:8-9), the benefit of preparation (10:10), the limitations of the advantage of skill (10:11), the words of the wise and the fool (10:12-14), the incompetence of fools (10:15) and the consequences of foolish and lazy leadership (10:16-18). He makes a note on parties (10:19) and warns not to criticize the powerful (10:20).

In chapter 11, Qohelet exhorts to generosity (11:1-2) and notes that events have consequences (11:3). He recommends trying instead of missing an opportunity by looking for the best opportunity (11:4-6). He notes how life is sweet and to be enjoyed knowing that there will be many difficult times (11:7-8). He recommends the youth to have joy and to walk according to their hearts taking God's judgment into account (11:9-10).

In chapter 12, Qohelet exhorts remembering one's creator in one's youth (12:1) before the end of life (12:2-7), which is presented poetically. That is the end of words attributed to Qohelet. The epilogist summarizes Qohelet's message as all things being futile (12:8), and notes Qohelet's wisdom (12:9), attempt to write pleasantly and truthfully (12:10), notes that words of the wise may be painful but they are given by one shepherd (12:11), warns about the tiring nature of scholarship (12:12) and ends with a conclusion that one is to revere God and keep his commands as that is for everyone and as God will judge every single deed (12:13-14).

The book of Ecclesiastes views life from two contrasting orientations: achievement of profit and enjoyment. Achievement orientation tries to gain something and hold on to it, even though it will ultimately be lost. Achievement orientation may hinder one from enjoying life as God's gift. Enjoyment orientation takes things as God's gifts and does not neglect doing good. There is a measure of achievement in enjoyment orientation (4:6), but work and rest are balanced and work is something done with enjoyment. When that is not possible, one is to remember that God has created both kinds of days (Eccl 7:14). Enjoyment orientation requires the humility to leave attempts at ultimate understanding and permanent results to God and his plan (Eccl 3:11-14), but takes God's judgment into account (Eccl 11:9). Permanent results are up to God, as it is his work that remains forever. Man may at most participate.



### 3.9 Conclusion

Several words and expressions were discussed. They are חלק 'portion', יתרון 'profit', שמחה 'joy', הבל 'futility', רעות רוח 'desire of wind' and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking'. It was concluded that חלק 'portion' is to be enjoyed and it is God's gift, and that יתרון 'profit' is used in reference to the thematic question and also otherwise. The thematic question concerns the profit of work. When יתרון 'profit' is used in the context of the thematic question, permanence is expected for something to be counted as profit. Profit and portion are contrasted in that there is no permanent profit under the sun, but there is a portion. Thus the thematic question is answered in the negative. Profit is used as an antonym of futility. Word שמחה 'joy' is used with latitude ranging from 'pleasure' to 'joy'. When it is called the best thing around, the reference is to genuine joy. Joy should be pursued while doing good and remembering God's judgment.

Word הבל 'futility' is used to argue that no achievement gives permanent profit. The word is polysemous. The book is summarized using this word. All occurrences of the word relating to the summary fall within the prototype category of futility. The majority of the occurrences are in a frame of work to gain permanent profit and specifically within one of the prototypical subcategories of it. These subcategories are metonymically related. The alternative hypothesis that הבל means 'transience' was examined and rejected.

A tentative conclusion was made that expressions רעות רוח 'desire of wind' and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' are used to refer to pursuit of the temporal. In these expressions רוח 'wind' refers to the transient. So רעות רוח 'desire of wind' refers to desiring something transient, and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' refers to thinking thoughts whose contents are transient or spending mental effort, the profit of which is transient.

The argument of the book of Ecclesiastes as presented in this chapter forms part of the context for chapter 4, which deals with the theme of divine judgment. On the basis of the study, the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes is summarized as follows.

No permanent profit is possible in this life. This makes all work futile with respect to the goal of securing permanent profit. Yet people work as if it were possible, depriving themselves of joy in the process. People should rather face their mortality and the futility of all work, and enjoy life while doing good and taking God's judgment into account.

## 4 Key passages on judgment

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to find out what the book of Ecclesiastes teaches about divine judgment and to relate this teaching to the argument of the book as established in chapter 3. These are subquestions (2) and (3) of the research question. Also the relationship between the theme of judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes and the rest of the canon is briefly discussed. In the concluding section, the results will also be looked at in the context of different answers given in research literature. The main research method is exegesis of all the judgment passages (passages with שפט, משפט, or פתגם). Also passages touching on the view of afterlife are discussed in excursus 4.2.2.

The word משפט 'judgment' occurs in Ecclesiastes 3:16, 5:7, 8:5, 8:6, 11:9, and 12:14. The verb שפט 'judge' occurs in Ecclesiastes 3:17. The word פתגם 'sentence' occurs in Ecclesiastes 8:11. This part of the study can be divided into six sections that are exegeted for relevant parts (3:16-22, 5:1-7, 8:5-6, 8:10-15, 11:9, 12:13-14). Also verbs with root עוּת are studied as possibly implicit verbs of judgment with the exception of the hitpa'el form of Ecclesiastes 12:3, which is deemed irrelevant for the purpose of this chapter. The piel form 'to make crooked' occurs in Ecclesiastes 7:13 and the pual form 'to be made crooked' occurs in Ecclesiastes 1:15.

The verb שפט has several meanings. Niehr (2006:419-422) gives meanings 'rule', 'judge', 'do justice', 'dispute' (in nifal). Schultz (1997:213) gives 'judge', 'execute judgment', and 'govern'. The senses 'rule' and 'judge' are relatively close. Judging or settling a dispute is one aspect of ruling or exercising authority. The prototypical ruling denoted by the use of the word is judicial. For the general sense 'rule', 1 Chronicles 16:33, Obadiah 1:21, and Daniel 9:12 are examples. The general sense 'rule' is excluded in favor of the more specific 'judge' when two parties are expressed with ב 'between'. According to Niehr (2006:420) all these constructions appear in forensic contexts. He gives Genesis 16:5, 31:53, Exodus 18:16, Numbers 35:24, Deuteronomy 1:16, Judges 11:27, 1 Samuel 24:12, 15, Isaiah 2:4, 5:3, Ezekiel 34:17, 20, 22, Micah 4:3 as the occurrences. Niehr (2006:421) notes that the sense is seldom 'condemn' or 'punish'. Yet in judicial contexts the execution is part of the frame of the verb as the sentence is expected to be executed.

When the sense is 'judge', the frame of the verb שפט in qal has typically two parties having an issue with each other (or at least one having an issue with the other). The issue is brought to the judge (שופט) to make a decision (Ex 18:16). The judge is then responsible for the execution of the sentence (Dt 25:1-3). The result in the ideal case is that the innocent receive justice as well as the guilty. For the innocent this results in deliverance (Ps 10:18) and for the guilty it results in punishment (Ez 7:3). Mafico (1992:1105) notes that the judge could act as an arbitrator. The meaning of the word is not limited to judgment but it can include governing in a more general sense (1 Sam 8:5-6, 1 Kgs 15:5, Ob 1:21). When an object is used, it may be the innocent that receives justice (Ps 26:1, 82:3) or the guilty (1 Sam 3:13) or a cognate accusative (Lam 3:59, Zec 8:16). The verb is sometimes used for a mere pronouncement of judgment instead of the act of judging or executing the judgment (Ez 22:2, 23:36), but even then the execution is part of the frame. If the object refers to deeds, the sense is not 'rule' but 'judge', as deeds are not ruled.

The noun משפט 'judgment' is found in a variety of metonymically related senses. It is used of 'the act of judging' (Lev 19:15), 'a decision by a judge' (1 Kgs 3:28), 'a legal case' (Num 27:5), 'a crime to be judged' (Ez 7:23), 'the standard of ruling or judging', 'law' (Ex 21:1). It is also used of 'what is right' (Dt 16:19), 'what is lawfully due' (Jer 32:7), 'custom' (2 Kgs 11:14, see also section 4.2.4), and of 'kind' (2 Kgs 1:7). (Modified from Gesenius 1857:519-520.)

There are various concepts of divine judgment in the Old Testament. First I study what the book of Ecclesiastes teaches about divine judgment in section 4.2. The goal is not to impose the concept of divine judgment from other parts of the Old Testament on the book of Ecclesiastes, but to let the book speak for itself. I compare the view of divine judgment in Ecclesiastes with various other concepts and views of systematic theology in sections 4.4 and 4.5.

## **4.2 The passages with root שפט or word פתגם**

### **4.2.1 Ecclesiastes 3:16-22**

#### **4.2.1.1 Introduction**

ועוד ראיתי תחת השמש מקום המשפט שמה הרשע ומקום הצדק שמה הרשע: אמרתי אני בלבי אתה צדיק ואתה הרשע ישפט האלהים כי־עת לכל־חפץ ועל כלה־מעשה שם: אמרתי אני בלבי על־דברת בני האדם לברם האלהים ולראות שהם־בהמה המה להם: כי מקרה

בני־האדם ומקרה הבהמה<sup>37</sup> ומקרה אחד להם כמות זה כן מות זה ורוח אחד לכל ומותר האדם מן־הבהמה אין כי הכל הבל: הכל הולך אל־מקום אחד הכל היה מן־העפר והכל שב אל־העפר: מי יודע רוח בני האדם העלה היא למעלה ורוח הבהמה הירדת היא למטה לארץ: וראיתי כי אין טוב מאשר ישמח האדם במעשיו כי־הוא חלקו כי מי יביאנו לראות במה And I again saw under the sun a place of judgment and there was wickedness there, a place of justice and there was wickedness there! I thought that God would judge the just and the wicked as there is a time for every matter and for every deed there. I thought that this is on account of human beings that God would expose them and show them that they are [just as] quadrupeds by themselves. The lot of the human and the lot of the quadruped is the same lot to both of them. As one dies, so does the other, and they both have the same spirit and the human has no advantage over the quadruped for all is futile. Both go to the same place. Both are from the soil and both return to the soil. Who knows whether the spirit of humans goes up and the spirit of quadrupeds goes down to the earth? And I saw that there is nothing better than that one has joy in his work for this is his portion for who will bring him back to see what will be after him?"

The section is linked to verse 10 (ראיתי 'I saw') by ועוד ראיתי 'and again I saw' (Eccl 3:16) and delimited by וארא 'and again I saw' in 4:1. According to Seow (1997:177), the latter expression appears to put more emphasis on discontinuity and the former on continuity. This means that the following section break is more major than the former. This section builds on the previous section where Qohelet discusses timing, desire for permanence (see section 3.4.5), the permanent nature of God's work, and God's purpose that people would fear him (3:14), and the lack of qualitatively new things (3:15), and makes a comment on God seeking that which is pursued (יבקש את־נרדף), a phrase variously interpreted (see Seow 1997:165-166,174 for the view that God will take care of what people pursue in vain, namely to understand God's activity, and Fox 1999:213-214 and Crenshaw 1987:100 for the view that God seeks to do things he has already done; there are other views, too).

There are few direct links to the preceding section. Reverence for God is mentioned in 3:14, and it is related to the question of injustice in court (3:16). In verse 3:19 the theme of death is raised and in 3:22 the theme of joy is revisited. These occurred in this order in 2:15-16 and 2:24. Joy is also mentioned in 3:12. The section is introduced with an observation of corruption of justice. Qohelet observed a court where there was wickedness. The place that

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37 Some manuscripts lack this waw.

should have been a place of righteousness was not. Two reactions to this are recorded, both introduced with בלבי אני אמרתי 'I said in my heart' (verses 17 and 18). Both are elaborated by a כי sentence. Qohelet's first reaction to injustice mentions divine judgment. He said ואת־הרשע ישפט האלהים 'The righteous and the wicked God will judge'. This has resulted in a number of interpretations as mentioned in sections 1.1.7 and 2.5.

The main views to be discussed here are (1) that the judgment mentioned is death (Goldingay 2014:191, possibility referred to by Crenshaw 1987:24 and Fox 1999:215), (2) that God may judge but also may not (Seow 1997:175), (3) that God will judge, but at times imperfectly, and the judgment is in this life (Fox 1999:57-59), (4) that God will judge and it is in the eschaton (Caneday 1994:107-108), and (5) that God will judge but Qohelet's scheme has no place for it (Longman 1998:127-128), revealing a contradiction in Qohelet's thinking. The main questions here are whether Qohelet's idea of divine judgment in 3:17 is that it was certain or not, that it was personal or not, that it was perfect or not, that it was in the afterlife or not, and what the significance of שם is in verse 17. I discuss Qohelet's two reactions to injustice, the first in 3:17 and the second in 3:18. Then I discuss the common death of humans and animals in 3:19-21 and the conclusion of 3:22. In the concluding subsection I relate the conclusions of each of the subsections to each of these views.

#### 4.2.1.2 Qohelet's first reaction to injustice in Ecclesiastes 3:17

אמרתי אני בלבי את־הצדיק ואת־הרשע ישפט האלהים כי־עת לכל־חפץ ועל כל־המעשה שם: 'I thought that God would judge the just and the wicked as there is a time for every matter and for every deed there.'

Qohelet's first reaction to injustice in verse 17 ends with the word שם. The word has raised a considerable number of interpretations. The ones discussed below are (1) the word is to be pointed as שָׁם 'there', (2) the word is to be pointed as שָׁם 'appointed', 'established', 'set', (3) the text is to be emended, (4) the word שם is a noun or gerund from שִׁים or שוּם meaning 'destiny', (5) the word שם is to be repointed as שֵׁם 'name, designation', and (6) the word is an asseverative particle.

(1) The word is to be pointed as שָׁם 'there'. This is the Masoretic pointing. Also the LXX translates the word as ἐκεῖ 'there'. The word could be segmented as the last word of verse 17 or as the first word of verse 18. If it is the first word of verse 18, it locates Qohelet's musing to the court scene. It is there that he had the thought expressed in verse 18. This is supported

by the LXX. If this were the case, the location would be somehow relevant. It would build cohesion into the text and bring a more direct link between verse 18 and verse 16. Yet its relevance is not clear. Qohelet's case is not improved by noting the place where he had the thought. Usually he tends to work on the basis of a rather generic observation and make conclusions on the basis of that. If there were a contrast between what he thought there and what he thought at some other time, the mention would make sense. Otherwise the mention does not seem very relevant. Therefore I rather place the word at the end of verse 17.

If the word is the last word of verse 17, the existence of a time for every matter and all deeds is 'there'. This interpretation suffers from an unclear reference to the actual place meant. Fox (1999:215) thinks that in the text as it stands, the reference is to the court of law, which is mentioned in verse 16. A court of justice is mentioned in the preceding verse (3:16), and it is active in the context. It is a good candidate to be the referent.

Lohfink (2003:66-67) agrees with Fox about the referent, and understands it in the sense that even though something immoral takes place, God is a participant. I understand him to mean that as the corrupt human judge judges, God also judges. This makes sense in the worldview of theological determinism. I understand this to be how Lohfink (2003:60) understands Qohelet's view in Ecclesiastes 3:1 as he comments that "everything is arranged from elsewhere".

Gordis (1951:225) thinks that  $\Omega\psi$  refers to "the other world, the period after death as in Job 1:21; 3:17, 19". He understands the intent as satirical. The interpretation that  $\Omega\psi$  is a reference to the afterlife has been rejected on the grounds that it would require belief in the afterlife by Qohelet (Fox 1999:215), or because Qohelet insists that people cannot know the future (Seow 1997:166-167), or the lack of optimism in Qohelet's thought (Crenshaw 1987:102). A note that God will judge every deed in the afterlife has been considered inappropriate for Qohelet's thought. Thus the argument is basically about the consistence of this thought with Qohelet's worldview.

The thought is reminiscent to Ecclesiastes 12:14 where the epilogist claims that God will judge all deeds. Crenshaw (1987:192) claims that the view is alien to Qohelet. He calls verse 12:14 "comforting for good people" but in 3:17 denies the view to Qohelet because it is too optimistic. Seow (1997:395-396) thinks the ending is compatible with Qohelet's view, but in 3:17 he denies belief by Qohelet in the afterlife on the basis on his belief in the unknowability

of the future. Yet nowhere in the book of Ecclesiastes is Qohelet's insistence of the unknowability of the future absolute.

Qohelet believes that man knows he will die (Eccl 9:5). He does claim that לא־ידע ההאדם 'man does not know what will happen' (Eccl 10:14) and asks מי־יגיד לאדם 'who will tell man what will be after him under the sun', thereby implying ignorance of what will happen in this life in the future generally or after one is dead (Eccl 6:12). He also notes that לא ימצא האדם אחריו מאומה 'man will not find out anything of what will be after him' (Eccl 7:14). The last reference Seow (1997:240) understands as a reference to future in one's lifetime.

The argument that Qohelet cannot refer to a judgment after this life based on denial of knowledge about the future assumes too much of what is unknown. Ignorance of events in the future generally does not imply ignorance of all events in the future, as Qohelet's firm belief in the universality of death shows. It is possible that Qohelet's view on the certainty of death and the certainty of an eschatological judgment are similar in their relationship to the unknowability of the future. The view that שם 'there' is a reference to the afterlife has been rejected mostly as incompatible with Qohelet's worldview. The truth of this claim is not apparent, which justifies a further look into it. The question of Qohelet's belief in the afterlife is discussed in sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.5.3.

There are other alternatives for the referent of שם 'there'. In the verse (3:17) God's judgment is explicitly mentioned. It implies a time and place for judgment. This is inferrable information (Brown and Yule 1983:182-188). The assumption that there is a time and place for judgment is made more accessible (Sperber and Wilson 1995:77-78,138-151,167-170) by the mention of judgment. Thus it is possible to identify שם as referring to God's judgment just mentioned. It is quite plausible that the referent could be the occasion of God's judgment, assuming that Qohelet had such a concept of an eschatological judgment.

The sentence (עת לכל־חפץ ועל כל־המעשה שם) is possibly elliptical. One way to fill out the ellipsis is עת [משפט] לכל־חפץ [במקום ובעת אשר ישפט האלהים שם] ועת [משפט] שם [משפט] על כל־המעשה [במקום ובעת אשר ישפט האלהים שם] 'there is a time [of judgment] for all things [where and when God judges] and time [of judgment] over all deeds there [where and when God judges]'. The expression ישפט האלהים 'God will judge' is taken from ישפט האלהים 'God will judge' in the same verse. Words עת and שם are repeated from the

sentence. The word משפט 'judgment' is added conceptually on the basis of the preceding verse. The word שם 'there' occasionally refers to time instead of place as discussed below in connection with interpretation (6) of the current passage. The hypothetical filling of the ellipsis assumes that שם means the occasion, including both time and place. This is reflected by using the words במקום ובעת 'in the place and in the time'.

Preposition על is interesting in that עת על is not a common combination. The meaning of the preposition may be 'concerning' in the general sense, but it may be part of an elliptical expression עת משפט על partially similar to משפט על 'judgment over' as in Ecclesiastes 12:14. This makes sense in the context of the verse apart from possible considerations of Qohelet's worldview, the topic of section 4.2.2. If this interpretation is followed, the judgment is eschatological. The expression עת לכל־חפץ 'there is time for every matter' in 3:17 is reminiscent of 3:1. In this interpretation, the parallel is more verbal than conceptual.

According to this interpretation of שם 'there', Qohelet affirms that God will judge and that there will be a specific occasion when God will judge all matters and all deeds. This is similar in thought to Ecclesiastes 12:14. In this case שם 'there' is a predicative defining עת 'time'.

The occasion of judgment is specific in that it may be referred to by שם 'there'. That means that there is a way to conceptualize the judgment as a single event. The reference may be to different times and places where the judgment takes place that are collectively conceptualized as one single judgment. If for each individual there is a single judgment where his deeds will be judged, the expression as all things being judged 'there' is quite natural, as it is looked at from the viewpoint of an individual. The expression may also be used to refer to one single judgment for all mankind. Though care must be taken not to infer too much from the concept of a specific occasion for judgment, the expression is not natural to refer to an idea of a judgment within the lifetime of the individual unless it covers all his deeds. In light of the contextual connection to rectifying injustices in court in 3:16 and the fact that there is no generally known concept of an occasion of judgment of all of the individual's deeds in the lifetime, this judgment is best understood as occurring in the afterlife. The court scene suggests that the meaning is not 'rule' in a more general sense.

Fredericks (2010:120-121) is close to this interpretation. He suggests that שם refers not to 'under the sun' where injustices occur, but to where justice is found. Yet it is not clear, according to him, whether it will be “within a person's lifetime, through natural, legal or other means of retribution”. It is this last point where the interpretations differ. The difference is in



understanding the reference of שם. Fredericks understands it more generally and not as a direct reference to the occasion when and where ישפט האלהים 'God will judge' mentioned the verse. Fredericks's view is not impossible, but it makes the reference more vague and leaves more to be inferred by the reader. Thus, on the basis of the principle of relevance, the more specific reference may be preferred as the more accessible one in this passage.

If Fox (1999:215) and Lohfink's (2003:66-67) identification of שם 'there' as the unjust court of justice is followed (but not Fox's emendation of המעשה 'deeds' to הנעשה 'what was done' nor Lohfink's identification of divine judgment with the human one), the ellipsis should be filled differently. It could be something like עת משפט לכל-חפץ הנעשה שם ועת משפט שם על כל-המעשה הנעשה שם 'there is a time of judgment for all matters done there [in the court] and there is a time of judgment for every deed done there [in the court]' or perhaps עת משפט לכל-חפץ שם ועת משפט על כל-המעשה הנעשה שם 'there is a time of judgment for all matters and there is a time of judgment [not only for all matters but specifically] for every deed done there [in the court]'. Following Lohfink's identification of the human judgment with the divine one, there is no ellipsis: עת לכל-חפץ ועל כל-המעשה שם 'there is a time for all [kinds of] matters and over all [kinds of] deeds there [at the corrupt court]'.

If the reference is to the unjust court, it is plausible that it is a statement of divine judgment over what happens in the corrupt court, as the sentence is related to God's judgment. This interpretation (without emendation) requires that כל-המעשה שם is understood as 'all the works done there', that is שם 'there' restricts the reference of כל-המעשה 'all deeds'.

Fox (1999:215) thinks that the idea of there being a judgment of all that is done in the court would be better expressed by הנעשה 'what is done' than המעשה 'deed', and consequently suggests an emendation conjecturing a mem-nun graphic error. This would help the reader connect שם 'there' with the preceding word ('what is done there') rather than the place of divine judgment, and it would disambiguate the sentence. Sometimes שם 'there' is an attribute to a noun rather than a predicative, but this is very rare. In 1 Samuel 10:12 we find ויאמר איש משם ויען 'a man from there answered and said'. An alternative expression is to use אשר 'that' before שם 'there', as in Numbers 21:32 וירש את-האמרי אשר-שם 'dispossessed the Amorites that [were] there'. In Ecclesiastes 3:17 there is no אשר 'that' to disambiguate. Yet the very rarity of שם being used as an attribute to a noun as compared to it being used as a predicate argues for the word defining the place of judgment, not of deeds, in

Ecclesiastes 3:17. It may be because of this rarity that Fox resorts to emendation. This rarity argues against the idea that the reference of 'there' is to the corrupt court of justice.

Seow (1997:166) discusses the verbal form שפּט and notes that it does not follow that Qohelet refers to an eschatological judgment here. He comments: "The imperfect merely indicates *potential* here." (Italics his.) Yet, together with an identification of שם 'there' as referring to the judgment, it is difficult to consider that only potential is meant. Also if שם 'there' refers to the corrupt court, the existence of a time of judgment implies that more than just potential is meant. Seow does not take שם in the sense of 'there'.

This leaves two plausible views. One is Lohfink's identification of the human and divine judgments, and the other is that the judgment refers to a divine eschatological judgment of all deeds done at the human court, or by a likely extension, to all deeds. The eschatological judgment takes place in the afterlife, if it is to be just as there is no just judgment guaranteed in this life according to Ecclesiastes 8:14.

There are several things to consider when choosing between the eschatological judgment view and the rather deterministic view identifying the human judgment with the divine one. The identification view presupposes a worldview of divine causality of the human immoral action in some form, even if it may not require a fully developed determinism. The eschatological view presupposes a worldview that includes an afterlife.

There are some linguistic factors that favor Lohfink's view. They are no ellipsis versus a relatively natural ellipsis, a conceptual cohesive link to 3:1 with לְכָל זְמַן 'there is an appointed time for everything' (but only if read as a statement of divine determinism) versus a verbal but not conceptual parallel, and the textual link between the שם 'there' of verse 17 and an explicitly activated referent (the corrupt court) versus an implicitly activated referent (occasion of divine judgment).

If the statement is read with an assumption that considers God's judgment to be different from a corrupt human judgment, the linguistic factors are hardly enough to be conclusive to question that the divine judgment is not the same as the human judgment. This is well illustrated by the fact that Lohfink's view is a minority view. In a context that considers God as determining human events, and thus an agent of immoral actions, the identification with human judgment is quite plausible.

If it is assumed that God is the agent of corrupt human judges, there is no need to see a reference to a divine judgment in the afterlife. Deciding between these two views is ultimately a matter of interpreting Qohelet's worldview. The author of the book of Ecclesiastes did not elaborate on this point, presumably because he considered it unnecessary. It could be because he trusted his original audience would share with him the basic presuppositions needed to interpret this. It is also possible that the reason he did not disambiguate himself more clearly is that he was not consciously aware of the ambiguity.

Whether Qohelet was a determinist is relevant for the identification of the divine judgment. Ecclesiastes 3:1 has been understood as teaching determinism by Murphy (1992:39). Fox (1999:194-206) argues at length that Ecclesiastes 3:1-9 should not be understood in a deterministic sense and that the catalogue of times is a catalogue of appropriate times. This latter idea coheres well with Ecclesiastes 3:11 commenting that God has made all things appropriate in its time. The catalogue of times is a list of things that have appropriate (יפה) times (Eccl 3:11), not predetermined times or times when the events happen.

Fox (1999:200-201) notes that the word זמן 'time' is used to denote an appointed time (Neh 2:6, Esth 9:27, 31) and mentions that it is not usually found in the sense of an appropriate time. He explains the usage here to complete the parallelism. The word does not occur frequently enough in biblical Hebrew to determine its semantic range with confidence. In later Hebrew its meaning was not limited to appointed times. For example Jastrow (1996:404) mentions בזמן ש as 'in the case of'. Even the understanding of זמן as 'appointed time' does not necessarily imply determinism. That all event types (not events) have at times an appropriate time that may be also appointed, even if divinely, does not mean that all events are divinely appointed or that God may be considered the author of corrupt judgment. Fox (1999:202) notes that a deterministic view is incompatible with Ecclesiastes 7:17. One cannot die before one's time if the time is predetermined and neither can one influence the time in a deterministic worldview as implied by the imperatives in the verse.

If the text is a catalogue of appropriate times, a corrupt judgment is not in its time by definition as long as it is not considered appropriate. This understanding of Ecclesiastes 3:1-9 destroys the conceptual cohesive link between 3:17 and 3:1 with לכל זמן 'there is an appointed time for everything', leaving only two of the three linguistic arguments I mentioned above in favor of Lohfink's view. It is clear that in Lohfink's view Qohelet considered God to be an author of evil. Nowhere else is such a view expressed in the book of Ecclesiastes. To be

sure, God is held responsible for the crooked state the world is in (Eccl 7:13), but this does not attribute an evil action to God. The naturalness of Lohfink's view outside of the framework of determinism can also be questioned. It is not clear why God would judge a person in the judgment of a corrupt judge or on what basis Qohelet came to the conclusion when observing this take place, unless he thought that any human action, including immoral ones, can ultimately be attributed to God. Since Qohelet does not seem to be a determinist, and he makes no attribution of evil action to God, this interpretation is weakened.

However, it remains possible to interpret the text as identifying the human and divine judgments. Ultimately this is dependent on whether Qohelet was consistent in his implicit rejection of determinism in Ecclesiastes 7:17 and in his worldview. In a case like this, the interpretation cannot be resolved apart from debatable worldview assumptions. Without them it is difficult to assess the likelihood of Qohelet attributing ethical evil to God.

On the basis of these arguments and considering that Qohelet was not a determinist, I conclude that if  $\square\psi$  means 'there' and if Qohelet's expressed worldview in the text does not exclude the interpretation, the most likely interpretation of verse 17 are that he refers explicitly to a divine eschatological judgment of all deeds in the afterlife. The text of verse 17 gives a rather natural reading when read either way, given the appropriate worldview assumptions. Qohelet's view of the afterlife is discussed in section 4.2.2 and touched on in section 4.2.1.4.3. Other views for the meaning of  $\square\psi$  are discussed below.

(2) The word is to be pointed as  $\square\psi$  'appointed', 'established', 'set'. This could be translated 'I thought that God would judge the just and the wicked as he has appointed a time for every matter and for every deed.' This view is mentioned and rejected on the grounds of word order by Seow (1997:167) and Fox (1999:215). Seow also mentions the use of  $\text{לע}$  as arguing against this view. Ogden and Zogbo (1997:112) considers the change (from  $\square\psi$  'there' to  $\square\psi$  'put', 'appointed') to be logical though without textual evidence.

Crenshaw (1987:102) considers that the argument from word order is blunted by "Qohelet's practice of holding the subject in abeyance", which he might use with a verb. Crenshaw's argument is based on a stylistic device Qohelet might have used, but is not demonstrated to have used. Word order in the book of Ecclesiastes should be systematically studied to assess the possibility in more detail. To me this position of the verb seems to be strange and

unlikely. The sense could be that God has appointed a time [of judgment] for every matter and concerning every deed.

(3) The third alternative for שם is to emend the text. Among suggested emendations are זמן 'season' and שמר 'observe' (mentioned by Whitley 1979:34-36, glosses his), זמן 'time', and משפט 'judgment', and משם (mentioned by Seow 1997:167, glosses mine) for שם 'there' and הנעשה 'what is done' for המעשה 'deed' (Fox 1999:215). Seow (1997:167) considers all of the above emendations for שם 'there' to be too far-fetched. Emending the text is not the preferred solution especially as the text makes sense as it stands.

(4) The word שם is a noun or gerund from שים or שום (Seow 1997:167). Seow translates this as 'destiny' (Seow 1997:159). The existence of the verb is well established. Noun שם with the meaning of 'destiny' is speculative.

(5) The word שם is to be repointed as שם 'name, designation' (Seow 1997:167). The sense would then be that there is a time for all things and a name over all matters. This introduces other problems to the text. While שם 'name' occasionally occurs with על 'on' (Dt 22:14, 19), there is verb הוציא 'bring out' and the sense is different (to incur a reputation). One would expect preposition ל 'to' rather if the sense were that for all deeds there is a name.

(6) The word is an asseverative particle, glossed as 'too, also' (Whitley 1979:34-36 tentatively). This meaning for שם has been argued at length by Whitley (1974). The article argues that in a number of passages the meaning 'there' is not suitable. He gives Psalms 14:5, 36:13, 48:7, 66:6, and 132:17 as examples. Whitley suggests that an asseverative meaning suits the passages. While he does not give a formal definition of asseverative, he glosses it as 'yea' and 'indeed' (Whitley 1974:394-395).

The article discusses Job 23:7, Job 35:12, Hosea 6:7, Ecclesiastes 3:17, Zephaniah 1:14, and Isaiah 48:16. Thus the argument rests on eleven passages. Seow (1997:167) criticizes this view in that the particle probably does not have the nuance 'too, also'. Psalm 14:5 may be explained as שם 'then' as a metaphorical extension of meaning from the local domain to the temporal domain referring to the occasion of God looking down from heaven in verse 2. In Psalm 36:13 שם may refer to God's presence. In verse 10 עמך 'with you' is used to refer to God. It is noteworthy that שם is used in Psalm 14:5 and 36:13 in the context of judgment.

In Psalm 48:7  $\text{אש}$  may refer to the place the kings assembled (verse 5). In Psalm 66:6 the reference may be to the occasion (time and place) where God did his mighty works. In Psalm 132:17  $\text{אש}$  may be local, referring to Zion. In Job 23:7  $\text{אש}$  refers to the occasion of Job's argument with God. It can be understood locally referring to God's dwelling place (verse 3) or temporally to the occasion of the court argument (verse 4) or as a combination of both local and temporal meanings. In Job 35:12  $\text{אש}$  may refer to the occasion of oppression of verse 9. In Hosea 6:7  $\text{אש}$  refers to the breaking of the covenant as the sphere of treachery against God. This is not primarily in a local sense but refers to the manner of treachery. It is a metaphorical extension of the meaning from the spatial domain to the behavioral domain.

Ecclesiastes 3:17 is the very text under discussion, and I have argued it may refer to God's judgment. It need not be a strictly local reference. More likely it is a reference to the occasion of God's judgment including both temporal and local spheres. In Zephaniah 1:14  $\text{אש}$  refers to the day of the Lord, a temporal reference or a local reference to the place where the judgment takes place. In Isaiah 48:16  $\text{אש}$  refers to the (time and) place where "it" has happened (היוֹתָהּ 'its being'). God was there.

All of the occurrences of  $\text{אש}$  in Whitley's (1974) article can be understood on the basis of the meaning of 'there' or its metaphorical extension to other domains. It is better not to multiply homonymous roots with a weak basis when polysemy is adequate to explain the usage. It is to be noted that  $\text{אש}$  'there' can be used to refer to the occasion, such as an eschatological divine judgment. It need not be taken in a local sense only. This is fitting for Ecclesiastes 3:17.

Because none of the alternative meanings for  $\text{אש}$  seems more plausible than 'there' as referring to the occasion of divine judgment, I prefer this interpretation if it is possible to harmonize with Qohelet's worldview. The major argument against the view of an afterlife judgment is that it is not possible. This is the topic of sections 4.2.1.4.3 and 4.2.2, where I argue that it is possible. If the judgment is not identified with the human one, Qohelet's first reaction to the problem of the corrupt court is that there will be a time and place for God to judge in an eschatological judgment in the afterlife, as the reference is to a single occasion where there is time for all matters to be judged. By referring to an eschatological judgment as a single occasion I do not intend to take a stand on whether all will be judged at one single judgment or whether there are several judgments, some judged at one and others at another. Several judgments separated by time can be viewed as a single occasion of judgment or as different judgments, depending on the viewpoint. The question of the number of

eschatological judgments is an important question of systematic theology, and it is not solved by Ecclesiastes 3:17.

In section 4.2.1.1 different approaches to the question of divine judgment in this passage were listed. Determining the correct view depends on difficult exegetical decisions, which leaves room for disagreement. The view that I argued to be the most probable is that God will judge in the afterlife. There are other alternatives, such as identifying the divine judgment with the corrupt human one, implying that God judges in this life imperfectly. The judgment-in-the-afterlife interpretation excludes the views that the judgment is death, that God may or may not judge, that God will judge imperfectly in this life, and that God will judge but Qohelet's scheme leaves no place for it.

#### **4.2.1.3 Qohelet's second reaction to injustice in Ecclesiastes 3:18**

אמרתי אני בלבי על־דברת בני האדם לברם האלהים ולראות שהם־בהמה המה להם: I thought that this is on account of human beings that God would expose them and show them that they are [just as] quadrupeds by themselves.'

Qohelet's second reaction to injustice in Ecclesiastes 3:18 raises several important questions. (1) What is the meaning of על־דברת as used in the verse? (2) What is the meaning of לברם in the verse? (3) What is the meaning of לראת and should its vocalization be emended? (4) What is the meaning of המה להם in this verse? (5) How do לברם and בהמה 'quadruped' relate to the thought in the verse and to Qohelet's concern of injustice and his first reaction to it? I will discuss these questions in this order, the last one in the concluding section.

##### **4.2.1.3.1 על־דברת in Ecclesiastes 3:18**

The expression על־דברת occurs in the Hebrew Bible in Ecclesiastes 8:2, 7:14, and Psalm 110:4 besides Ecclesiastes 3:18, and in the Aramaic texts of the Bible it occurs in Daniel 2:30 and 4:14. Additionally דברה occurs without על in Job 5:8. The word is related to דבר 'thing', 'word'. In Job 5:8 the word is used to refer to a case brought before God. In Daniel 2:30 the expression is used to introduce a final clause: a mystery was revealed to Daniel for the purpose of making an interpretation known. Also in Daniel 4:14 the expression is used to introduce a final clause: the decision was made for the purpose of making it known to the living that God is the ruler. It must be remembered that Aramaic is a cognate language and the expression may or may not mean the same in Hebrew. In Psalm 110:4 there is textual

variation (על־דברת, על־דברתי, על־דברתו). The expression is joined to מלכי צדק 'Melchizedek' to make a reference to the Melchizedek priesthood. This does little to help us understand its meaning in Ecclesiastes, but it is a reminder that the expression has latitude in meaning.

In Ecclesiastes 8:2 the expression occurs in an exhortation to keep the king's command because of (Fredericks 2010:188-189) or in the manner of (Seow 1997:279) an oath taken before God. In Ecclesiastes 7:14 the expression is used to introduce a final or result clause: God did something so that or in order that humans will not find out anything of what comes in the future. These examples show that the expression is used to connect a purpose statement or a result statement to an action statement. Some give the expression a general translation 'with regard to' (Koehler and Baumgartner 1994:212).

The expression על־דברת is used in Ecclesiastes 3:18 either as connected to אמרתי אני בלבי 'I said in my heart' or connected to the observation of injustice in court in verse 16 that Qohelet is reacting to. If it is connected to what Qohelet thought, the subordinate clause either lacks a finite verb or לברם is considered finite (Seow 1997:167). Murphy (1992:30) adds an implicit copula before לברם. He does not elaborate what he thinks the copula connects. One possibility is to construe the thought as 'I thought about humans: this [wickedness in court] is for God to test them'. The function of the topic announcing על־דברת 'about humans' is not clear. This argues against this possibility.

Out of all the occurrences of the word in the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes 3:18 is the only passage where the expression is complemented by a noun phrase and an infinitive. Presumably the meaning is the same as when it is complemented by a subordinate clause, as in Ecclesiastes 7:14, or close to it. Thus in Ecclesiastes 3:18 it may mean 'so that' or 'for the purpose that'. If the sense is final, the purpose is divine rather than human.

Another option to understand the connection of על־דברת is to connect it to verse 16 and understand על־דברת as introducing a final or result clause. The connection is left implicit. It could be explicated by repeating the element from verse 16: אמרתי אני בלבי שמה הרשע על־דברת בני האדם 'I said in my heart that there is wickedness so that [or in order that] people are exposed by God'. It is assumed that על־דברת has the same meaning with an infinitive complement as with a subordinate clause. I am not convinced that לברם should be understood as finite (see section 4.2.1.3.2). It is better to connect the infinitival



clause to wickedness in court rather than Qohelet's thinking. The sense is not affected by how the ellipsed subject is construed, whether as 'wickedness in court' or whether as 'there is wickedness'. In either case, the ellipsed part refers to the same thing.

To err on the safe side, I interpret the infinitive rather as an infinitive of result than one of purpose, as that would make a stronger statement of divine purpose in allowing wickedness. This is based on the assumption that the result clause can safely be considered to be true. However, I do not find either interpretation problematic. Thus I understand the sense to be that Qohelet thought that the wickedness in the place of justice results in God exposing or revealing what people are like.

#### **4.2.1.3.2 לברר in Ecclesiastes 3:18**

The word לברר has been understood in two different ways. One is that the verb is the infinitive construct of ברר with a third person masculine suffix. The other is that it is a third person masculine of suffix conjugation with an asseverative lamed. (Seow 1997:167.) In both cases the verb is ברר in the qal conjugation. The verb is used nine times in the qal conjugation in the Hebrew Bible (Eccl 3:18, Ez 20:38, Is 49:2, Jb 33:3, Zep 3:9, 1 Chr 7:40, 1 Chr 9:22, 1 Chr 16:41, Neh 5:18) and nine times in other conjugations (nifal: 2 Sm 22:27, Ps 18:27, Is 52:11; piel: Dn 11:35.; hitpael: 2. Sam 22:27, Ps 18:27, Dn 12:10; hifil: Jer 4:11, Jer 51:11). These passages are an exhaustive list of the occurrences based on Even-Shoshan (1997:209).

Koehler and Baumgartner (1994:163) think that Isaiah 49:2 and Jeremiah 51:11 come from a homonymous verb meaning 'to sharpen'. According to Jastrow (1996:197), the word in the qal conjugation means in later Hebrew 'to make clear, prove, ascertain', and 'to single out, select, sift, assort', and in the piel conjugation 'to prove, ascertain', and 'to sift, select'. The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew gives 'cleanse' as the gloss for one verb ברר and 'separate' for another, and 'sharpen' for yet another (Clines and Elwolde 1995:275-276).

In the qal conjugation the ברר verbs are used seven times in the qal passive participle (Jb 33:3, 1 Chr 7:40, 9:22, 16:41, Neh 5:18, Is 49:2, Zep 3:9). The objects that are called ברור are דעת שפתי 'knowledge of my lips', that is 'knowledge that I speak' (Jb 33:3), 'lip', 'language' (Zep 3:9), ראשי בית־האבות 'heads of families' (1 Chr 7:40), people designated as gatekeepers at the thresholds (1 Chr 9:22) and a group of people designated to give thanks to God (1 Chr 16:41), צאן 'small cattle' (Neh 5:18), and חץ 'arrow' (Is 49:2). The meanings

from later Hebrew of 'make clear' (knowledge, language) and 'select' (choice sheep, heads of families and the group of people designated to give thanks) fit these occurrences well apart from Isaiah 49:2, which may be a homonymous verb. The rest of the qal occurrences are active in Ecclesiastes 3:18 and Ezekiel 20:38. In both passages the actants are God and humans. In the Ezekiel passage preposition מן 'from' indicates separation. The reference is to God separating the rebellious from Israel at judgment.

In the nifal conjugation the word is used three times (2 Sm 22:27, Ps 18:27, Is 52:11). In both 2 Samuel 22:27 and Psalm 18:27 the antonym is עקש 'twisted', 'false'. The reference of נבר (nifal participle) in these two passages is to the person who is sincere before God. The meaning is likely related to 'make clear' in qal. In the hifil conjugation the word is used in Jeremiah 4:11 and 51:11. The former occurs in a context of judgment metaphorically compared to a wind that is too strong for winnowing and להבר, which may be used synonymously with it. In winnowing the chaff is separated from grain. This may be related to the meaning of 'separate'. The latter, as noted above, may be a homonymous verb.

The piel form is used just once (Dan 11:35), there synonymously with לצרף 'to refine (by smelting)' and ללבן 'to whiten', 'to cleanse' (Koehler and Baumgartner 1995:517 and 1996:1057). The hitpael of Daniel 12:10 has the same synonyms and differs only in voice from the piel. The hitpael of 2 Samuel 22:27 and Psalm 18:27 contrast with nifal, possibly with the nuance of behaving with integrity (not behaving with עקש) rather than just having integrity. All the occurrences except Isaiah 49:2 and Jeremiah 51:11 fit the pattern of postbiblical Hebrew, so it is a good assumption that this is where the meaning should be searched for Ecclesiastes 3:18.

The meaning of the word is given as 'testing' by Ogden and Zogbo (1997:113). I am not aware of any passage with the meaning 'test', unless Ecclesiastes 3:18 is one. This meaning has been argued on the basis of the Vulgate and the Targum, and has been accepted by many commentators (Murphy 1992:30). Seow (1997:159) translates it as 'choose'. This is consistent with the later use as noted above. The LXX renders it as διακρίνει 'separates', 'distinguishes'. One of the meanings for ברר is to 'make clear', as used in the qal passive participles in Job 33:3 and Zephaniah 3:9. It is quite probable that the meaning in Ecclesiastes 3:18 is related to this in that God makes clear what people are. This is related to people being exposed as to how they behave in circumstances like when the court is corrupt. This thought could be

expressed also using the word 'test', though testing does not seem to be the primary meaning. This accords well with the Vulgate and Targum.

Another alternative is to understand the sense of the verb as 'separate', or 'winnow'. The idea would be to separate the good and the bad. The sense is close to God making clear, as the separation is probably not intended as physical, but rather God making the separation or distinction clear to people. (Delitzsch n.d.:267.) Cleansing is not likely to be the meaning here. Injustice encourages evil rather than cleanses people according to Qohelet in Ecclesiastes 8:11. Even if it is thought that some people are exceptions and when they experience injustice, they are somehow “cleansed”, the thought is rather subtle and there are no clear textual clues to help the reader arrive at this interpretation. This discounts the possibility, though the argument may not be decisive. Preferably a larger corpus of occurrences of qal active of בָּרַר and a person object should be studied.

The expression לְבָרַר הָאֱלֹהִים is ambiguous about the subject and the object, as it lacks the object marker אֶת. Murphy (1992:30) understands God as the subject and refers to Gesenius (1910:355). Gesenius notes that the rule is that the subject, not the object follows immediately the infinitive. Yet he notes examples contrary to the rule. Thus the rule is not absolute. He notes Numbers 24:23 as having the subject follow an infinitive with an object marked with a noun suffix, quite analogous to the situation in Ecclesiastes 3:18. Thus Gesenius does not give unambiguous support to Murphy. His rule denies Murphy's interpretation but his exceptions allow it.

If we understand God to be the object of בָּרַר, the meaning is probably related to people choosing God because of corruption in the court. Against this view is the relative infrequency of the idea of choosing God. We find it in Joshua 24:22 and Judges 10:14. In Joshua 24:22 it is explicitly mentioned that God is chosen as an object of service, and the verb used is different (בָּחַר). In Judges 10:14 the reference is to the gods people chose, again with verb בָּחַר, not בָּרַר. To choose God among gods (or one god among several gods) does not seem as relevant in the context of Ecclesiastes 3:18 as God exposing what people are like. This discounts the possibility of God being the object.

Seow (1997:167) appeals to Ecclesiastes 9:4 for the existence of an asseverative lamed. Muraoka (1985:113-123) argues that the examples used to argue for emphatic lamed are not convincing, though he says that “no satisfying solution has been offered to the notorious”

Ecclesiastes 9:4 (Muraoka 1985:120). Fox (1999:292) thinks the lamed is not emphatic but one of benefit. Nevertheless, Muraoka is open to the possibility of asseverative lamed with finite verb forms and with the subject or predicate of a nominal clause (Muraoka 1985:123). The reason for suggesting an emphatic or asseverative lamed for לברם in Ecclesiastes 3:18 appears to be that the other alternative is seen as problematic. Seow (1997:167) gives two reasons why it is problematic. There is no finite verb in the sentence and it is difficult to account for the word order. The lack of finite verb may be due to an ellipsis as explained in section 4.2.1.3.1. The word order becomes natural if the ellipsis is assumed.

Appealing to an asseverative lamed to resolve the lack of a finite verb creates another problem for the verse, the function of על־דברת. It cannot be a final or result clause marker, as it would not make sense to attribute the sentence to be the result or purpose of Qohelet's thinking. So it should be understood in a more general sense 'concerning'. While this meaning is possible for על־דברת, its function in this text is not clear. It should be understood as a topic marker, but there does not seem to be any reason for such a topic announcing expression here. Qohelet's previous note in verse 17 was also about people. The next verse continues to be about people. This meaning for על־דברת is not a good textual fit. Thus it is better not to consider the verb to have an asseverative lamed.

Out of the various views of the meaning of לברם, it was concluded that 'to expose' is the most likely for Ecclesiastes 3:18, with God as the subject and people as the object. The sense of the first part of Ecclesiastes 3:18 is that the result or divine purpose of corruption in court is that God uses it to expose what people are like. Out of these two variants I am inclined to prefer result over purpose to err on the safe side.

#### **4.2.1.3.3 לראות in Ecclesiastes 3:18**

Many commentators (Fox 1999:216, Murphy 1992:30, Ogden and Zogbo 1997:113, Seow 1997:167) emend וְלִרְאוֹת (qal) to וְלִרְאוֹת (hifil with apocopated ה). The LXX agrees. This makes God the subject of the verb, with the idea that God shows people that they are like quadrupeds. However, this emendation is unnecessary. The Masoretic pointing makes sense as it stands. The subject must be inferred from the context (see Joüon and Muraoka 1996b:439). In this case, the humans is an active topic, which serves well as a default subject. Thus the thought is that a result or (divine) purpose of the corruption of the court is that people see that they are בהמה 'quadruped'.

#### 4.2.1.3.4    **המה להם in Ecclesiastes 3:18**

The expression **המה להם** has generated discussion. Whitley (1979:38) and Crenshaw (1987:103) propose taking the lamed as emphatic ('they indeed' or 'really'). Seow (1997:168) criticizes this by noting that all the examples cited by them are ethical datives which should follow an imperative or at least a verb. His solution is to understand **להם** to mean "something like 'of themselves'". I suggest that the lamed is one of specification (Waltke and O'Connor 1990:206-207), giving the sense 'with regard to what they are in themselves'. The clause is elliptic, unless we excise **המה** as dittography with Seow (1997:168). I don't find Weeks's (2002:1) suggestion likely that the subject of **לראות** is **המה** because the **ש** clause intervenes.

If the Masoretic text is allowed to stand, it should be understood as having an ellipsed **בהמה** 'quadruped' (**המה בהמה להם**), giving the sense 'they are quadrupeds in themselves'. The meaning differs from the version without **המה** in that the qualification 'in themselves' is given as a separate proposition. Not much depends on whichever text is chosen. More significant is the qualification itself. Qohelet limits human animalness to what they are 'in themselves'. The point of comparison is further specified in the next verse to death. It is not quite clear why this hedge 'in themselves' is mentioned, but Qohelet has mentioned divine judgment in verse 17. He may make a contrast: humans are animals *in themselves*, but not necessarily with respect to divine judgment.

#### 4.2.1.3.5    **Conclusions on Ecclesiastes 3:18**

Qohelet's second reaction to his observation of injustice in the court was that its result is that God makes clear what people are like and that people see that they are animals in themselves. The flow of thought is somewhat difficult to follow. Qohelet does not elaborate on what the connection between injustice in court is to being an animal other than injustice is supposed to help seeing one is (like) an animal. Perhaps the thought is based on the theme of human limitations. A person at the mercy of a corrupt court faces his human limitations. It is also a test to the innocent victims, the guilty who receive favor from the court, and the corrupt judges. It exposes what they are like. Especially for the victim, it is a poignant reminder of his limitations, which may cause him to see his other limitations. It is possible to take death to be the result of a corrupt death sentence at the court (Lohfink 2003:66), but the reference need not be limited to death penalty.

A quadruped may be introduced as a being with limitations. It will die, and it is not known to try to make a permanent profit for itself, let alone to be successful at it. It is at the mercy of its environment, just like people are. Yet people may forget their limitations and trust in their ability to manipulate situations and not think of ending up dead. Suffering injustice in life may help one think of their mortality and ephemerality. In themselves they are no more in control of the final outcome of death than the animal, whatever differences there may be with respect to divine judgment after death. Yet, as noted in verse 17, there is going to be an eschatological divine judgment for people to reckon with, if that line of interpretation is followed. This is not Qohelet's main theme here but is it assumed and it expresses Qohelet's solution to the problem of God allowing injustice to take place in human courts. He will judge. Also it helps people realize their human limitations, especially mortality.

#### **4.2.1.4 The common death of humans and quadrupeds in Ecclesiastes 3:19-21**

##### **4.2.1.4.1 Introduction**

Verses 3:19-21 continue on the theme of human mortality, comparing it with the death of בהמה 'quadruped'. Qohelet notes that humans and animals have the same מְקָרָה 'lot', that they die the same way, that their spirit is the same, and that humans have no advantage over the animals, and that both came from the soil and both return to the soil. He ends with a rhetorical question asking who knows if the human spirit rises up and the animal spirit goes down to the ground. This passage raises a number of interpretive questions of high importance for the subject of this study.

##### **4.2.1.4.2 Ecclesiastes 3:19-20**

In Ecclesiastes 3:19, Qohelet discusses the common רוּחַ 'spirit' that people and animals share, the common death they share, and the lack of advantage people have over animals. These three expressions all speak of death. He sums all this up as 'all is futile'.

Delitzsch (n.d.:268-269) argues that מְקָרָה is not a construct form because it is spelled with shegol rather than tzere in the Masoretic text, and gives 'chance' as the meaning here, interpreting the phrase as meaning that people and animals are dependent beings. Seow (1997:168) takes it as a construct noun on the basis of the vocalizations of III-weak nouns in the absolute and construct forms not being consistent in the book of Ecclesiastes. Murphy

(1992:30) suggests that the Masoretic vocalization may have tried to avoid the implications of what Qohelet said, and that it should be vocalized with tzere and understood as construct form. Delitzsch's attempt to make sense of the syntax with the Masoretic vocalization results in an abrupt introduction of the notion of contingent beings. It seems much more likely that *מקרה* should be understood as a construct form. The word itself has the meaning of 'chance' along with 'event', but here it refers to the common death (an event) shared by men and animals.

The waw in *ומקרה אחד* 'and one event' is emended away by Longman (1998:126). Seow (1997:168) understands it as waw apodoseos introducing the predicate of the casus pendens. This is not a normal case of casus pendens. The pronoun *להם* does not refer to *מקרה* 'event' but the humans and animals sharing the *מקרה* 'event'. Seow gives Job 4:6 and 36:26 as parallels. In both passages the waw, rather than *הוא*, functions to introduce the predicate to the topic. I understand this to be one of the uses of waw and apply it to Ecclesiastes 3:19 with Seow. The event is further specified as death in the latter part of the verse, which says that as one dies, so dies the other. Qohelet denies the idea that the event of death is different for humans and animals.

Qohelet claims that people and animals have the same *רוח* 'spirit'. This is in the context of them dying the same way. This may mean simply 'life' (see Fredericks 2010:122, Gn 6:17, 7:15, Ps 104:29) or it may refer to the human and animal spirits being similar in death. Either way, as noted by Fredericks, the comparison is not specifically extended to say that there is no distinction other than with regards to death. Understanding it as a reference to 'spirit' as something capable of existence outside of the body creates more cohesion to 3:21, but it is also very possible Qohelet discusses the bodily aspects of death first and only after that moves to speculation about different destinies for human and animal spirits.

Because of the common death people and animals share, people can make no more profit (*יתרון*) than animals. Therefore all is *הבל* 'futile'. If people died in a different way from animals, it might be possible to make a profit and carry something to the next life. The argument goes from what seems to be on a less disputed ground to the more questionable one. Qohelet assumes he finds common ground that animals cannot produce profit, and argues that since people die the same way, neither can they. Though the keyword *יתרון* 'profit' does not occur in this passage, its antonym *הבל* 'futility' does, linking the thought to the theme of the book on the futility of pursuing permanent profit.

In verse 3:20 Qohelet elaborates the point even more. He refers specifically to the bodies of humans and animals. They come from עפר 'soil'. This is evident from the biological food chain originating with plants, and it is mentioned for humans in the creation story in Genesis 2:7. Both animals and people decompose after death and become soil again.

#### **4.2.1.4.3 Ecclesiastes 3:21**

##### **4.2.1.4.3.1 Introduction**

In Ecclesiastes 3:21, Qohelet raises the question of whether the spirit of man goes up and the spirit of a quadruped goes down to the earth at death. Not all agree that this is the question. Kaiser (1979:70) thinks that Qohelet says that “the spirit of the man goes upward but the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth”. His argument is based on the pointing of ה as an article rather than as an interrogative particle. With הירדת, the letter ה has patach and the following consonant has dagesh forte. With העלה, the letter ה has qametz. These are consistent with the participial form. The expected pointing for the interrogative form is no dagesh and the vowel to be chatef patach for יורדת and patach for עולה (see Joüon and Muraoka 1986a:334-335).

With Kaiser's interpretation, the rhetorical question in this interpretation becomes “who knows that”, and the thing known is presupposed to be true. This view is very problematic in light of the pronoun היא. It is appropriate in an indirect question as a resumptive pronoun filling the subject slot of the subordinate clause and referring to הרוח 'spirit'. This construction is not appropriate for an attributive participle interpretation, as the participle is part of the matrix clause (מי יודע רוח בני האדם העלה) and the pronoun is a subject in the subordinate clause (היא למעלה). This leaves the subordinate clause without a proper predicate. To take the adverbial of direction as the predicate is quite abrupt. Rather what is to be questioned is whether the pointing is a reliable indicator that the Masoretes understood it as a participle. To the degree it is, it may be an attempt by the Masoretes to obfuscate the sense of the verse for theological reasons.

Fredericks (2010:110-111) thinks the question is ambiguous between 'whether' that is so and 'when' that is so. He argues that the question is not 'whether' or 'where' but 'when' (Fredericks 2010:123). This interpretation suffers from the problem of the interrogative particle ה. It is used to introduce a polar question, not an open question like 'when' or 'where'.



A rhetorical question, in this case “who knows whether the spirit of humans goes up and the spirit of quadrupeds goes down to the earth?”, like all questions, communicate that the answer to the question is relevant (Sperber and Wilson 1995:252). A rhetorical question is not an elicitation for information but it makes the point that the answer is relevant. What the answer is may be clear or not. A rhetorical question may be used to mark a topic with the author answering his own question, or it may be used to get the reader make inferences on the basis of the answer. The function of the rhetorical question *מִי יָדוּעַ* 'who knows' may be to draw attention to a possible state of affairs as a potential basis for an action or thought (2 Sam 12:22, Est 4:14) or to the lack of knowledge of a state of affairs as strengthening the basis for an action or thought (Eccl 2:18-19). The conclusion that joy in one's work (Eccl 3:22) is the best thing is connected by a *waw* to the rhetorical question. The function of the rhetorical question is to strengthen this conclusion.

In the case of Ecclesiastes 3:21, Qohelet has just previously discussed death of humans and animals and now he moves on to what happens or not after death. The question presupposes the existence of a *רוח* 'spirit' after death. Assuming that the body goes down to the ground, at least in the case of the human, the spirit has existence independent of the body. In the case of the animal, it may go to the same place as the body. Nevertheless, its existence does not cease with the death of the animal. The spirit cannot go anywhere without existence.

Animal spirits are not much discussed in the Bible. That animals have 'a spirit of life' is clear (see 4.2.1.4.2), but the reference may not be the same here if a distinction is made between a spirit as an entity and having a spirit as an idiom of being alive. As far as I know, the Bible is silent on what happens to spirits of animals after they die other than the rhetorical question of the present passage.

The rhetorical question of Ecclesiastes 3:21 has been understood in various ways. One approach is to understand Qohelet to be speaking of the afterlife in general. This view is supported by Bartholomew (2009:178), Enns (2011:59), Fox (1999:216-217), Liroy (2008:48-49), and Longman (1998:130-131). Murphy (1992:37) notes that there may be a reference to a specific view of the afterlife. Fox (1999:215) agrees though he expands Qohelet's attitude from the specific view to afterlife in general.

The view that Qohelet denies certainty of the afterlife in general makes a statement that is beyond what is needed in this context. Assuming that Qohelet is making an argument that one

is to have joy in his work (Eccl 3:22) on the basis that because of injustice and mortality one should not attempt to hoard something in this life to enjoy it later (see chapter 3), and assuming that Qohelet thinks that enjoyment is accepted by God (Eccl 9:7, see section 3.3.7), a concept of an afterlife in general does nothing to weaken Qohelet's point. Ignorance or lack of empirical evidence for the afterlife is relevant to his argument only for a subset of possible views of the afterlife.

Neither is it clear that an affirmation of the afterlife in general is very relevant to Qohelet's argument, unless he argues that there is reward in the afterlife for enjoying life now. There is no textual evidence that he makes this argument in this passage. An interpretation of Qohelet questioning afterlife in general creates tension with the interpretation of his view of divine judgment expressed in 3:17 that it refers to an afterlife judgment (see section 4.2.1.2). There are a few possibilities to approach this tension. One is to think it is a contradiction. This makes one wonder if the questioning of afterlife in 3:21 is general after all. A reference to a particular view may solve the contradiction, depending on the particulars. Another is to identify the divine and human judgments in 3:17. The contradiction also disappears if another interpretation is accepted for Ecclesiastes 3:17.

Yet another possibility is to question whether a universal eschatological judgment necessitates afterlife. Logically it does not. It is possible for God to pronounce a judgment over all deeds ever committed with some of the actors no longer present to hear the judgment. However, this is not likely as the execution of the judgment is part of the frame of the semantics of the verb **שפט** in the sense of 'judge'. Therefore I favor the view that Qohelet makes a reference to a particular view of the afterlife, one that he either affirms as supporting his message or denies as incompatible with it. In either case he chooses here only to present the view as a question, that humans may have an advantage over animals after death in being able to enjoy in the afterlife something of what they have accomplished in this life. This view strengthens or undermines Qohelet's basic exhortation to enjoy life in one's work, as an enjoyment in the afterlife might very well be worth giving up on joy now.

Bryson (2011:95) thinks the rhetorical question is an affirmation of the state of affairs: the human spirit ascends and the animal spirit descends. Leupold (1952:97-100) approaches the question similarly. He understands the verse not to continue the preceding thought but to contrast with it. While the use of a rhetorical question to draw attention to an affirmed state of affairs is a possibility, it is not clear that it fits contextually to Ecclesiastes 3:21. If it does, it

should somehow strengthen the exhortation to have joy in one's work. When Qohelet does not elaborate on how he thought this to take place, and while there is no obvious answer, the relevance of this view is low, as relevance decreases with the increase of required processing for contextual efforts (Wilson and Sperber 1995:123-132). Qohelet has just argued for the similarity between animals and humans in death. If he intended to make a contrast between them after death, it would probably be more clearly marked, since the reader is predisposed to see a similarity rather than difference right after reading about their similarity.

So far Qohelet has made no case for the afterlife or judgment in the afterlife to motivate one to overcome the temptation to toil for profit at the expense of joy. Ecclesiastes 11:9 is a possibility, but even there the reference to judgment probably includes a hedge rather being exclusively an encouragement to joy (see section 4.2.6). It is acknowledged that knowledge of the particular view Qohelet refers to might alter this relevance judgment. Nevertheless, based on these considerations and being unaware of a view of afterlife that fits this interpretation, I do not think it likely that Qohelet affirms the particular view of the afterlife presented in the rhetorical question.

There are a few things we can infer on the basis of assumptions in the previous paragraphs about the kind of concept of afterlife Qohelet questions knowledge of.

Inference (1). The original readers would recognize the concept Qohelet referred to by the notions that the human spirit ascends and the animal spirit descends.

Inference (2). The human spirit going up is more privileged than the animal spirit going down. This reading connects the lack of advantage in death in verse 19 more naturally with the view of afterlife than its opposite.

Inference (3). Qohelet disagreed with the concept of the afterlife. While this inference is less than certain, this is a good assumption, unless there is a good contrary candidate that satisfies contextual relevance and fits Qohelet's purpose. If Qohelet agreed with the concept, it should explain why the human spirit rising strengthens the need for joy now. The idea could be that the ascending spirit does not have a possibility for joy in the afterlife. Yet this would leave unexplained why Qohelet drew the contrast to animal spirits descending.

Inference (4). The concept of afterlife undermines Qohelet's argument of the importance of joy. This is a corollary of inference (3) within the present context in light of Ecclesiastes 3:22.

More specifically, the concept of afterlife implies that by depriving oneself of joy one could achieve something for the afterlife. This is supported by the fact that futility is used as an argument for joy and that overwork and greed threaten the proper attitude to enjoyment (see sections 3.5 and 3.6.4). Even if one is more effective in achieving some goal by giving up on enjoyment, Qohelet prefers a balance of rest and work rather than overwork (Eccl 4:6). The idea may be but need not be that in the afterlife one may have access to one's possessions or achievements in this life. It may also be that one is able to gain some benefit for the afterlife rather than being able to come back to enjoy benefits of this life. Either way, toil now improves his standing in the afterlife. Also the rhetorical question of 3:22 ('Who will bring him back to see what will be after him?') shares this concern, though it need not be completely synonymous.

Inference (5). The concept of afterlife goes beyond the idea that there is a judgment based on one's works. This alone would not suffice, because in Qohelet's worldview, God accepts one enjoying his life (see section 3.5). If God is the judge, one would not expect him to judge negatively something he approves. Qohelet connects divine judgment and the call to enjoy in Ecclesiastes 11:9. Rather in this view one is to give up on some joy in order to improve his standing in the afterlife.

The expressions Qohelet uses are not expressions of denial of knowledge of all views of the afterlife. He is specifically concerned with a view that assumes the existence of the spirit after death for both people and animals and that makes a separation between the directions they go. Fox (1999:215) calls the idea that the spirit goes up non-Semitic. In the Old Testament there are no passages that I know of that speak of the direction where the spirit of man goes at death, other than 'out' (אצ', for example Ps 146:4), though the spirit is said to return to God (Eccl 12:7), which may be considered as 'up' (thus interpreted by Fredericks 2010:123). The view Qohelet referred to should be studied in the context of ancient Near East views of the afterlife.

#### **4.2.1.4.3.2 Assyro-Babylonian view on the afterlife**

Bailey (1979:16-21) argues that the Assyro-Babylonians believed that ghosts of the dead are in the tomb or the netherworld. Thus their direction would be mostly down. However, if they were not properly buried or not provided for with offerings of food and drink, they might come out and roam the earth and attack mortals (Bailey 1979:9-11). According to Bailey

(1979:21), tombs have been discovered with tubes through which food and drink were passed to the deceased, but Lewis (1999:228) disputes this. That the ghosts of the deceased were below rather than above may be related to the bodies being buried in the ground. Bailey does not equate the ghosts with the concept of a soul because the living was not considered to possess a ghost that survives death but the person at death becomes the ghost (1979:17).

Bailey (1979:18) notes that in the Assyro-Babylonian culture the dead were summoned by placing tempting offerings of food, drink, and blood in a pit. This points to an idea that the dead may be able to enjoy something in this life (the offerings) on special occasions. Thus in their view the separation between the living and (the ghosts of) the dead was not complete. This is an interesting parallel, but it does not qualify to be the view referred to by Qohelet, as the ghosts that are able to receive a portion from this life are below, not above, thus violating inference (1). The idea that the spirits or ghosts of the dead are below is not strange, because they buried people underground. The location of their bodies makes it easy to locate the person as a whole underground.

#### **4.2.1.4.3.3 Greek views on the afterlife**

The view of the afterlife in the Greek poetry of Homer is rather similar to the Assyro-Babylonian concept of the afterlife. In the Homeric poetry the spirits have an impoverished existence. They are no longer fully human beings. Their location is in Hades, which is underground. They are invoked by digging a pit and pouring drink-offerings and the blood of sacrifices, points of similarity with the Assyro-Babylonian culture. Interestingly, though Heracles's (Hercules's) eidolon is in the house of Hades (below), the real Heracles feasts with the immortal Gods. (Wright 2003:41-44.) Drozdek (2011:29-30) explains that Heracles's eidolon was left in Hades when his soul was taken to Olympus. This is because his soul belonged irrevocably to Hades as it had entered there. When gods transferred his soul to Olympus, a replica was left in its stead. (Odyssey 11.)

Not everyone goes to Hades at death (Drozdek 2011:30-33). Menelaus, for example, was informed that he will go to Elysium (Wright 2003:50, Drozdek 2011:32, Garland 1985:60-61, Odyssey 4:561-569). Elysium is called the Islands of the Blessed by Herodotus. The islands are located in the west, not above. The concept probably comes from the Egyptian concept of the Field of Reeds, according to Taylor (2010:243). Wright's logic requires that Elysium was not considered a region of Hades. Drozdek (2011:30-33) interprets Elysium to be separate

from Hades. The division of the dead into two categories played a relatively minor role in the history of Greek eschatology, according to Garland (1985:66). The soul does not have the principle of cognition (νόος) or of emotion (θυμός). Nevertheless it is capable of these functions. This is because the soul is left with a reflection of νόος and θυμός. These capabilities are feeble though existent. Humans and animals both went similarly to Hades (Drozdek 2011:22-23.)

Plato considered the soul to be the non-material aspect of a human being. He considered the soul to be immortal, to have existed before the body, and to continue to exist after the disintegration of the body. He saw death in a positive light. It releases the soul from the prison of the body. The separation of soul and body is to be desired. After death, judgment is passed according to the person's previous behavior. The virtuous will be sent to the Islands of the Blessed and the wicked to Tartarus, but most will reincarnate. Wright sees tension in Plato's view in that the wicked will be punished, but overall the view of death is positive. He thinks this tension is resolved by understanding even negative judgment as good, because it brings truth and justice. Later some of the dead will return to other bodies. According to Drozdek (2011:224-226), the animal soul is really a human soul in the animal body, and will be likewise judged. This does not allow for the directional distinction between humans and animals that Qohelet makes. (Drozdek 2011:199-228, Wright 2003:49-50, 52.)

Hengel (1974:124) suggests that Qohelet refers to a view in Greek epitaphs and literature by Euripides that the human soul goes up in death. This is not sufficient to qualify to be the view referred to by Qohelet. It is obvious that there was latitude in the various Greek views of the afterlife. This brief study touches only on the views in Homer's poetry and the view of Plato. They were incompatible with the view referred to by Qohelet. These views are not the only views. For a rather thorough study of the different views, see Drozdek (2011). None of them, as presented by him, express a clear distinction between the directions of the animal and human souls so as to be clearly recognizable by Qohelet's reference. Rather in many views the afterlife of animal and human souls or spirits are viewed rather similarly. However, this is not sufficient to settle the issue. More research is needed. Yet it is clear that the view that it is possible that Qohelet refers to a Greek view cannot be taken for granted without further argumentation.

#### **4.2.1.4.3.4 Some other views on the afterlife**

According to Wright (2003:45), in many ancient cultures it was common to bury with the dead household goods that one might need. Sometimes the wealthy had animals and slaves, even wives, slaughtered to accompany them in the next world. This is relevant to the book of Ecclesiastes in showing that in the ancient world there were ideas that one might take something with themselves to the afterlife. This concept may be used to argue for toiling to gain out of life in order to enjoy it in the next life rather than enjoy it now.

For a select few it was believed possible to become a god or a star. Wright (2003:55) notes that Heracles was admitted to the company of gods. The souls of the virtuous might attain to be stars (Wright 2003:57-58). According to Wright, this idea of astral immortality was found in Greek thought, but also in Babylonian and Egyptian sources. Plato held a view that the virtuous souls go to stars rather than become stars (Wright 2003:58).

#### **4.2.1.4.3.5 Ancient Egyptian view on the afterlife**

A major source for the ancient Egyptian view(s) of the afterlife is the Book of the Dead. The book does not have a consistent composition but rather represents a selection of spells (Taylor 2010:13). Books of the Dead were written from the seventeenth century BC to at least the first century BC, spanning more than a millennium and a half (Taylor 2010:16, 54, 310, Ikram 2003:43-44, 213-214, 221). They represent an Egyptian view of the afterlife. The purpose of the book was to help the deceased in his journey in the afterlife by means of spells contained in the book. Thus it does not attempt to present a systematic view of the afterlife, but much can be gleaned from it. Here I will pay attention to some features relevant to Ecclesiastes 3:21.

The Egyptians viewed the human as a composite being that disintegrated at death. The heart, as part of the body, was the center of the person's being. Mind and intelligence were associated with the heart. There were two spirit aspects, *ka* and *ba*. *Ka* referred to the person's life that was passed from parent to child, but it was personal to each individual. After death, *ka* was believed to remain in the tomb, nourished by food offerings. *Ba* represented the personality and was the nearest equivalent to 'soul'. *Ba* could move more freely than *ka*. It could leave the tomb by day, but it had to return each night to reunite with the mummy. (Taylor 2010:17, Ikram 2003:23-30, McDermott 2006:20-23.) Assmann (2005:14) describes *ba* as the individual self and *ka* as the social self. He notes that the concept of *ka* did not

remain constant (2005:96). For a fuller explanation of Assman's view, see Assmann (2005:87-102).

The dead were given material goods, such as food, drink, and clothing in the tomb, but also magical texts to help them in the afterlife. The main types of magical texts for the dead were actual words of rituals in mortuary liturgies and funeral texts proper, such as the Book of the Dead. (Taylor 2010:28-31.) Taylor (2001:154) mentions the possibility that the *ba* of the deceased might also eat fruit from a tree he had planted. This seems to indicate that it was believed that one could access his life-time accomplishments in the afterlife to some degree. It was believed that the dead could influence the world of the living. Letters were left for the dead, often requesting for healing. The *ba* could leave the tomb and revisit the world of the living, journey in the sun-god's boat and go to Duat, the underworld of god Osiris. (Taylor 2010:102, 104-105, McDermott 2006:50.)

The concept of 'coming forth by day' was important. The original name of the Book of the Dead can be translated as 'Spells for coming forth by day' (Taylor 2010:288). The concept refers to the idea that the *ba* left the tomb. In the New Kingdom (about 1550-1069 BC as given by Taylor 2010:10), it became the most important concept that influenced preparations for the afterlife (Taylor 2010:105). Likewise in the New Kingdom the idea of going forth by day is connected with power to be transformed into different forms, such as wild creatures (a golden falcon, a divine falcon, a heron, a swallow, a snake, a crocodile) or divine beings. There was even a spell (spell 76) to enable transformation into any form one wishes. The goal was to be able to depart the netherworld in the morning and to return in the evening. (Taylor 2010:166.) So the *ba* could be said to go up in the morning and then go down in the evening.

The king was believed to participate in the sun-god's journey across the sky by day and through the netherworld at night. There is some difficulty in determining whether the peasant could expect the same. In the afterlife there might be interaction with great gods as well as life in a more familiar landscape. It is not clear how these relate to each other. (Taylor 2010:238.)

The Field of Reeds was believed to be a place for the dead where there are abundant crops. From it probably came the Elysian Fields of Greek mythology. The journey through the Field of Reeds was understood as cyclical like other journeys in the afterlife. In the pyramid texts the deceased was purified in the Field of Reeds before ascending to the sky, but in the Book



of the Dead it was a place where food was provided for the dead by crops growing there. In the Field of Reeds, animals were pictured as present. There are at least oxen used for plowing in the Field of Reeds (see figure 73 in Taylor 2010:244 picturing Papyrus of Ani EA10470/35 from about 1275 BC). It is not clear whether the Field of Reeds was in the sky or under the earth, but it was located in the east where the sun-god ends its nightly journey. (Taylor 2010:241-244.)

As agricultural life can be laborious, it was considered possible that one might have to work in the afterlife. To ease the burden of the deceased, shabti figures could be placed in the tomb. They were human-like figures thought to work on behalf of the deceased, especially when a proper spell was employed. They would number from 1 to 401, or even more. The number 401 consists of “365 'workers', plus 36 'overseers', equipped with whips to control every gang of 10”. (Taylor 2010:244-245, McDermott 2006:159-161, Ikram 2003:128-131, Assmann 2005:110.) Though one should be content in life in the netherworld only as argued by god Atum in a spell, the deceased may desire to leave the netherworld periodically. This is why 'coming forth by day' was so important. Many spells aim to help the deceased gain admittance to the sun-god's boat to travel in his company. (Taylor 2010:240.)

There was a concept of judgment for the dead in Egyptian thought. It was called 'weighing of the heart', and believed to take place in the hall of the two Maats. There one would claim to be innocent of sins, such as robbing, stealing, killing, lying. The hoped-for result was that the weight of the heart was equal to the weight of an image of goddess Maat. It was feared that the heart might speak and witness against the person being judged or even lie. Certain deities were believed to be able to turn the heart against its owner. Successfully denying one's guilt, the deceased would not receive a penalty at judgment. However, important as moral integrity was considered, it was acknowledged that everyone has done something bad. These misdeeds might be concealed from gods if the heart was silent at judgment. Possession of appropriate ritual knowledge was believed to enable the deceased to escape punishment. (Taylor 2010:204-212.)

If all did not go well, the deceased was believed to be handed to the Devourer that devoured the dead. The Devourer was a hybrid beast of crocodile, lion, and hippopotamus. If vindicated, the deceased was believed to receive back his heart. (Taylor 2010:212-215.) There was also a judgment in the lake of fire, located in Duat (the underworld). In it evil was burned

in its flames, and the blessed dead were nourished by it. It is not clear whether the lake of fire was an alternative to the weighing of the heart. (Taylor 2010:217.)

A significant feature of the concept of judgment is that special knowledge and spells were thought to help (Taylor 2010:212). Therefore it was not just a matter of an objective judgment of one's works. The special knowledge was contained in the form of the spells. There was a whole industry of books of the dead. This must have been economically quite convenient for those who produced the books. Production of books was expensive in antiquity. There was an elaborate view of the afterlife and the deceased would need the help of spells in the afterlife. There would be a potentially horrifying judgment but they could pass it with the help of appropriate spells, a view with some similarity to indulgences. Assmann (2005:77-79) denies the idea that correct behavior was unimportant. It is just a matter of striving for a good result at judgment using both means, living right and spells.

It was not only the cost of the book of the dead that was involved in preparing the deceased for the afterlife. Also mummification and proper burial were involved. According to Taylor (2001:41-42), it took substantial resources to equip the dead for eternity so that it had considerable influence over the economy of Egypt. There were different methods of mummification with different costs. The poor were not embalmed with the best methods. (Taylor 2001:50-51.) Various items were placed in tombs, which could be expensive (see Taylor 2001:99-111, 178-180, McDermott 2006:154-159). There is some debate as to whether objects were produced for the tomb or whether they had served the owner in life, or whether both kinds of objects were placed in the tomb (Ikram 2003:132), but in any case they were unavailable for further use after being placed in the tomb.

The mortuary cult required a price in the form of a proper burial site that maintained the offering and payment for the cultic priest if one was employed (Taylor 2001:174-175, Ikram 2003:187-191, McDermott 2006:194-195). The tomb-owner was generally responsible for financing his mortuary cult (Ikram 2003:191). The eldest son was responsible for provisioning the tomb for his father (McDermott 2006:194, Ikram 2003:191). Sometimes people would pay for the construction of their own tombs (Ikram 2003:151). In this worldview it would make sense to submit to the presumably oppressive economy of religion and work hard to get enough money to acquire the proper burial and spells so that one would be able to come forth by day and arise with the sun-god, even if that meant losing a lot of enjoyment in life because of not having a balance between work and rest.

Some humans were believed to be able to arise with the sun-god. I am not aware of any evidence that this was considered a possibility for animals. Taylor (2001:247) thinks that for the majority of animals that were mummified in the Late-Roman periods, no afterlife appears to have been envisaged. Mummification of animals was done to express devotion to a particular god (Taylor 2001:254). According to McDermott (2006:214) and Ikram (2003:77-93), the mummification of animals served various purposes. They could be preserved as pets or food supplies, for example. As it was believed that the afterlife had a similar environment to that of the living, it is logical to think that there were animals. An example of an exalted status of an animal is Tamy, the cat of prince Tuthmosis. It was buried in a sarcophagus that had hieroglyphic texts identifying the cat as an Osiris and invoking the protection of goddesses (Taylor 2001:263). I interpret this to mean that an afterlife was envisaged for the cat. Ikram (2003:77-78) also thinks that pet mummies were believed to continue existence in the afterlife. We lack a clear explication of the fate of animals what were ritually buried. (Taylor 2001:247.) Assmann (2005:17) believes that immortality was ascribed to animals as well.

The Egyptian view appears so relevant to inference (4) that the same point was made already in Egypt. There were skeptical views on whether the elaborate preparations for afterlife were worth making as opposed to enjoying the pleasures of life (Taylor 2001:44-45).

#### **4.2.1.4.3.6 Conclusions on afterlife and Ecclesiastes 3:21**

Several views of the afterlife were presented. Now it is time to compare them with the inferences made on the meaning of Ecclesiastes 3:21 earlier in section 4.2.1.4.3.

Inference (1) is that the original reader would recognize the concept Qohelet referred to by the notions that the human spirit ascends and the animal spirit descends. The Assyro-Babylonian view and some of the Greek views reviewed above fail to match this inference. The idea that the dead might become a star or a god may meet this requirement, as does the Greek idea that the human soul goes up. Likewise the Egyptian view with its emphasis on going forth by day clearly qualifies for the human spirit ascending. The idea of the human spirit going up was very central in the Egyptian thought. Though evidence of what was believed to be the afterlife future of animals seems meager, it is possible that the spirits of the ones that went to the afterlife would go down. In the Field of Reeds there are at least oxen, but it is not clear whether this is considered to be part of the netherworld or the sky or

perhaps something in between. Neither is it clear if the oxen have previously lived in this life and died or if they are just oxen that happen to live there having never been in this life. The view of the animal spirits going down may perhaps signify lack of rising up with the sun, thus a less privileged position than that of the humans who did, regardless of the status of animals in the netherworld and in the Field of Reeds. More research into the afterlife of animals in the view of ancient Egyptians and its applicability to Ecclesiastes 3:21 is desirable.

Inference (2) is that the human spirit going up is more privileged than the animal spirit going down. The Greek view of the soul going up was not evaluated specifically for compatibility with this inference. This inference fits easily with the rest of the views reviewed where the human spirit goes up. In the ancient Egyptian thought, the *ba* of the human going up for the day was a privilege. If some animals made it to the afterlife, they may have spent it in the underworld, and been thus less privileged than those humans whose spirits went up.

Inference (3) is that Qohelet disagreed with the concept of the afterlife. If reference is made to either the idea that the dead might become a star or a god, or that the Egyptian gods control the afterlife, it is quite likely that Qohelet would have disagreed with this. However, the major disagreement for Qohelet's concern in the text under discussion concerns inference (4). Assuming that Qohelet did agree with the concept is a possibility considering the rhetorical question. In that case the view could be something like the possibility of having joy does not extend to the afterlife for those rising up. However, the views where the human spirit rises up that were covered above did not turn out any such notion. Rather up was good. Additionally there is the problem of the relevance of animal spirits descending.

Inference (4) is that the concept of afterlife undermines Qohelet's argument of the importance of joy. The Egyptian view strongly favored the use of magic to help one in the afterlife. I do not know the price of appropriate magic, but assuming that it was substantial, it would make sense to do what one can, including overwork, to ensure sufficient funds for a better afterlife. If the deceased was able to go out of the tomb by day and somehow partake of something he had, the case is strengthened. This seems to be the case based on the mention of the *ba* being able to eat fruit from a fruit tree he has planted while alive. The Greek view where the soul goes up was not evaluated with respect to this inference.

Inference (5) is that the concept of afterlife goes beyond the idea that there is a judgment based on one's works. For this inference to match a view it is enough if one needs to give up

on joy in pursuit of the better afterlife in cases where Qohelet considered God to accept that joy. The Greek view where the soul goes up was not evaluated with respect to this inference. In the Egyptian view, the use of spells pointed to the judgment not being that of works only. Qohelet was against overwork (Eccl 4:6), even though it might produce results and help one acquire spells ensuring a better afterlife, were the Egyptian view of the afterlife true. The Bible, too, has passages where present joy is postponed for a better afterlife, such as Hebrews 11:35. Inference (5) creates tension with these passages. This raises the question of how Qohelet might have related to these passages and whether his judgment of them would be similar to that of Ecclesiastes 3:21. These questions and the underlying tension and its resolution is discussed in section 4.2.8.

It must be remembered that the review of these views was rather cursory and there may well be more relevant views outside of what was reviewed. The Egyptian view of the afterlife is a promising possibility to be the one Qohelet referred to. It is appealing also in the sense that it was a major view in the ancient Near East. This increases the likelihood that it was known to the original readers. The view covers enough time for the range of suggestions for the dating of the book (see section 1.1.2). It is also possible that the view was not a pure form of what we know of today due to the rather random nature of preservation of ancient literature.

The Egyptian view is rather well-known, but there may have been other views well-known at the time that have not survived to our time. Specifically, Hellenistic views were not evaluated in sufficient depth to estimate whether one or more of them might satisfy the inferences. Even so, the Egyptian parallels are quite suggestive. I propose tentatively that it is the view that Ecclesiastes 3:21 alludes to, but more research is needed. The Egyptian view covers the whole range of suggestions for the date of the book, and it is therefore not dependent on any particular dating of the book for its plausibility.

#### **4.2.1.5 Qohelet's conclusion in Ecclesiastes 3:22**

The conclusion of Ecclesiastes 3:22 was discussed in sections 3.3.5 and 3.5.5. This material need not be repeated in detail here. The general conclusion for the meaning of the verse is that Qohelet emphasizes the importance of joy in one's work and argues against a possibility that its importance is diminished by the possibility to enjoy after death the profit one has made in his lifetime. In its context, the conclusion comes as a reaction to a scene of injustice. To the injustice Qohelet gives two basic answers. One is to note that God will ultimately

judge both the wrongdoer and the just. This he notes in passing as if to answer the intellectual question the injustice raises.

The second answer, which is more central to Qohelet's purposes, is to note that injustice leads to people realizing their limitations. One important limitation is mortality. Assuming that animals do not get profit out of life, the fact that people die like animals makes a case that death deprives people of the chance to gain permanent profit. He also questions whether one can be certain that the afterlife changes this picture. He probably refers to a view where giving up joy in pursuit of profit or achievement results in a better afterlife, quite possibly the Egyptian view of the afterlife.

Qohelet seems to address someone who may not agree with him. He does not offer any proof against the opposing view nor does he call the idea wrong. Rather he challenges one's confidence in it as if to ask whether it is worth trying to devote one's life to gaining permanent profit to enjoy it in the afterlife and miss joy in one's work in the meanwhile. It should be borne in mind that Qohelet makes these comments within a context where divine judgment is to be taken seriously. God accepts having joy in one's work.

#### **4.2.1.6 Conclusions on Ecclesiastes 3:16-22**

Qohelet probably presents an eschatological divine judgment in the afterlife as a solution to the dilemma of injustice in court. I have argued that the judgment is probably certain, eschatological, personal, and in the afterlife. However, this interpretation is based on a number of difficult exegetical questions. If the judgment is considered to be God's response to injustice in court, as I argued to be probable, the question of whether the judgment has to be in the afterlife depends on whether it is personal or not. In section 4.2.1.4.3.1 I argued that in that interpretation, it is personal. The issue will be further touched on in sections 4.2.5.3, 4.2.7, 4.2.8 and 4.5. If the judgment is eschatological, there does not seem to be any reason to consider the judgment imperfect. Rather one would expect God to judge perfectly. Alternative interpretations include the idea that the divine judgment is to be identified with the human one. If the judgment is to be identified with the human judgment, it is clearly immoral and corrupt from the human side. God's justice in his involvement may be rescued by noting that His purposes may go beyond human justice. Nevertheless, the book of Ecclesiastes makes no such argument but rather makes the tension apparent. There is also tension with Psalms where God's judgments are called righteous (Ps 119:75, 137). The tension is possible to resolve by noting that the reference in the psalm is not likely to be to human judgments.

The theme of divine judgment in 3:16-22 seems to be not much more than a diversion from what Qohelet really wanted to say, other than answering the implicit question of injustice either by resolving the tension by appealing to an eschatological judgment or in another interpretation by highlighting the question by making God an agent of the corruption. He uses more space to discuss the similarity of humans and animals in death. Both death and injustice illustrate human limitations. Recognizing one's limitations helps find the proper value of joy. This is relevant to his main claim that one is to have joy in his work. Specifically, Qohelet questions an idea of the afterlife that includes human spirits ascending and animal spirits descending. While the details of this view are not made explicit, it seems to include the notion that somehow man might make a profit for himself in life and thereby joy in work is less important. This may be connected with the idea of being able to see and somehow participate in what will be after one's death in Ecclesiastes 3:22, or it may be a separate argument. Qohelet encourages one to recognize his limitations to find the proper value of joy in work.

## 4.2.2 Excursus: Afterlife in the book of Ecclesiastes

### 4.2.2.1 Introduction

Whether a personal eschatological judgment in the afterlife, as I have argued to be a plausible interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3:17, is compatible with the theology of the book of Ecclesiastes is dependent on the view of afterlife in the book. There is scholarly divergence of opinion on the matter. I now discuss arguments used to show that a concept of a certain afterlife is contrary to the worldview of the book of Ecclesiastes. I do not exhaust the topic here. Some relevant issues are discussed in later sections 4.2.5 and 4.2.8 in more detail. Here I discuss Ecclesiastes 12:7 and 9:1-10 for their contribution to the concept of afterlife in the book of Ecclesiastes. For background information for Ecclesiastes 9:1-10, the word שאול *'Sheol'* is discussed.

### 4.2.2.2 Ecclesiastes 12:7

and the soil returns to the ground that it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.<sup>38</sup> על הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל-האלהים אשר נתנה:

Ecclesiastes 12:7 makes a distinction: in death the body, referred to as the soil, goes to the ground and the spirit returns to God. Longman (1998:273) claims that this is not a reference to consciousness after death but a return to a pre-life situation. What is significant in this verse is the dichotomy between spirit and body. The book of Ecclesiastes affirms it clearly in this verse. Yet Longman is correct in that the verse the state of the spirit is not discussed, whether conscious or unconscious. The dichotomy expressed here is significant in that it is presupposed by my discussion of Ecclesiastes 9:1-10 below, and shown here to be part of the worldview of the book of Ecclesiastes. The spirit cannot return to God without having existence like the soil (עפר), a reference to the body, cannot return to the ground without existence.

### 4.2.2.3 *Sheol* (שאול)

In this discussion, I use the word 'grave' to refer to the place the corpse is placed after death, and 'underworld' or 'netherworld' to refer to the place where the spirit is located, thus differentiating between the domain of the world of human spirits and the domain of the physical world. This is not meant to exclude the possibility that the underworld has a physical

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<sup>38</sup> Possibly the preposition should be ל. The choice of the variant is not important for the present purposes.



location, either different from the grave or the same. While many scholars referred to in this section do not make any definition of their terminology explicit, I think my definition does not do violence to their views. I also use 'spirit' to refer to the non-physical part of the human that is separate from the physical body after death. The choice of the word is not meant to imply a connection between the Hebrew word רוח 'spirit' and *Sheol*. The inhabitants of *Sheol* are not called by the name of רוח 'spirit' in the Hebrew Bible. The choice of the term is rather a matter of English terminology for this discussion. Some authors use the word 'shade' to refer to the inhabitants of *Sheol*, and many but not all scholars think the Hebrew word רפאים 'rephaim' refers to them.

*Sheol* has often been understood to mean the underworld (Wächter 1978:241-242, Johnston 2002:73-75). Others think it refers always to the grave (Harris 1962). Some think that it can refer to both (Bar 2015). Walton (2006:320-321) argues that the word refers to the netherworld and that references to the grave are metaphorical. Johnston (2002:71, 74-75) thinks the word “always refers to the realm of the dead located deep in the earth” and though there are nuances of the word, “these are the nuances of the single basic concept of the underworld. Views to the contrary cannot be sustained.” The context of the last quote is right after he specifically argues against the view that the word means 'grave'. Thus I understand him to represent a rather strong view that excludes 'grave' from the semantic range of *Sheol*.

Johnston's arguments are mostly counter-arguments to scholars who have suggested the meaning of 'grave'. He does not apparently think that he needs to argue in detail, as his view “is almost universally accepted” (Johnston 2002:73). Johnston (2002:73-74) notes Heidel's the argument that *Sheol* means 'the grave', “as shown by references to pomp, worms, maggots and swords (Is. 14:11; Ezek. 32:26f.) or worms and bones (Job 24; Ps. 141; Elephantine papyrus), or by poetic parallels (Ps. 89; Prov. 23) or by the general context (Gen. 37 – 44; 1 Kgs. 2).” He also notes an explicitly theological argument by Heidel. Johnston's response is that the argument (1) “ignores the prophetic pictures of *Sheol*'s inhabitants speaking”, and posits different meanings of *Sheol* within the same passage (Is 14:11-15), and (2) “results in the contradiction that the pious go the *Sheol* (when it means the grave) but not to *Sheol* (when it means the underworld).”.

Johnston (2002:74) further discusses Harris's view that Psalm 88:3 refers only to the grave, and that Isaiah 14:9 is a figure of speech, and that '*Sheol* below' is the opposite of 'heaven above' as that is “as far down as the Hebrews could imagine” (quote from Harris 1961:130;

Harris 1961:131-133). Johnston's counter-arguments are (3) that Harris's discussion of Psalm 88 ignores verses 7 and 11 (6 and 10 in Johnston following English versification), (4) that Isaiah 14 portrays רפאים '*rephaim*' as being roused to greet the fallen tyrant (Is 14:9-10), and (5) that the view cannot be maintained consistently, as illustrated by Amos 9:2 and Deuteronomy 32:22, where NIV does not translate שׂאול as 'grave' because the sense of the passage demands it. Johnston has thus five counter-arguments to the view that שׂאול means 'grave'.

(1) Unfortunately Johnston does not discuss the argument about worms and maggots. If the reference to *Sheol* is to the place of the spirit (or 'shade') and not the body, presumably the worms are not physical or the spirit is considered to be located in the physical world in the soil together with the worms. The picture seems to refer to a place underground where worms typically are. It also seems that they are associated with the decomposition of the physical body, and refer to the physical domain rather than the domain of spirits. In Isaiah 14:9-10 the inhabitants of *Sheol* do speak as Johnston notes. The function of this in the text is to describe the reaction of those already dead to the death of the king of Babylon. They were surprised at the fall of the king. When they were alive he was strong. This can be understood as figurative speech describing the supposed reaction of these people, dead at the time of the death of the king, to the news. In this text, the רפאים '*rephaim*' or 'spirits of the departed' (gloss from NIV, Is 14:9) note how the body of the king of Babylon was covered by worms (Is 14:11). *Sheol* in Isaiah 14:15 need not be understood as anything else than the remote place where the corpse ends up or is buried. Thus the prophetic picture of the inhabitants of *Sheol* speaking may be a figure of speech.

If *Sheol* is considered to have only the basic meaning of 'grave', there are two options. Either the *rephaim* are corpses that are personified, or they refer to the spirits and *Sheol* is used metaphorically in verse 9, though not in verse 11. However, it is also possible that the word is polysemous and has both meanings to begin with. The two meanings both refer to the place after death, but differ in whether it is looked at from the perspective of the spirit or the body. Thus Johnston's argument (1) does not invalidate the view that *Sheol* refers to the grave in verse 11. I do not find the idea that *Sheol* in verse 11 refers to the underworld likely, as the domain indicated by the worms in the verse is physical.

(2) Johnston's argument (2) is specific to Heidel's argument and relates to the theological view that the pious do not go to the underworld. This is not very relevant to my thesis, as

Qohelet clearly excludes no reader of his from those going to *Sheol* in Ecclesiastes 9:10, regardless of their piety.

(3) Johnston understands Psalm 88 to be a description of distress in hyperbolic language (Johnston 2002:86-97). Verse 7 uses expressions בור תחתיות 'pit below', מחשכים 'dark places', and מצולות 'deep places', and verse 11 refers to רפאים '*rephaim*'. The word בור 'pit' can refer to the grave (Johnston 2002:83 gives Jer 41:7,9 as examples). Graves can be located below the ground and be dark. So possibly Johnston does not think that they are very deep and this may be the reason why Psalm 88 cannot refer to the grave. However, the depth may also function metaphorically as expressing the depth of the psalmist's distress. In verse 11 the problem Johnston sees may relate to *rephaim* being hypothetically raised to thank God. He understands the *rephaim* to refer to the spirits of the dead (Johnston 2002:128-130). Harris disputes this and thinks the term refers to dead persons, but admits that in other passages it may refer to "continuing life of the soul" (White and Harris 1980:858). The verse is an appeal for God to deliver the psalmist while he is alive, since he will not be able to thank God when he is no longer alive. The idea is that a live body is needed for the expression of thankfulness to God. This does not change regardless of how we understand the *rephaim* of the verse. Thus Johnston fails to refute Harris's interpretation though this does not imply that Johnston's interpretation is thereby falsified.

(4) The רפאים '*rephaim*' (Is 14:9) may be understood either as a reference to the spirits of the dead or a personification of the dead. In either case, it hardly overturns the physical description of the grave in verse 11. In this figurative passage it is possible that the physical domain and the domain of dead spirits are both used as part of the personification. Unless we exclude a metaphor between these domains in this passage, Johnston's argument falls short of refuting a reference to the grave. It only argues that the word is not used exclusively for the grave. If 'grave' is the primary meaning, then 'underworld' is a natural metaphorically derived meaning used to personify the dead for rhetorical purposes. If the metaphor is not considered live, the word is polysemous.

(5) Amos 9:2 refers to heaven and *Sheol* as hypothetical places to escape from the death sentence given by God (verse 1). *Sheol* does not appear to be a good place to flee from a death sentence, as being in *Sheol* means one is already dead. The expression is hyperbolic and hypothetical. No one was expected to flee to *Sheol* or heaven. The expression seems to express totality with heaven and *Sheol* contrasted in a merism. Johnston's argument is

specifically against the idea that *Sheol* refers to a grave. The argument has some force, as graves may not be typically the deepest places, but the force depends on what the native speakers of ancient Hebrew thought of as a prototypically deep place. Thus the argument as such is not conclusive, though it has some merit. Even so, this does not imply that the use of the word שְׁאוֹל '*Sheol*' activates the domain of spirits. It is possible to understand *Sheol* to refer to the underground as a physical entity, and the merism could refer to the two extremes, one of height and one of depth. Thus understood, with death in the context, a reference to *Sheol* seems natural, regardless of whether it is considered the place where the spirit or the body goes after death.

Deuteronomy 32:22 refers to the depths of *Sheol* or lower *Sheol* (שְׁאוֹל תַּחְתִּית). It is true that a reference to the fire of God's wrath going to lower grave may not seem a fitting expression, and that NIV has chosen to translate differently. Yet the important question is whether this is considered a physical place that may have physical beings in it, or a place that has spirits in it. It is possible to understand *Sheol* to refer to the underground locally and be restricted to the domain of death for the most part. Thus a grave would be in *Sheol*, though it could include more. The reference to the foundations of mountains favors a physical location. This of course does not settle the question as it is possible to view the location of dead spirits as a physical location. *Sheol* here may include all of the underground. This explains reference to its depth as a figure of the scope of divine judgment. Alternatively it may be considered a polysemous word with both meanings of 'underground' and 'grave' even if the location is considered different for the corpse and the spirit.

Johnston's brief argumentation succeeds in pointing out Isaiah 14 as a passage problematic to the view that *Sheol* refers always to the grave and to the view that it is used only in reference to the corpse. However, in this passage he assumes a constant reference even when there is textual indication otherwise in the form of worms and maggots. He has not succeeded in refuting the idea that *Sheol* refers to the grave, whether occasionally or even prototypically. He has challenged Harris's thesis with a measure of success in noting the merism of heaven and *Sheol*, even if this argument is not considered conclusive.

Bar (2015) gives more recent support for the idea that *Sheol* and the grave refer often to the same place, and at times *Sheol* refers to the underworld. He thinks the word *Sheol* is used with a negative connotation, and associated with unnatural and premature death or "bad death" (Bar 2015:149). While this is typical, there is no hint in Ecclesiastes 9:10 that the

death is a bad one. Bar (2015:151) thinks that “only in later writings, such as Josephus and the book of Enoch, is *Sheol* divided between the righteous and the wicked”. He argues that in Ezekiel 31:15, 16, 17, 32:21, 27 the dead are in *Sheol* and in 32:22, 23, 25, 26 they are in the grave, implying that the place is the same (Bar 2015:145-146). He also argues that in Isaiah 14:11-20, Job 17:13-16, 24:19-20, and 21:13 the word means 'grave'.

I think Harris and Bar have succeeded in showing that the meaning of 'grave' as the place of the corpse indeed fits many of the occurrences. Bar's (2015:145-147) examples include Job 17:13-16, Psalm 88, and Ezekiel 31-32. I think Numbers 16:33 is important in that also physical property went with Korah's crowd to *Sheol* as the earth opened up and swallowed them. Job 17:13-16 is refers to the corpse being with worms in *Sheol* and the pit. Thus *Sheol* cannot be only a place for the spirits. It is significant that the mention of *Sheol* allows reference to the body as opposed to a spirit of the person quite easily.

This is not to deny the idea that spirits also go to *Sheol*. Job 26:5-6 seems to be an example of this. If *Sheol* is understood as the underground, it allows for the grave to be in it as well as for it to be a useful picture of extreme depth (Job 11:8) and a place for the dead spirits. *Sheol* refers to the place of existence after death. It may refer to the place where the body is or where the spirit is or perhaps even where both are. Which of these options is realized in a particular text cannot be inferred from the use of the word שְׁאוֹל '*Sheol*' alone.

#### **4.2.2.4 Ecclesiastes 9:1-10**

Ecclesiastes 9:1-10 has been claimed to show that Qohelet did not believe in afterlife.

Longman (1998:228, 231) thinks that verse 5 means that the dead are not self-aware and verse 10 means that “death brings everything to a stop” and “the second half of the verse is one of the clearest indications that Qohelet had absolutely no concept of life after death”, but “death is the absolute end”. In Ecclesiastes 9:6 Longman (1998:229) thinks that Qohelet expresses a belief that emotions of love, hate, and jealousy come to an end at death.

Crenshaw (1987:163) infers from verse 10 that “Qohelet saw no basis for optimism about the next life, either in its Hebraic expression, the resurrection of the body, or in its Greek expression, the immortality of the soul. For Qohelet, *Sheol* was a place of nonbeing.”

It seems to me that to draw the conclusion from this passage that Qohelet did not believe in any afterlife is to infer too much from the passage. In section 3.3.7 I noted the possibility of two interpretations for Ecclesiastes 9:6 that are compatible with a conscious afterlife. They

are that the dead do not experience the love, hate, or jealousy of others, and that the dead do not express love, hate, or jealousy to others. Both interpretations express separation between the living and the dead. It may be added that if the reference is to the corpse rather than the spirit of the dead, nothing may be inferred of the afterlife of the spirit. That leaves Ecclesiastes 9:10 and 9:5 to be discussed.

#### 4.2.2.4.1 Ecclesiastes 9:10

כל שאר תמצא ידך לעשות בכחך עשה כי אין מעשה וחשבון ודעת וחכמה בשאול אשר: 'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for there is no work, thought [or planning], knowledge, or wisdom in *Sheol* where you are going.'

The crucial question is what *Sheol* refers to and how it is used in this verse. Some think it refers to the grave (Kaiser 1979:102) and others think Qohelet says that in the (non-)afterlife there is no thought or knowledge (Longman 1998:231). Consequently we get two different kinds of interpretations. Either Qohelet says that in the (non-)afterlife there is no thought or knowledge (Longman 1998:231) or he says that in the grave there is no thought or knowledge for the body. These two views coalesce if Qohelet is understood to view the composition of humanity after death as a unity and not a duality. The book of Ecclesiastes makes the distinction between the spirit and the body, as argued in section 4.2.2.2. The two interpretations expressed above for Ecclesiastes 9:10 are therefore distinct.

That *שאול* '*Sheol*' can refer to the grave was argued in section 4.2.2.3. This gives credence to the idea that Qohelet discusses death from the perspective of the corpse, not of the spirit. If this is a plausible view, it is not safe to conclude from Ecclesiastes 9:10 that Qohelet did not believe in a conscious afterlife for the spirit of the dead. I argue for the plausibility of this view by arguing that it is contextually relevant.

In Ecclesiastes 9:10 Qohelet encourages action by noting that the time frame for action is limited by death. To make this point, all that is needed is a concept of death that disallows further action in this life. That dead corpses do not work, think, know, or have wisdom may seem too self-evident to deserve mention. If there is any thought, knowledge, or wisdom associated with the dead, we would expect that to be associated with the spirit, not the body. Yet the lack of these abilities by the corpse is relevant if the body is considered the medium by which one acts in this world. The window of opportunity is coming to a close. Even if this

is self-evident, people may not draw the kinds of inferences from it that Qohelet exhorts one to draw here. One must act now.

#### **4.2.2.4.2 Ecclesiastes 9:5**

'כי־החיים יודעים שימתו והמתים אינם יודעים מאומה ואין־עוד להם שכר כי נשכח זכרם: The living know that they will die and the dead do not know anything and they will no longer have a reward. Their memory is forgotten.'

Similarly to Ecclesiastes 9:10 in the previous section, in Ecclesiastes 9:5 the discussion may be of the body rather than the spirit. The comment that the living know that they will die and the dead know nothing need not be taken as irony. The fact that the living know they will die implies that they know that a window of opportunity to act is closing. They can draw conclusions and act. The dead do not know anything that they could act on. This is true especially if they do not know anything. Here also what is relevant is the body, not the spirit which may (or may not) be aware somewhere else but unable to take part in this world. Psalm 146:4 describes death by saying that the spirit (feminine) departs and he (masculine) returns to the ground. The self is identified with the body in this passage, not the spirit. Likewise when the dead (מת) are buried, the reference is, of course, to the body (Gen 23:3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15). Qohelet claims that the earthly reward for earthly work is no longer available to them and they will not be remembered by later generations (see section 3.3.7).

#### **4.2.2.4.3 Conclusions on Ecclesiastes 9:1-10**

A discussion of temporal limitations to what humans can do and when is relevant to what Qohelet argues in Ecclesiastes 9:1-10. Qohelet believed that the dead person is cut off from the living in the sense that he cannot act in this world anymore. Depending on the interpretation of Ecclesiastes 9:6, Qohelet may have claimed additionally that the dead cannot experience people's love, hate, or jealousy toward them. If this verse refers to the corpse rather than the spirit of the deceased, nothing can be inferred of the afterlife of the spirit and Qohelet just made a simple, non-controversial statement of the lack of ability of corpses. He used this to argue for the importance of using one's opportunities in this life before it is too late.

If this line of argumentation about *Sheol* is rejected and it is considered that Qohelet discussed the manner of existence of the spirit in *Sheol*, then the description of *Sheol* as a

place of no work, plan, knowledge, and wisdom can be understood as a total separation from the living. The dead cannot do or plan anything in this world, cannot know about this world or have wisdom. This may but need not imply unconsciousness. It may be a reference to the separation between the dead from the living. If it did imply unconsciousness, it would still be possible to envision unconsciousness as a temporary state that ends before divine judgment, possibly by way of resurrection, though it must be emphasized that there is no reference or hint by Qohelet to any resurrection. This simple observation makes this interpretation weak, as that would imply a radical viewpoint that the author does not help the reader understand. One possibility is that he did not care to elaborate how to put the two views together. Two arguments can be made to support the view that Qohelet did not argue that the afterlife is unconscious. The first one is that the view that Qohelet made a statement of divine judgment in the afterlife on unaware people seems weak. This argument is relevant only if the human and divine judgments are not identical in Ecclesiastes 3:17. The second one is more important. It is that it is plausible that Qohelet was making a simple statement of the ability of corpses as the medium without which any action in this life is impossible.

The idea that Qohelet additionally claimed that there is no conscious afterlife is not required by the text. The text can be read as a reference to the lack of consciousness by the corpse. It is true that Qohelet's words would gain even more significance if he did not believe in afterlife. However, since a more minimal interpretation is possible, it is not a safe assumption. Thus this passage should not be used to create a contradiction with the interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3:17 that supports a divine eschatological judgment.

#### **4.2.2.5 Conclusions of the excursus of afterlife in the book of Ecclesiastes**

The book of Ecclesiastes does not require the interpretation that there is no afterlife. Ecclesiastes 3:21 was discussed already in section 4.2.1.4.3. Ecclesiastes 9:1-10 can be understood as a reference to the state of the body rather than the spirit. The body and spirit are separate according to Ecclesiastes 12:7. In section 4.2.1.4.3.1 it was argued that Ecclesiastes 3:17 quite plausibly refers to a conscious afterlife. The view implies that the human spirit is conscious in its continued existence after death. Even if this argumentation on the lack of evidence for the exclusion of conscious afterlife is rejected, it is still possible to consider the lack of consciousness as temporary, allowing for a later judgment of conscious people. This topic is further commented on in section 4.2.5.3.



### 4.2.3 Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

This passage discusses rash vows. The word משפט 'judgment' occurs in verse 7 in a note that one is not to be surprised that justice is deprived of. The reference is to corruption. This aspect of the passage was discussed in section 3.4.6, and need not be taken up here again. For our present concern on divine judgment, more relevant is the discussion on the consequences of vows that are not kept in 5:3-5. In verse 5 Qohelet notes that God may destroy the works of one's hands because of sinning concerning a vow. The verse is relatively straightforward with the exception of the identity of מלאך 'messenger'.

Salters (1978:95-101) notes that the messenger has been understood as referring to angels or human officials. A reference to an angel and an eschatological judgment is not plausible in light of the threat for the work of one's hands to be destroyed. Qohelet does not favor the idea of taking the work of one's hands to the afterlife and the judgment there (see sections 3.4 and 3.6). If the referent is a human, there are several ideas to whom it exactly refers to, but what unites the suggestions noted by Salters is that the referent is someone of an official standing to whom one is accountable for the public vow, though there is disagreements about the details. Suggestions include a temple official (mentioned by Salters 1978:100 and Seow 1997:196) and a priest (mentioned by Salters 1978:99-100).

It is to be noted that Qohelet expressed a view that God may judge not keeping a vow by destroying the results of one's work. There is no hint that he will always do so. The possibility is noted as a warning. From this passage we may infer that Qohelet believed in the possibility of a divine judgment in this life (under the sun). It is not revealed how Qohelet envisioned this divine judgment to take place, whether by God's intervention or by action of a human מלאך 'messenger'. In any case the action is ultimately attributed to God, who is the subject of the sentence.

### 4.2.4 Ecclesiastes 8:5-6

שומר מצוה לא ידע דבר רע ועת ומשפט ידע לב חכם: כי לכל־חפץ יש עת ומשפט כי־רעת: 'One who keeps a command does not experience an evil thing, and the heart of the wise knows the time and the custom. For all things there is a time and custom. The evil of a human is heavy on him.'

In the context the king's commands and power are discussed (8:2, 4) as well as 'evil things' (8:3). The command in verse 5 is likewise the king's command, which is to be obeyed (Eccl 8:2). One who obeys does not experience an evil thing (לֹא יִדַּע דָּבָר רָע). This refers to experiencing retribution from the king (Seow 1997:281) or being involved in evil (Ogden and Zogbo 1997:284-285). Ogden and Zogbo argue for this meaning for יִדַּע on the basis that the verb is used to describe relations between individuals, and thus 'to be involved with'. They give no examples, and the existence of the meaning does not seem clear. It is explicitly denied by Delitzsch (n.d.:341). The meaning of 'experience' is established for יִדַּע by Isaiah 47:8 for example. Because it is safer to take an attested meaning, I prefer the sense that the one who keeps a command does not experience an evil thing.

The expression עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט 'time and custom' has been understood in different ways. Ogden and Zogbo (1997:285-286) translate it as “the wise person knowing the time and reason for everything”, understanding מִשְׁפָּט as a judgment “a wise person can make”. They also mention the possibility to understand the judgment as divine. Fredericks (2010:192-193) thinks the verse discusses human judgment, that is discernment. Fox (1999:278-279) translates מִשְׁפָּט as 'procedure', noting three possible interpretations for עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט 'time and custom': (1) “the appropriate time of procedure”, (2) “the right time”, and (3) “the time of judgment”. He discounts the third possibility on the basis that the passage does not discuss injustices or evils that call for rectification. Crenshaw (1987:151) notes that in Judges 13:12 the word mean 'procedure' or 'stipulation'. Ogden (1987:131) suggests 'evaluation' or 'assessment'.

Seow (1997:281) discounts the idea that Qohelet believed that anyone could know the right time and procedure (see also 8:7). He is right that knowledge of the right time and procedure is limited but it need not mean that one knows nothing of it generally speaking. Fox (1999:278-279) thinks that though the wise does not know when things will happen, he knows what the right time to do things is. He considers it almost self-evident that “the wise man knows the proper time and procedure” (Fox 1999:280).

Seow (1997:281) has a point in noting that the list of כִּי clauses can be understood as objects of יִדַּע 'knows'. This is appealing considering the basic function of the particle to be an interpretive marker. In this interpretation there are four things the wise knows about עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט 'time and judgment' (Seow's gloss): (1) There is a time of judgment (or a proper time and procedure or evaluation) for all things. (2) Evil (or misery) is heavy on a human being.

(3) No one knows the future. (4) No one tells one what the future is going to be. Point (4) is actually an elaboration of (3). This leaves the number of things the wise knows as three.

Fox (1999:279) sees an expression with similar meanings for רעת האדם רבה עליו 'evil [or suffering] of the human is big on him' in Ecclesiastes 2:17 רע עלי 'was painful to me' (glosses mine). If this sense is followed, the sentence means that human suffering is very painful to him. Seow (1997:281-282) considers that there are two interpretive options. Expression רעת האדם 'the evil of the human' may have a subjective or an objective genitive. If it is objective, it means human misfortune, probably death. If it is subjective, the thought is that people are terribly evil. He argues for the subjective genitive on the basis of parallels in Genesis 6:5, 1 Samuel 12:17, and Joel 4:13.

The arguments basically relate to the genitive construction (Seow) and the meaning of על (Fox). There are plenty of genitive constructions where the possessor of evil is the experiencer of misfortune (especially in Psalms in the first person: 35:4, 35:26, 38:13, 40:15, 70:3, 71:13, 71:24) as well as cases where the possessor of evil is the agent of evil (Gen 6:5, Jgs 9:56, Jgs 9:57, 1 Sam 25:39, Jer 7:12, Jer 11:7, Jer 32:32). This alone does not solve the question. Preposition על seems to indicate the experiencer of the evil or misfortune. Yet in Jeremiah 14:16 the experiencer and the agent of evil is the same person: וּשְׂפַכְתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־רַעְתָּם 'I pour out one them their evil [metonymically for the consequences of their evil deeds]'. Similarly it could be argued that the meaning here is that what the evil people have done is heavy on them at judgment. It seems that neither Seow's nor Fox's argument is decisive. However, suffering in general is not an active topic, but evil is mentioned in 8:2. Therefore I prefer Seow's view to Fox's. Human evil can have painful consequences on the person, especially when subject to royal punishment.

The text discusses wisdom in acknowledging limitations. The wise person is not defiant (verse 1), but keeps the king's command and does not take up an evil cause (verses 2-3). The argument for doing this is the might of the king, a limitation on the relatively less powerful sage (verses 3-4). The text continues to talk about limitations in knowing the future (verse 7) and being saved from death (verse 8). The text continues to talk about oppression (verse 9), evil people dying (verse 10) and delayed judgment encouraging evil (verse 11). The behavioral element of the text is about doing right and being obedient to the king (8:2-3).

Two features of the text help arrive at an exegetical decision. One is that the **משפט** extends to **כל־חפץ** 'all matters'. If it were a royal judgment, it would be a hyperbole, which I find unlikely. The other is that the text does not bring up the idea of a divine judgment explicitly and the preceding text gives no hint that any divine judgment is discussed. It is not an active topic. Consequently, I find the interpretation of **משפט** in this text as 'custom' as more plausible. The word **משפט** has the meaning of 'custom' or 'manner'. 1 Samuel 2:13 is a good example with the meaning of '(accepted) custom'. The wise knows timing and accepted custom in one's behavior. Specifically, he knows that they exist for all **חפץ** 'matters'<sup>39</sup> (8:6), and that evil behavior can have painful consequences (8:6) and that the future is unknown (8:7). There may not always be painful consequences in time, so that people may be encouraged to do evil (8:11).

The flow of thought is that the wise person knows how to behave before the king whose word is authoritative (verses 1-4). He knows the proper time and manner (verse 5) in that they exist (verse 6), that evil may end up being personally painful (verse 6), and that no one knows the future (verse 7) or has power to prevent death (verse 8). Evil will not be able to save him even if it seemed like a good option (verse 8). Though disobedience to the king and doing evil may seem like a tempting option in some circumstances and it may seem that one can get away with it, the king is mighty, evil may weigh heavily on its practitioner, one does not know the future, nor can one save himself from death.

The text discusses proper behavior and the inadequacy of evil. Though it does not explicitly call the reader to behave right, it links proper behavior to the wise at the start of the passage, and notes general human limitations, such as not knowing the future and not being able control one's death. Then it turns to the question of evil in the form of oppression (8:9) and religious hypocrisy (8:10), and applies the theme of death to the hypocrites. Judgment works best when it is not delayed too much (8:11). In Ecclesiastes 8:12 it mentions the good benefits of reverence for God and limitations of the wicked in 8:13. All this argues that one is to behave right.

If my interpretation above is correct, this judgment is not a reference to divine judgment and as such its relevance to the topic of the chapter is low. However this passage creates context for the next passage to be discussed, Ecclesiastes 8:10-15.

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<sup>39</sup> The basic meaning of the word is 'delight'. Here it refers to the preferred action, which is to be done at the proper time and manner.

## 4.2.5 Ecclesiastes 8:10-15

### 4.2.5.1 Introduction

In section 3.6.3.19, I argued that in Ecclesiastes 8:10 Qohelet commented on the wicked that had boasted of their religiosity. They were buried and their evil was futile. However, there was a problem in that people are encouraged to do evil when the sentence against it is delayed. It is in this context that I proceed to elaborate on verses 12-15. I give the gloss from section 3.6.3.19 for the first two verses for the sake of context:

Ecclesiastes 8:10-11: “And then I saw the wicked being brought to graves and they used to go from the holy place and boast in the city that they had done so. Also this is futile. Because the sentence of an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the heart of people in them is full to do evil.”

### 4.2.5.2 Ecclesiastes 8:12a

לֹא מֵאֲרִיךְ לוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עֲשֵׂה רַע מֵאֲזֶל<sup>40</sup> וּמֵאֲרִיךְ לוֹ 'For a sinner does evil for a long time and lives long.'

The expression מֵאֲרִיךְ לוֹ יָמִים 'lengthens for himself' is elliptical for מֵאֲרִיךְ לוֹ יָמִים 'lengthens days for himself' (see Seow 1997:287-288). Fox (1999:286) notes the two possibilities for the subject: the person or God. On the basis of the parallel in verse 13, where the subject is God, it is likely so also here.

There is some discussion whether מֵאֲרִיךְ 'hundreds of' should be revocalized as מֵאֲרִיךְ 'hundreds', though it is not specified whether 'times' or 'years' or something else should be understood (Seow 1997:287) or whether מֵאֲרִיךְ should be understood as מֵאֲזֶל 'from of old' on the basis of the LXX, which has ἀπὸ τότε 'since then' (Fox 1999:286). The problem with the Masoretic vocalization is that a construct form requires an absolute that is missing. Fredericks (2010:190) thinks it is a vernacular ellipsis. Perhaps the Masoretic text is based on an assumption that a word was dropped out. In any case, the Masoretic text is unusual.

The absolute form may be used without mentioning the numbered item as in Ecclesiastes 6:3. This argues for revocalizing with Seow, but does not explain the origin of the Masoretic vocalization. A solution might be to assume that the original text had מֵאֲזֶל 'from of old'. This was used by the translators of the LXX. In some copy the word changed into מֵאֲרִיךְ, which

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<sup>40</sup> מֵאֲזֶל in the Masoretic text. See the discussion below.

may have been considered difficult as a plural, since it was written plene, which is rare though it does sometimes occur. Therefore the Masoretes may have thought that a word, such as פְּעָמִים 'times' had dropped out, and vocalized accordingly with a construct form. Fortunately for our purposes, the meaning does not change too much, whether the LXX or the Masoretic text is chosen. The sinner sins a lot and still lives long.

Seow (1997:287) understands אשר at the beginning of the sentence to be part of expression אשר חטא 'the one who sins' or alternatively to introduce a condition. In this interpretation the function of אשר does not seem clear. It is probably better to connect the verse causally to the preceding על־כן with Longman (1998:217) and Murphy (1992:85). Thus understood, the text gives two reasons why the hearts of people are full to do evil: the sentence is not executed quickly and one may sin a long time and still live long. Both relate to the lack of observable consequences that would deter one from doing evil. The example of the wicked hypocrite of verse 10 may be an example of delayed judgment. Though he died ultimately and his evil was futile, his death may have been so late that the lateness encouraged evil. The book of Ecclesiastes does not elaborate the relationship between the example of the hypocrite and the effect of the delay of justice, but this is one way to understand it.

#### 4.2.5.3 Ecclesiastes 8:12b-14

כי גם־יודע אני אשר יהיה־טוב ליראי האלהים אשר ייראו מלפניו: וטוב לא־יהיה לרשע ולא־יארִיךְ ימים כצל אשר איננו ירא מלפני אלהים: יִשְׁהַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ צַדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר מִגִּיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כַּמַּעֲשֶׂה הַרְשָׁעִים וְיֵשׁ רָשָׁעִים שִׁמְגִיעַ אֲלֵהֶם כַּמַּעֲשֶׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים: 'I also know that it will be well with those who revere God because they revere him and that it will not be well with the wicked and he will not lengthen his days which are like a shadow, because he does not revere God. There is a futility that happens on earth that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the evil and there are evil people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I said this is also futile.'

Seow (1997:288) thinks that ימים כצל is 'shadowy days' or 'days like a shadow' refers to the transience of days. Fox (1999:286) thinks כצל is parenthetical to לא יארִיךְ ימים 'does not lengthen days' and builds a parallel meaning that neither people nor shadows endure. Thus they disagree about who is like a shadow, whether it is the wicked or the days. In 1 Chronicles 29:16, Job 8:9, and Psalm 102:11, passages describing the brevity of life, it is days

that are like a shadow. This favors Seow's view. Fredericks (2010:196) thinks the meaning to be that even if the life of the wicked is lengthened, it is not lengthened to be as long as an elongated shadow before dusk. Thus the life of the wicked, though it may be long, is quite limited. There is tension between the wicked not lengthening his days in this verse and the wicked lengthening his days in verse 12.

In this passage, Qohelet expresses his faith that it will be well for the one who reveres God and that it will not be well for the one who does not revere God. This is in a context where the lack of sentence for evil action and the long life of the wicked encourage people to do evil. There is tension between these propositions, and it has been handled in various ways. Another tension in the text is the contrast between the notion of consequences and that of mentioned exceptions in verse 14 (introduced with  $\psi$  'there is'). Murphy (1992:85) understands the expression of Ecclesiastes 8:12b-13 as indicating awareness of the orthodox solution. Bartholomew (2009:290-291) thinks that Qohelet juxtaposes his confessional and enigmatic views. Fox (1999:286) notes that there is no sign that Ecclesiastes 8:12b-13 are the words or opinion of someone else. Rather Qohelet knows the principle of retribution but he is also aware of its violations.

Longman (1998:219-220) and Seow (1997:288) argue on the basis of Isaksson (1987:67) that the present participle of  $\text{יָדַע}$  'to know' as opposed to a finite form argues that he refers to accepted or common knowledge. Seow suggests using words 'recognize' or 'acknowledge' in translation to bring out the nuance. Just the fact that something is common knowledge does not mean that the speaker who knows it disagrees with it. Knowing presupposes that the thing known is true. This strengthens idea that Qohelet agreed with the content. This is further strengthened by the fact that there is nothing that distances Qohelet from it, unless it is the very tension that cries out for a solution.

There are a few possibilities to deal with the tension. One is to acknowledge it and not attempt to resolve it. This is how Bartholomew (2009:290-291) handles it. I reject this because of rejecting the paradigm the interpretation is based on (see section 2.2.7) and because, generally speaking, people read texts harmonistically, if there is no reason not to do so (see section 2.2.9). If the tension is to be resolved, there are two options. One is to take the contrast between lengthening days and not lengthening days that are like a shadow as an exceptional situation and a general rule (Fox 1999:286). The other is to take the contrast as a

possible situation and a notion that even in that case the length is limited (Fredericks 2010:195-196).

Likewise there are two options for understanding the contrast between the view that it will be well with the one who reveres God and not be well with the wicked and the view that there are cases when the reverse is true on earth. One option is to take the reverse situation as an exception (Ogden 1987:137-139) and the other is to limit the exception to 'on earth' as a temporal state of affairs. Provan (2001:167-168) hints at this solution though he does not use the expression 'on earth' to drive the point and he assumes Qohelet was agnostic on life after death.

With the exception and general rule approach to resolving tension, the thought is that people are encouraged to do evil as the sentence delays and they live long while they do evil. Yet generally speaking this does not happen, but the God-fearer will do well and the evil-doer will die younger. But there are exceptions, which causes futility. With the exceptionless approach to resolving tension, the thought is that people are encouraged to do evil as the sentence delays and they live long while they do evil. Yet doing evil never pays off, as it will ultimately be well with the one who reveres God because of the divine judgment, and it will not be well with the evil-doer as he (also) dies in the end and faces a divine judgment. Yet on earth this does not always apply and evil may pay off, which is a cause of futility. The perspective just has to include a divine judgment afterwards.

Another exceptionless approach might be to argue that reverence for God is a value in itself, so it is better to do right regardless of anything else, and therefore it will be well for the one who reveres God regardless of how things turn out (Krüger 2012:10). However, I find it easier to read יהיה טוב ל־ 'it is good for' as something subjectively good rather than something that is objectively good but never experienced by the subject in this text with no textual hint to the contrary.

The exceptionless interpretation has a corollary. The person will be personally present at the eschatological divine judgment. Thus it is necessary that there is an afterlife and that Qohelet's view of the eschatological judgment is not just a divine pronouncement. If my argumentation earlier in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 is followed, this is a possibility.

The mention of על־הארץ 'on the earth' might argue for the exceptionless interpretation in that it creates a contrast to what is not on earth. However, in Ecclesiastes 11:2 the same



expression is used with no such contrast. The argument is not decisive. The exception and general rule interpretation makes the general rule parenthetical to the main thought. Qohelet is interested in the exception. The exception encourages evil and it sometimes happens and it causes futility. It is as if he tried to avoid a misunderstanding and he wanted to affirm that he believed in the general rule. In the exceptionless interpretation, he gives additional information that the problem is real but limited to the earth and rectified in the afterlife.

To choose conclusively between the two interpretations is not easy. It seems that the worldview of the book or the Bible as a whole does not dictate the result either way, though it may be questioned with Job 21:17-34 whether the rule really holds that often. Qohelet might well respond to Job's argument by appealing to the exceptionless interpretation with its corollary of interpreting the lack of lengthening of days as a shadow indicating that the number of days is limited and cannot be lengthened beyond some unspecified point. If the wicked hypocrite is used as an example of delayed justice, the exceptionless interpretation fits the text well, as his ultimate death coheres well with the idea that the wicked will not lengthen his days indefinitely. If the judgment of Ecclesiastes 3:17 takes place in the afterlife, the likelihood of Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 referring also to a judgment in the afterlife is increased.

#### **4.2.5.4 Ecclesiastes 8:15**

ושבחתי אני את־השמחה אשר אין־טוב לאדם תחת השמש כי אם־לאכול ולשתות ולשמוח  
'And I praised joy because  
there is nothing better for man under the sun than to eat, drink, and have joy and this  
accompanies his work during the days of his life that God has given him under the sun.

Qohelet concludes the passage with a praise of joy. This is a reaction to the futility he observes at the end of verse 14. This futility relates not to divine judgment but to the fact that sometimes justice does not occur on earth, which encourages evil.

#### **4.2.5.5 Conclusions on Ecclesiastes 8:10-15**

The passage discusses delay in justice. Lack of quick execution of a sentence may encourage evil. It also happens with the divine judge as justice is not always apparent on earth. The situation is mitigated by the fact that often evil will result in corresponding consequences on earth or by the fact that there will be a divine judgment in the afterlife. If the latter, the passage offers support for a conscious afterlife with a judgment in it. The function of divine

judgment is to answer the problem of injustice in life. It addresses the question of lack of corresponding results of actions in life spans. Additionally it functions to encourage doing right. This is a concern in the wider context that discusses how to behave and laments evil behavior (8:1-9:3). However, the main point is not divine judgment or consequences but that life is not just. This should lead to valuing joy.

#### **4.2.6 Ecclesiastes 11:9**

שמח בחור בילדותיך ויטיבך לבך בימי בחורותך והלך בדרכי לבך ובמראי עיניך ודע כי  
'Have joy, young man, in your youth, and be of a good  
cheer in the time of your youth and walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your  
eyes and know that for all this God will bring you to judgment.'

In section 1.1.7 it was noted that this mention of judgment has been understood as contributing to the argument in two different ways. Either it is a warning to remember divine judgment in one's pursuit of joy or it is meant as a basis for the exhortation to enjoy. Neither view has to be excluded. Joy is a divine gift and enjoying it honors the gift-giver. Not enjoying it does not, but neither does abusing the gift. The passage is unique along with 9:7 in that the pursuit of joy is not only commended but commanded. In this passage divine judgment is directly related to the theme of joy whereas in 3:16-22 and 8:10-15 it is indirectly related through futility.

#### **4.2.7 Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

סוף דבר הכל נשמע את־האלהים ירא ואת־מצותיו שמור כי־זה כל־האדם: כי את־כל־מעשה  
'End of the matter. All has been heard.  
Revere God and keep his commands. It is for every human. All deeds God will bring to  
judgment over all things hidden, whether good or evil.'

This concluding passage is one of the clearest statements in all of the Bible that God's judgment will extend to every single deed, both good and evil. This judgment includes hidden things. The scope of the judgment favors understanding it as an eschatological judgment. There is no observable judgment of all deeds in this life and Qohelet has argued against all things receiving a proper judgment on earth (Eccl 8:14), and there is no textual support for the idea that the judgment of all deeds is not just. If the human and divine judgments are identical in Ecclesiastes 3:17, there the divine judgment is not clearly just, but it is not a

judgment of all deeds. Thus it does not constitute a good argument that here the judgment of all deeds is not just or that it is not eschatological.

Here the judgment is used to support keeping God's commands. The argument is, of course, much stronger if it is assumed that the person personally faces the judgment. In sections 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.2 it is argued that this is a plausible interpretation of Qohelet's view. It is consistent with the biblical canon (see section 4.4). As this makes the passage more relevant than the interpretation of an impersonal judgment, this is to be preferred in the absence of arguments to the effect that a personal judgment would not be part of the worldview of the book (see also sections 2.5.8 and 4.1).

#### **4.2.8 Conclusions on passages with root שפט or word פתגם**

In Ecclesiastes 3:16-22, the concept of divine judgment is probably evoked to answer to the theological problem of the existence of corrupt courts along with the consequence of people understanding their limitations. However, the main application the text points to is appreciation of joy. For this purpose the theme of divine judgment is not central. In Ecclesiastes 5:3-5, it is noted that God may judge a person in time, though no guarantees were given that he will and though in this text the noun משפט 'judgment' or the verb שפט 'judge' is not used.

Ecclesiastes 8 offers two significant texts that unfortunately have exegetical difficulties. I argued that the first (8:5-6) is not about divine judgment, and the second (8:10-14) argues quite possibly that things will turn out well at the eschatological divine judgment for the one who reveres God, but not so for the wicked. I also noted a possible alternative interpretation that generally speaking things turn out well in this life, but there are exceptions. Either way, the main point of the text is the case where on earth the deeds and results do not match for the wicked or the godly. This points to futility and is a cause for valuing joy. In this passage, the function of the theme of judgment is to support doing right and to answer the problem of injustice, but this is not the main point leading up to the behavioral application of Ecclesiastes 8:15.

In Ecclesiastes 11:9 the theme of divine judgment is found in the immediate context of enjoyment. The two must be in harmony. This implies that one's pursuit of joy must be in line with what is known about the divine will. This is the first time in the book that divine judgment is directly related to the theme of joy. The concluding passage (Eccl 12:13-14) also

makes divine judgment directly related to the behavioral point of the respective passage. In this case it is the main argument used to support the exhortation to revere God and to keep his commands. The passage also contains a clear statement of the judgment of all deeds.

If a judgment in the afterlife is considered to be expressed in the body of the book of Ecclesiastes, the judgment passages cohere well, with the obvious exception of Ecclesiastes 5:3-5, which discusses temporal judgment. All works will be judged (Eccl 3:17), and the stronger view of Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 that evil will never pay off ultimately is a strong option. Also the judgment of one's pursuit of joy in Ecclesiastes 11:9 is not just a potential, but a certain reality. This view coheres well with the ending of the book with its judgment of all deeds. This view allows the eschatological divine judgment to be completely just. As far as the judgment passages are concerned, they cohere conceptually very well if all these judgments are understood as taking place in the afterlife. This coherence adds to the likelihood of this view. It is concluded that this concept does not produce any contradiction within the worldview of the book of Ecclesiastes.

An alternative possibility is that the body of the book does not contain a reference to a judgment in the afterlife. Ecclesiastes 3:17 may refer to God judging a person in the corrupt human court, or perhaps even God ruling the just and the wicked in a more general sense than judge, and evil not paying off usually, but perhaps at times it may (Eccl. 8:12-14), and that God very well may judge the way one has joy, and it needs to be taken into account (11:9). It is also possible to see some judgment passages as referring to the afterlife but not others. This view is weakened by the fact that it presupposes attributing an evil action to God or requires understanding *שפט* in a more general sense of 'rule' rather than 'judge' despite the court context in Ecclesiastes 3:16-17. The possibility of attributing an evil action to God is dependent on Qohelet's worldview. I consider this view to be less probable.

The ending of the book is quite compatible with what has been attributed to Qohelet, but it contrasts with the emphasis in the rest of the book. In the ending the main point is to revere God and to keep his commands on the basis of divine judgment rather than to value joy. The use of divine judgment is not new. It is raised to be the main argument for the behavioral of the passage, and indeed of the whole book. Temporal judgment was used similarly to support keeping one's vow in Ecclesiastes 5:3-5. Yet in the conclusion of the book, the use of divine judgment to exhort to revere God as the main hortatory point of the passage is new, and it represents a shift of emphasis. It functions as another main behavioral point made in the

book. Perhaps its function was to guide the reader in not missing this aspect because of the repeated emphasis on the value of joy in light of the futility of achievement.

If the judgment-in-the-afterlife view is followed, the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes has a significant in-built tension that should to be discussed. If Qohelet believed in an eschatological divine judgment whose results are personally experienced and if he believed that all achievements are futile in that they cannot be enjoyed in the afterlife but will be lost, it should to be explained why one could not negate this futility by achieving something by obeying the divine will, and thus storing treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20). This same tension may be formulated by alluding to Hebrews 11:35. If some endured suffering in the hope of a better resurrection rather than trying to find an easier way out, this must have decreased their joy in the present and postponed it to the afterlife, precisely the kind of logic that Qohelet argued against.

I believe the tension is to be solved by noting that Qohelet combined divine judgment and pursuit of joy in Ecclesiastes 11:9. By combining the notions the tension is resolved. Qohelet made the point that all things are futile. This does not mean that the results of divine judgment are futile (the 'all' is exclusive of the results of the eschatological divine judgment). Indeed, what God does remains forever (Eccl 3:14). It is because achievements themselves are futile that all permanent value is dependent on divine judgment. This contrasts with the Egyptian view presented in section 4.2.1.4.3.5.

If all value depends on divine judgment, the very argument for the value of joy is dependent on God accepting the joy. While this argument is not developed in the book of Ecclesiastes, it gives a rather secure foundation to the value of joy. Also significant is that joy is often put in the context of work. This is seen for example in Ecclesiastes 2:24, 3:22. Qohelet valued work (Eccl 9:10). The book discusses more how work is to be done (with joy) and less what one should seek to achieve. This contrast is key to resolving the tension.

While it is possible that God's will is to do something that may be difficult (like Jeremiah), one should nevertheless appreciate whatever joy may be available, while working towards a higher goal. Thus the pursuit of joy is subservient to a higher goal. This is a consequence of submitting the pursuit of joy to divine judgment. Yet the importance of joy should not be lost or ignored. The book of Ecclesiastes makes a case for the importance of joy in one's work.

## 4.3 עוֹת as implicit judgment

### 4.3.1 Introduction

It was noted in section 1.1.7 that some authors understand the book of Ecclesiastes to claim that the world was made crooked by God, and that this crookedness is the result of the curse by God as the result of the fall. In this view, the crookedness may be called divine judgment. The relevant Hebrew root עוֹת occurs three times in the book of Ecclesiastes (1:15, 7:13, and 12:3). The last of these is in the hitpa'el conjugation, and speaks of physical stooping. This leaves two occurrences that are of interest. In Ecclesiastes 1:15 the root is in the pual conjugation and in 7:13 in the piel conjugation.

### 4.3.2 Ecclesiastes 1:15

מֵעוֹת לֹא־יֻכַּל לְתַקֵּן וְיִסְרוֹן לֹא־יֻכַּל לְהִמָּנוֹת: 'The crooked cannot be straight [or be made straight] and the lacking cannot be counted.'

Seow (1997:122) argues that לְתַקֵּן should be revocalized as pual 'be straightened' instead of the Masoretic qal, which he glosses as 'is straight'. He says that the word is never in the qal in the Bible or in postbiblical Hebrew. In any case, the root is rare in the Bible, and the argument does not have much statistical weight. More relevant is its postbiblical usage, which seems to support Seow's claim that the verb does not occur in qal. In any case, the Masoretes for some reason vocalized the word as qal. Seow (1997:147) understands the referent to be the world: "He [Qohelet] means that even the wise cannot straighten out the world in all its perversity and disorder." Longman (1998:82) thinks the thrust of the verse to be that "there is something fundamentally wrong with life on earth". Fredericks (2010:82) thinks the verse "speaks to the futility of trying to change the fleeting nature of reality". There is a feature in the world that cannot be changed. The truism that the lacking cannot be counted is relevant in a context where there is temptation to do so. It seems that the crookedness of the world is a bad thing. The world is not as it is supposed to be, and people are unable to change the situation. In verse 14 futility has been mentioned. This is likely one expression of the crookedness Qohelet talks about.

### 4.3.3 Ecclesiastes 7:13

רֵא אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי מִי יֻכַּל לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָוָת: 'See the work of God. Who can straighten what he has made crooked.'

In this passage God is made explicitly the one who made something crooked. Seow (1997:251) understands this in the context of the world not being perfect so that one can only accept things as they are, as both the good and the bad are the result of God's doing (Eccl 7:13-14). Fredericks (2010:173) thinks the crooked includes the tragic days of verse 14.

#### **4.3.4 Conclusions on עֵו as implicit judgment**

The world, as Qohelet sees it, is somehow crooked. This crookedness is attributed boldly to God and it cannot be changed by man. The book does not explicitly define what constitutes this crookedness, but it is likely it refers somehow to the world not being the way humans would like it to be. It is significant that the book does not call this crookedness divine judgment, though it is called divine work. It is also significant that in a canonical reading it may well be called a divine judgment because of sin. In Genesis 3:17-19 God cursed the ground because of the fall. Part of the quotation is the mention of human mortality, which in the book of Ecclesiastes is a major cause of futility. Cherubim are placed to guard the way to the tree of life, removing the possibility of living forever (Gen 3:24). As noted in section 1.1.7, this crookedness of the world has been identified as a divine judgment by various scholars. I am in agreement with them. Caneday (1994:110) notes also Romans 8:19-21 in this connection.

The book of Ecclesiastes describes a world that is crooked. It is made so by God and humans cannot change it no matter how hard they try. This is seen in the futility of trying to have permanent profit. The reason God made the world crooked is not discussed in the book of Ecclesiastes but it is discussed in Genesis 3.

### **4.4 Divine judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes in relationship with the rest of the canon**

#### **4.4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this section is to relate the theme of divine judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes to the rest of the canon in a cursory way. This is subquestion (4) of the research question. This places the teaching of the book of Ecclesiastes in a wider context. This is done by discussing elements of personal eschatology in the context of systematic theology. I will address the following questions:

(1) What the Bible teaches of temporal divine judgment.

(2) What happens at death according to canonical scriptures and how that relates to section 4.2.2.

(3) How the doctrine of resurrection relates to divine eschatological judgment and how the timing of eschatological judgments relate to the book of Ecclesiastes.

(4) What the consequences of the eschatological divine judgment are.

#### **4.4.2 Biblical teaching on temporal divine judgment**

The topic of temporal divine judgment is a broad one. By temporal, I mean judgment that takes place in this life and that affects the current life and possibly its length rather than the afterlife. The book of Ecclesiastes does not discuss this a whole lot. It makes two very important points that are worth bringing up in this context. One is that God may judge in time. This was discussed in section 4.2.3.

In the Old Testament, the theme of temporal divine judgment is approached both as a collective judgment and as an individual judgment. Collective judgment is found in the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra (Gn 18:16-19:29). In Pentateuch, Israel is threatened by curses for disobeying God (Lv 26:14-39, Dt 28:15-68). These curses include drought, disease, famine, military invasion, slaughter, destruction of cities, and exile. The prophets refer to similar results of disobedience. Hosea 13:15 speaks of drought. Hosea 10:6 speaks of exile.

Amos describes consequences of the sins of people from various areas brought about by God in Amos 1:3-2:16. It is significant that gentile people are included alongside Israel and Judah. Thus these judgments cannot be only for breaking the covenant between Israel and God. The judgments consist of fire that is sent to cities and that consumes the palaces in connection with military invasion, with the sole exception of Israel. Fire is not mentioned in connection with Israel, only the destruction of the people and its soldiers. Daniel 9:11 connects the exile with the curses in Pentateuch after the fall of Israel and Judah. Isaiah 1:4-7 describes military defeat as divine chastisement. Examples could be multiplied. This paints a consistent picture of God judging cities and nations generally and Israel and Judah specifically. Only in connection with God's covenant with the nation of Israel is there a promise of temporal judgment (for example Dt 28:15). Otherwise it is described as a divine option.



Individual judgment is found in Job 42:8, where God threatens Job's friends with judgment unless Job prays for them. In 1 Kings 13:21-23 God judges a disobedient prophet with death by a lion. In these passages the word judgment is not used but the concept is there as these judgments are depicted as a divinely imposed consequence of their sin.

Also the New Testament has the concept of divine judgment in this life. For example, Acts 5:1-11 discusses the case of Ananias and Sapphira who lied. They both died as a consequence. Though the text is not explicit, the implication is that it was divine judgment. Acts 13:9-12 describes Paul saying to a person opposing the gospel that the hand of the Lord would be on him and that he would become temporally blind, and that happening. Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem as a day of vengeance (Luke 21:20-22). Also apocryphal Ecclesiasticus 16:7-12 notes the temporal divine judgments on the giants and those that lived near Lot, and continues that God will judge people according to their works. The book does not elaborate whether the latter judgment takes place in this life or the afterlife.

The other important point besides the point that God may judge in time is that temporal judgment may not take place. This was discussed in section 4.2.5.3. Sometimes the opposite of what is deserved takes place on earth. Psalm 73 describes the scene where things are well with the wicked (verses 3-12) and not well with the psalmist who has lived a pure life (verses 13-14). The book of Ecclesiastes makes the point that the future is unknowable because of this (Eccl 7:14-15, 9:1-2, see also section 3.6.3.21).

The book of Proverbs discusses the dangers of wrong behavior and the benefits of right behavior and wisdom. Proverbs 1:10-19 discusses the dangers of a life of crime and claims that unjust gain takes the life of the greedy (thus understood by Waltke 2004:196-197). Proverbs 2:7-8 speaks of protection for the wise. These need not be taken in an exceptionless way (Zuck 1991:234). Rather they speak of consequences in general. The book of Ecclesiastes assumes that though there are exceptions, the rule holds, too. Right behavior produces good results, or better ones than wrong behavior. This is presupposed by one interpretation of Ecclesiastes 8:14, which discusses the exceptions to the rule as breaking the expectation. Ecclesiastes 5:3 is an example of this as well as passages recommending wisdom, such as Ecclesiastes 4:13. Though there is a measure of good consequences from good actions, this does not always hold and that makes the future unknown. Whether the wicked getting what they deserve is called natural consequences of their actions or divine

judgment, the book of Ecclesiastes is in line with the teaching of the book of Proverbs if interpreted as a general rule as opposed to exceptionless corresponding consequences from deeds.

#### **4.4.3 Death in the Bible compared with death in the book of Ecclesiastes**

Enns (1989:371-372) places death in his list of common factors in eschatology in Christian thought. He notes that death should not be understood as annihilation. He also notes that for the believer death means to be with Christ and for the unbeliever it means torment.

The book of Ecclesiastes makes no distinction between the believer and unbeliever in death. Though there is debate on whether the book teaches annihilation, I have argued that it should be interpreted in a way that is consistent with conscious afterlife (see sections 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.2 and references there). In this respect the book of Ecclesiastes offers a less detailed but consistent picture with Christian thought as expressed by Enns.

Non-canonical Ecclesiasticus expresses death as coming to all (Ecclus 8:7, 41:3-4) and notes that the dead do not praise God just like the one who does not exist (Ecclus 17:27-28), in line with Psalm 115:17. It is easy for God to pay a person in the day of death according to his conduct (Ecclus 11:26). This may be a reference to a belief in an afterlife judgment at the time of death. Thus there is some continuity from the Old Testament to the New Testament through apocryphal Ecclesiasticus in this aspect of divine judgment. There is also a contrast to Luke 14:14, which places judgment at the time of resurrection rather than at the time of death.

#### **4.4.4 The doctrine of the resurrection in relationship to divine judgment**

Enns (1989:376-377) places also resurrection of the dead in his list of common factors in eschatology in Christian thought. The resurrection is bodily. Jesus claims that judgment and resurrection occur at the same time (Luke 14:14). The timing and number of resurrections is among the features of eschatology that Christians are not in general agreement.

Amillennialists and postmillennialists see one judgment and one resurrection whereas premillennialists, according to Enns, see several judgments and several resurrections. (Enns 1989:380-394.) Anderson (2010:viii) limits the idea of separation of judgments for the believers and unbelievers to dispensationalists as opposed to all premillennialists.

The book of Ecclesiastes makes no distinctions between eschatological judgments. Thus it is compatible with the amillennial, postmillennial, and dispensational premillennial positions about the number of judgments, as it is possible to speak of an eschatological divine judgment that occurs in stages. This issue was discussed in section 4.2.1.2. The book of Ecclesiastes discusses life under the sun, and a divine judgment afterwards, but it does not discuss resurrection at all. Also in this respect the book of Ecclesiastes offers a less detailed but consistent picture with each of the eschatological schools that Enns (1989:380-394) discussed.

#### **4.4.5 The consequences of the eschatological divine judgments**

##### **4.4.5.1 Rewards or not**

It is claimed by Paul that “we” all will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10), and then “we” will receive according to what “we” have done in the body, whether it is good or bad. The “we” is not specifically identified, but must include Paul at the very least. Barnett (1997:274-277) thinks it refers to believers. Furthermore, he makes a distinction between condemnation and evaluation. Believers are not condemned but they are evaluated at this judgment. Jesus further argues that whoever gives a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple will not lose his reward (Matt 10:42). In other words, there is a guarantee of reward for this act. Jesus also describes rewards as permanent in Matthew 6:19-20.

##### **4.4.5.2 Second death or not**

The book of Revelation discusses two resurrections. The first one (Rv 20:4-6) results in not being overpowered by the second death and in a millennial reign. The second one (20:21-15) results in the second death. It is noted that the associated judgment is made κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν 'according to their works' (Rv 20:13). The theme of two resurrections is also found in John 5:28-29 under the names of the resurrection of life and the resurrection of judgment.

##### **4.4.5.3 Conclusion on the consequences of the eschatological divine judgments**

The Bible describes two kinds of results for judgment. One is reward or not, and the other is life or second death. Premillennial dispensational interpretation considers these as two separate judgments. The book of Revelation actually places a thousand years (plus a time of revolt) between the resurrections, making them separate events, if literal hermeneutics is

followed. Amillennialists, postmillennialists, and non-dispensational premillennialists see these as taking place in the one judgment. Both judgments are made on the basis of works. This is in line with the teaching of the book of Ecclesiastes that all works will be judged, but the book of Ecclesiastes makes no distinction between the two judgments discussed. The consequences of the judgments are experienced personally. The consequences are eternal. This is a point that is not discussed in the book of Ecclesiastes, but it is relevant in the context of the book.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

The book of Ecclesiastes discusses individual divine judgment in this life only as a possibility. It also discusses a certain judgment in the afterlife at least in the conclusion and possibly also in the body of the book. It is silent on such themes of divine judgment as collective judgment. This is in distinction to some other books, such as the book of Amos, which discuss collective judgments on various nations. My interpretation of the evidence in the area of divine judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes is harmonistic. Though divine judgment was not considered a major theme in the book until the end, the evidence is compatible with the interpretational framework of an eschatological divine judgment of all things with the subject of the judgment being conscious. This is consistent with the theme of the book about the value of joy in light of the futility of attempting to gain permanent profit. Also the possibility that no eschatological judgment is described before the ending of the book was discussed. The concept of individual judgment is in line with wisdom literature, such as the book of Proverbs and the book of Ecclesiasticus, though these books were not studied in depth. The major tensions in the area of divine judgment were solved harmonistically.

As noted in section 2.2.2, harmonization as an approach to the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes has been criticized as not being based on the guidance given by the text in making distinctions and as being based on assumptions of what the meaning must be rather than based on the context. While the history of interpretation has shown that this kind of harmonization exists, if my argumentation is sound, it is also possible to harmonize the text consistently with a contextual reading in the area of divine judgment. However, some rather key passages influencing my conclusions contain a number of difficult exegetical choices. If it were not so, there would be much more unanimity of the meaning of the book among scholars.

Further research is desirable in the area of the ancient Egyptian view of the afterlife and its applicability to the book of Ecclesiastes. I have argued that the book of Ecclesiastes presents a personal eschatological divine judgment. The argument is made even stronger in a canonical reading of the book, which places it in the context of a canon that indicates faith in God as a judge of the dead and the living. I hope to have shown that harmonization is a plausible option and that lexical studies can offer a lot of guidance into the exegesis and theology of the book of Ecclesiastes.

The main research question is how the theme of divine judgment contributes to the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes. The answer I give to this question on the basis of the study is that the main argument of the book is about the value of joy in light of the futility of attempting to gain permanent profit. Qohelet probably believed in an eschatological divine judgment of all deeds as well as the possibility that God may judge in this life. Yet divine judgment plays only a supporting role to the argument in Qohelet's teaching. It is probably evoked to resolve the problem of evil in Ecclesiastes 3:17. The possibility of temporal divine judgment is used to encourage right behavior in 5:3-5. In Ecclesiastes 8:10-14 an eschatological divine judgment is possibly used to encourage right behavior along with answering the problem of lifespans disproportionate to moral behavior. It also addresses the lack of justice on earth.

In Ecclesiastes 11:9 divine judgment is found in a context directly discussing a very central part of the argument. The pursuit of joy must be in harmony with divine judgment. This relates to an important philosophical underpinning of Qohelet's discourse that God accepts and expects the pursuit of joy. This is not much discussed in the book, but rather assumed. In the end of the book, the argument is summarized with a shift in emphasis in that a minor theme (divine judgment) is elevated into a major one.

If the judgment in the body of the book takes place in the afterlife, the judgment passages apart from Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 cohere well and speak of the same judgment. The themes support each other and are related in Qohelet's theology, so the different viewpoint in the epilogue is more of shift in viewpoint than essence. The theology of divine judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes stands within the doctrinal confines of the rest of the biblical canon in the broad outline discussed in section 4.4. This is not to deny the book its own unique contribution. The book of Ecclesiastes stands out by its explicit mention of a divine judgment of all deeds. The idea of a judgment in the afterlife in the book of Ecclesiastes is significant for Old Testament biblical theology.

## **5 Homiletic implications and conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In chapter 3, subquestion (1) of the research question was studied. The subquestion is what the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes is. In chapter 4, subquestions (2), (3), and (4) were studied. They are (2) “what does the book of Ecclesiastes teach about divine judgment”, (3) “how does the theme of divine judgment relate to the argument of the book”, and (4) “how is the theme of divine judgment related to the rest of the canon”. The answers to these subquestions were used to answer the main research question in section 4.5. This leaves subquestion (5) about homiletic implications of this study to be discussed. First I summarize the research results in section 5.2. Then I discuss the implications of this study for the understanding of the book of Ecclesiastes in section 5.3. This is followed by a discussion of homiletic implications in section 5.4 to answer subquestion (5) of the research question. Areas for further research are broached in section 5.5.

### **5.2 Summary of research results**

#### **5.2.1 Introduction**

There are several views of the message of the book of Ecclesiastes. Some consider the book to discuss the meaning of life or to present an argument to revere God or to discuss the value of work or to argue to enjoy life (see sections 1.1.4 and 2.3). A significant part of the debate is the meaning and usage of some key words. The book is summarized by calling everything הבל 'futility', but scholars have not been unanimous about the meaning of the word as used in the summary. It is clear that the book recommends שמחה 'joy', but the nuance is debated, whether the book recommends pleasure or joy.

These questions are important for the interpreter in that they shape the worldview of the book to a considerable degree. Another important debate about the worldview of the book concerns divine judgment. The book discusses divine judgment a few times in passing, culminating in a summary that makes it central. Yet how the book envisions the judgment is a subject of considerable importance to understanding the worldview of the book. Solving these questions does not automatically lead to a clear understanding of how the theme of divine judgment contributes to the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes, which is the research question of this

dissertation. Yet these questions need to be answered before the argument can be fully appreciated.

### 5.2.2 The argument of the book of Ecclesiastes

The first subquestion of the research question concerns the argument of the book. The method was to study words חלק 'portion', יתרון 'profit', שמחה 'joy', הבל 'futility', רעות רוח 'desire of wind', and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' in all their occurrences in the book of Ecclesiastes. The word חלק 'portion' is used of positive experiences and opportunities to experience them and of possessions. One's portion is God's gift and it should be enjoyed. The dead do not have a portion under the sun, meaning in this life.

The usage of the word יתרון 'profit' relates to the theme in two different ways. The profit of work is denied on the basis of death nullifying any final profit and man not knowing God's work. The theme of profit was also discussed from a more temporal perspective in the book of Ecclesiastes. In this perspective, there is profit. The lack of permanent profit for work is significant in that it supports the value of joy as opposed to losing joy in drudgery for permanent profit. The contrast between יתרון 'profit' and חלק 'portion' turned out to be important. Permanent profit is denied but a portion is affirmed. This points to the question Qohelet was seeking to answer. The question of profit for work should be seen in a context including a quest for something permanent.

The meaning of שמחה 'joy' has some latitude from superficial merrymaking to genuine joy. The passages recommending joy are best understood as referring to genuine joy. The attitude to joy expressed in the book is that it should be pursued while doing good and remembering God's judgment. The source of joy is described as eating and drinking, which are simple joys of life. The book emphasizes somewhat more finding joy in life than seeking activities that produce joy. Joy is important for the argument as Qohelet repeatedly comes back to the value of joy. This is often in the context of futility, pointing to the reason Qohelet considered it relevant. This highlights the importance of the theme of joy. He argues that valuing joy is not to be neglected in the pursuit of achievement.

The word הבל 'futility' is in many ways a key word for the book. A hypothesis for the meaning of the word was presented as *"the meaning of the word הבל in the book of Ecclesiastes (with possible exceptions when there is good reason to believe that the use is unrelated to the summary statement) falls within the general sense of 'futility', and in most*

occurrences within the meaning “that which is associated with failure to gain permanent profit, (1) as that which fails to accomplish this, or (2) as the cause or (3) circumstance of the failure”. The strength of this hypothesis is that it allows a single meaning for the word as related to the summary. This hypothesis was tested over all the occurrences of the word in the book of Ecclesiastes, and it stood the test. It was also argued that the book contains textual clues to help the reader arrive at this meaning.

Additionally Fredericks's rival hypothesis of 'transience' was evaluated, and while it was found plausible for many occurrences, there were some occurrences where it was judged implausible, and his hypothesis was rejected. The study of הבל 'futility' points to an argument that is concerned with an impossible attempt. As joy is a value repeatedly argued for on the basis of futility, it points to the central concern why joy was undervalued in Qohelet's estimation. He was concerned that people were not fully aware of the consequences of futility of their pursuits and that the lack of awareness caused them to miss joy.

It was suggested that expressions רעות רוח 'desire of wind' and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' may refer to desire of the transient, but this conclusion is tentative. It was noted that רעות רוח 'desire of wind' tends to be associated with physical work and רעיון רוח 'windy thinking' with mental work. The expressions were understood as Aramaic loans. The conclusion of the study of the argument of the book is that because no permanent profit is possible in this life, all work is futile with respect to the goal of securing permanent profit. Yet people work as if it were possible, depriving themselves from joy in the process. People should rather face their mortality and the futility of all work, and enjoy life while doing good and taking God's judgment into account. (See section 3.8.)

### **5.2.3 Divine judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes**

The second subquestion is what the book of Ecclesiastes teaches about divine judgment. All occurrences of the root שפט 'judge' and the word פתגם 'sentence' were studied together with their co-text as well as the word עוות in the piel ('make crooked') and pual ('be crooked') conjugations. It was concluded that divine judgment is discussed or touched in Ecclesiastes 3:16-22, 5:1-7, 8:10-15, 11:9, and 12:13-14, unless in 8:10-15 only consequences are discussed without an implication that it is necessarily the result of a divine judgment.

In Ecclesiastes 3:17 there is a probable reference to a personal eschatological divine judgment in the afterlife. Because this possibility has been argued against on the basis that it



is incompatible with Qohelet's view of the afterlife, the topic was studied in more detail. Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 and 9:1-10 have been used to argue that Qohelet did not believe in an afterlife. These passages were examined from this point of view. It was concluded that neither passage requires an interpretation that questions or denies an afterlife. This is highly relevant for the worldview of the book as a whole and of Qohelet. The book probably assumes a worldview with a personal eschatological divine judgment. This implies also that it is not completely limited to this life (or life under the sun) in its scope. Though this is not the only possible interpretation of the book, this interpretation is coherent with itself and the text of the book. It was further suggested that in Ecclesiastes 3:21 there may very well be an allusion to the Egyptian view of the afterlife, and what is questioned is that specific view rather than afterlife in general. In Ecclesiastes 3:17 the concept of divine judgment is used to address injustice on earth.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 affirms the possibility (but not necessity) of a temporal divine judgment. The idea is used as a warning. In Ecclesiastes 8:10-15 it is noted that delays in judgment (not necessarily divine) encourage evil. Further it is noted that in one plausible interpretation of the passage there is a divine judgment (though the term is not used) that will ensure good consequences for the one who reveres God and bad for the wicked. In the alternative interpretation generally speaking there are good consequences for the one who reveres God in this life, but there are exceptions. I concluded that the first interpretation is somewhat stronger, but the second is also possible. In the first interpretation, the concept of divine judgment is used to answer the problem of lifespans disproportionate to moral deserts. It also encourages right behavior. However, this is not the main point of the passage but rather that there is no divine judgment that makes justice always happen on earth. This is mitigated by the fact that often evil will have consequences also on earth or by the fact that there will be a divine judgment in the afterlife.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 is understood in the context that joy is a divine gift. It is to be enjoyed in conformity to the divine will in light of divine judgment. This is important in that this serves to hedge the recommendations of joy. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 discusses keeping commandments and revering God on the basis of an eschatological divine judgment of all deeds. This is done from a viewpoint that is different from the rest of the book. Two possible views of divine judgment were discovered in the study. In the one with a personal eschatological judgment in the afterlife, the ending of the book is the same in content. In the

one without a personal judgment in the afterlife, the views are still compatible, but the ending adds another view not discussed in the body of the book. It was concluded that the root עוֹת was used to describe the state of the world as the result of God's action. In a canonical reading this can be understood to refer to the effects of the curse because of the fall, yet the book of Ecclesiastes makes no such connection.

The answer to the second subquestion is that the book of Ecclesiastes teaches that there will be an eschatological judgment of all deeds, and possible (but not necessary) divine judgments on earth and that justice does not always happen on earth. The concept of divine judgment should encourage right behavior. It is also probably used to address the problem of injustice on earth. By using the expression “the eschatological judgment” no argument is made whether there is a single judgment at which everyone is judged (amillennialism and postmillennialism) or whether there are several judgments, and each person is judged at some point (dispensational premillennialism). This is just a matter of viewpoint in using the term.

#### **5.2.4 The relationship of the theme of divine judgment to the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes**

The third subquestion is how the theme of divine judgment relates to the argument of the book. The theme is used to address the problem of corruption within a larger context of the importance of joy in Ecclesiastes 3:16-22. The theme is introduced not because it advances the main theme but, according to the interpretation of the passage estimated as probable, because it gives an answer to the problem of injustice, which is raised in the discussion of corruption, futility and the value of joy. It is not argued for but assumed. An alternative form of divine judgment is questioned, but not denied, possibly that of the Egyptian afterlife judgment quite dependent on spells and rituals, the affordability of which in turn is dependent on achievements in this world. The way the text handles these two views of judgment points to judgment not being the main point. Qohelet only states his view, but takes more seriously the possibility that an alternative view may challenge his view of joy. Even so, he does not argue against the view. The passage discusses human limitations and their implications on the theme of joy through futility.

In 5:1-7 the possibility of a temporal judgment is mentioned as part of an exhortation to keep one's vows. In one interpretation in 8:10-15 an eschatological divine judgment is used akin to the probable interpretation of 3:16-22, to address the incongruence of moral deserts and the

length of life. Alternatively it is a description of how things usually turn out, though exceptions remain. Additionally, the concept of divine judgment or usual consequences is used to support doing right in a discussion of delay in justice. Quite possibly the concept of divine judgment is used to affirm ultimately good consequences for revering God. It is noted that on earth what happens does not always correlate with the deeds. This latter observation implies the lack of divine judgment ensuring justice in this life, which is again used to support the value of joy.

In 11:9 divine judgment is directly related to the theme of joy as the reader is encouraged to have joy, walk in the way of his heart, and know divine judgment. Here the theme of divine judgment is brought together with the main argument of the book as Qohelet notes that divine judgment will cover one's pursuit of joy. The passage is also significant in that it is not just the value of joy that is discussed, but there is a positive exhortation to pursue things that bring joy. This is in contrast to other passages recommending joy, such as Ecclesiastes 2:24 and 3:12, which speak of joy, enjoyment, eating and drinking, but do not positively command pursuing things that produce joy (assuming that people will eat and drink anyway). Ecclesiastes 11:9 makes sense in a context where God approves enjoying life. This passage also is important in that it hedges the pursuit of joy by divine judgment, bringing the themes together. The pursuit is to be submitted to the divine will. The book closes with a clear statement of a divine judgment extending to all deeds.

The theme of divine judgment is found in proximity with the main themes of futility and joy in 3:16-22 and 8:10-15 (unless 8:12-13 is interpreted as consequences unrelated to divine judgment), but not directly related to joy. Ecclesiastes 11:9 is the only passage where divine judgment and joy are directly related. The reason why they are not directly related more often may be that futility and joy are related more closely, and divine judgment is not considered futile. It is at the end of the book, in 12:13-14 that divine judgment occupies the central stage in supporting reverence for God. The viewpoint is different from the rest of the book, but the basic content and theology is the same. It focuses on what was taken for granted and touched on in the rest of the book. It may be read as giving a foundation for the value system expounded in the book, including the value of joy, as it is approved by God.

There are several ways the theme of divine judgment contributes to the argument of the book. It is used to address the lack of justice in this life (Eccl 3:16-22 and possibly 8:10-15). It is also used in a wider context that encourages right behavior, and plausibly to guarantee good

results for revering God (8:10-15). It is used in connection with the pursuit of joy as a hedge and possibly also signifying the importance of obedience to the command to pursue joy. Finally, it is used as the reason to revere God at the conclusion describing what one is to do. Thus the theme of divine judgment is used mostly to support other points, but toward the end of the book (in 12:13-14) it occupies the central stage. Though not explained in this way in the book, it may be seen as giving the positive foundation for values, whereas the theme of futility attempts to take away a futile foundation for values.

### **5.2.5 The relationship of the theme of judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes to the rest of the canon**

The fourth subquestion is how the theme of judgment in the book is related to the rest of the canon, though properly speaking this is not directly related to the research question, but is rather a contextualization of it. The answer given in this study is that the book of Ecclesiastes teaches that there will be an eschatological divine judgment of all deeds, which is quite compatible with premillennial, amillennial, and postmillennial interpretations of the Bible. This is brought out in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, and possibly in 3:17 and 8:12-13. It was also argued that Ecclesiastes 3:19-21 and 9:1-10 do not argue against the idea of a conscious afterlife.

The book of Ecclesiastes emphasizes that divine judgment covers all deeds. My reading of judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes in the context of the canon is harmonistic. Harmonistic readings of Ecclesiastes have been criticized as not being contextually based. My study questions the assumption that harmonizing Ecclesiastes is necessarily insensitive to the text and context of the book in the area of divine judgment. The last subquestion is what the homiletic implications of the argument of the book and of divine judgment as part of it are. This question is discussed in section 5.4.

## **5.3 Implications of the study for understanding the book of Ecclesiastes**

### **5.3.1 Introduction**

Having reviewed the conclusions of the study above, I sketch their implications for the understanding of the book of Ecclesiastes. This is done in five areas, the choice of an interpretive paradigm, the area of lexical studies, the argument of the book, the theme of

divine judgment and afterlife, and the theme of work. This is followed by a discussion of homiletic implications of this study in section 5.4.

### **5.3.2 Contribution to the choice of an interpretive paradigm**

There are several competing paradigms for understanding the book of Ecclesiastes, as expressed in chapter 2. One important difference is the way how tensions are handled. While the purpose of this dissertation was not to resolve this question in general, in the area of divine judgment harmonization was found to be a plausible solution. This removes one reason for appealing to additions or quotations or changes of speakers or inner dialectic as a reason for inconsistent views. Though this does not argue against these ideas, this constitutes an argument that mutually contradictory views on divine judgment need not be postulated for the text and consequently need not be explained.

This is significant because different ways of handling tensions in the book have resulted in different paradigms for its interpretation. The harmonization of divine judgment gives a solution that is a priori plausible, tested to be plausible by this dissertation, and points to a harmonistic paradigm for understanding Ecclesiastes. Additionally, the way הבל was handled as 'futility' but not 'meaninglessness' provides for a way to harmonize a meaningful universe and divine judgment as part of it with the futility that summarizes the book.

This admittedly falls short of making a claim that all of the tensions of the book are to be harmonized, but divine judgment and issues relating to futility are among the most important areas of tension to be solved. This goes a long way toward showing the plausibility of a harmonizing paradigm for the book instead of some version of a tension-maximizing paradigm. Thus this study contributes to the plausibility of a harmonizing interpretive paradigm for the book of Ecclesiastes.

### **5.3.3 Contribution to lexical studies**

This study used the framework of prototype theory for lexical studies. Though it does not contribute to the methodology of it, it demonstrates its usefulness to solving exegetical problems. The study also used concepts of relevance theory for making exegetical decisions, illustrating their usefulness. Though this study does not make a methodological contribution in the area of lexical studies, it contributes to the understanding of key terms and their usage in the book of Ecclesiastes.

The main term studied in this dissertation that has been a subject of significant controversy is הבל 'futility'. The problem has been that each suggestion reviewed in this study has been deficient one way or another. Either the suggestions suffer from finding too many meanings for a term that summarizes the whole book, or the suggested meanings create exegetical problems of poor textual fit or lack textual support, or they lack support from the existence of the sense outside of the book of Ecclesiastes. The meaning has thus proven to be quite elusive.

This study argues for a novel solution for the meaning of the word as used in the book. The suggested sense of 'futility' is not novel, but rather its use in the book of Ecclesiastes in the frame of work to produce permanent profit. Thus the author of the book has taken a word, used it within its common meaning but related it in a more specific way to the theme of his discussion. Within this general sense, three metonymically related submeanings were discerned. This solution satisfies the conditions that the sense is found in other literature, it has textual support, and it fits all the occurrences that seem to be connected with the summary.

There has been a divergence of opinion on the word שמחה 'joy'. It is one of the key concepts in that Qohelet considered it the best thing around and recommended it. Because of the latitude of its meaning, scholars have had different views on whether it means 'pleasure' or 'joy' in the passages recommending joy. My solution was that it refers to genuine joy in these passages, though also the sense of 'pleasure' was found in the book. Joy is recommended in the context of work and awareness of divine judgment. There has been less disagreement about חלק 'portion'. The fact that enjoying it is within the divine will, the proposed sense for שמחה as genuine joy and the sense advocated in this study for הבל 'futility' help one understand the message of the book.

#### **5.3.4 Contribution to the message of the book**

The lexical studies of this dissertation contribute to understanding the message of the book. One's view of the book depends largely on his understanding of the meaning of הבל 'futility'. The view argued in this study is that the word is used of futility in the context of attempting to secure permanent profit. This implies that the book is not about the meaning of life in general or about collapse of meaning or ways to live in a meaningless world. Neither is there need to argue for multiple meanings of the word as far as the thematic sense of the word is

concerned. This study also argues that שמחה 'joy' refers to genuine joy as opposed to pleasure in the key passages recommending joy.

Together these findings about joy and futility point to the understanding of the message that one is to give up striving for a permanent profit and to pursue joy instead. Understanding the relationship between futility and joy helps appreciate the significance of the achievement-centered approach to life as detrimental to joy. This points to the centrality of joy for understanding the message of the book. Understanding the key vocabulary turned out to be crucial to understanding the message of the book. This is a contribution to the biblical theology of the book of Ecclesiastes and also a reminder of the importance of word studies for doing biblical theology.

The understanding of the theme of the book argued for in this study provides a means to combine several threads of thought in the book of Ecclesiastes. The theme of death provides a framework to argue for the futility of all work. The theme of joy is central in the behavioral application of the message as given in the book. Within the theme of joy, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes recommends finding it in ordinary life as well as pursuing it responsibly in view of divine judgment. The theme of judgment is used to address difficulties raised in the book. These are the problem of the corrupt court in chapter 3 and perhaps implicitly the delay of justice in chapter 8. The study of the theme of death in the book in sections 4.2.1.4 and 4.2.2 goes a long way toward harmonizing the book both internally and with the rest of the canon. This study also provides a framework that allows Qohelet to be interpreted as internally consistent as far as the topics covered in this study are concerned.

### **5.3.5 Contribution to the theme of divine judgment and afterlife in the book of Ecclesiastes**

This study argues that the book of Ecclesiastes teaches an eschatological divine judgment in the epilogue and probably also in the body of the book. The judgment is probably of conscious people in the afterlife. This view has been denied in many earlier studies. The result of rejecting this view has often been either rejection of Qohelet's orthodoxy or difficulty in understanding the message of the book as a unified whole. This becomes unnecessary if the conclusions of this study are correct. Consequently it is possible to interpret Qohelet's view of divine judgment as rather similar to that found in the prophetic

books and the New Testament, though there is no mention of any collective temporal judgment in the book of Ecclesiastes.

This study argues that the book alludes to a view of the afterlife that is quite similar to that found in ancient Egypt in relevant respects. This has some relevance to the study of the source of ideas expressed in the book and to the study of the original readership of the book. If this identification is confirmed, it points to some familiarity with Egyptian thinking among the original readers of the book.

Understanding the themes of divine judgment and afterlife in the book of Ecclesiastes helps find the place of the book within the biblical canon. The conclusion of this study is that the book is not an attack on older wisdom nor is its view of the afterlife or divine judgment incompatible with any of the major views in systematic theology.

The book of Ecclesiastes makes a clear statement that divine judgment covers all deeds in the conclusion. This point is made with clarity that is rare in the rest of the canon. Another important point is the crookedness of the world. Though God reigns, the world is not as it should be. This truth is not minimized in the book of Ecclesiastes. God is made accountable for this state of affairs in Ecclesiastes 7:14. Though the book does not call this the result of divine judgment, in a canonical reading it may be understood as God placing a curse on the world as the result of sin.

### **5.3.6 Contribution to understanding the theme of work in the book of Ecclesiastes**

The understanding of the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes argued for in this study has implications on how work is to be understood. The book brings out several aspects of work. Work is to be combined with joy. This has been discussed together with the theme of joy. Yet the book does not advocate working according to one's whims. Rather it argues against laziness in 4:5, and advocates for activity in 9:10. The latter argument is based on the idea that this life offers a unique window of opportunity to work. Yet this is balanced by noting that achievements do not produce permanent profit. This balance relates to the theme of futility. In light of this futility, one should have joy in his work.

The book also notes the fact that the future is unknown to a large extent. This has implications for work. One cannot know whether this succeeds or that (Eccl 11:6). The



inherent risk of failure should not paralyze one from working but rather encourage to work diligently. Rather opportunities should be taken advantage of. The goal of work is not much discussed in the book. It is noted that one is to do good (3:12), but what that consists in is not further discussed.

### **5.3.7 Summary of contribution to the message of the book**

By way of summary, the implications of this study for understanding the book of Ecclesiastes concern mostly the interpretive paradigm for the book. Tensions are to be harmonized in the area of divine judgment. The book is about joy, which may be threatened by an achievement-centered approach to life. The achievement-centered approach does not take mortality and the lack of permanent profit for work seriously enough. It is argued that it is a plausible interpretation that an eschatological divine judgment in the afterlife is assumed and used to resolve the problem of apparent injustice, to argue for doing right, and made central in the epilogue as a foundation for revering God and keeping his commands.

There is possibly some indication that the original audience was familiar with the Egyptian view of the afterlife. The book makes a few comments on the theme of work. Joy is important in work, one should work diligently and take advantage of opportunities, but also allow for rest and realize that the results of work will be lost. The research results also help place the book within the biblical canon. The book stands within it theologically, but it makes a contribution to the breadth of divine judgment as covering all deeds and to understanding the crooked state of the world.

## **5.4 Homiletic implications of the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes and of divine judgment as part of it**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

Homiletic implications of the argument of the book of Ecclesiastes and of divine judgment as part of it is subquestion (5) of the research question. Homiletic implications concern bridging the gap between the text and the life of the reader or listener of a sermon on the book of Ecclesiastes. The transfer from the text to the life of the recipient of the text is done through finding principles in the text that can be applied in the context of the reader or listener. Sometimes the level of abstraction in the text is such that the principles can be directly used

in the other context. At times the principle may have to be abstracted from the text at a level of abstraction high enough for application.

This principle may be illustrated by referring to Deuteronomy 22:1. The verse commands to take a lost ox or sheep of a neighbor back to him. This is a very concrete command. A more abstract version of the principle is to take back to the neighbor any lost animal that one finds. This version includes donkeys. However, there is still a more abstract principle that can be applied even if when none of the neighbors own any animals. It is to help the neighbor when he has lost something of value. Even more abstract version is to love one's neighbor as oneself (Gal 5:14).

One challenge of too abstract principles is that they may be difficult to apply. More concrete principles help the reader apply the more abstract principle. Thus the skillful preacher should know how to climb the ladder of abstraction as well as to go back down to the concrete in such a way that the message remains faithful to the message of the Bible and supports and helps the listener to grow in his skill in applying it in the context of his own life. In order to help the listener apply the message, it is important to be able to find the problems that must be faced by the person who attempts to apply the principle. In other words, the application should be problematized. Also the application should give enough latitude so that different listeners may apply it despite their different situations while avoiding the danger of misapplication. Misapplication may occur when the principle is presented in such a way that it does not legitimately apply in the context of the listener.

Fortunately for the purposes of this section, the message of the book of Ecclesiastes and divine judgment as part of it are not highly dependent on a particular culture. Nevertheless, the ladder of abstraction and cultural sensitivity are still needed. For example, Ecclesiastes 5:5 speaks of a messenger. One is not to make an excuse of having made an oath erroneously to the messenger. It is not quite clear who this messenger is, and quite likely it was part of the cultural context of the book (see section 4.2.3). The principle of keeping one's commitments includes this concrete case. This principle should be problematized as there are cases where keeping one's commitment is not the ideal solution. Nehemiah 5 discusses a concrete example where the well-being of the community was dependent on releasing the obligation of past commitments. It is not my purpose to problematize this principle any further but to use this example as an illustration of the need of problematizing the application.

### **5.4.2 Homiletic implications of the theme of joy**

The book of Ecclesiastes discusses the importance of joy. It is not alone in the biblical canon in this respect. Nehemiah 8:10 and Philippians 4:4 echo the same principle. Yet the book of Ecclesiastes discusses this theme more extensively. It creates a contrast between achievement-centered life and a life of joy. Setting goals and achieving them may well be a source of great joy, but it must be realized that no human achievement is permanent. The book of Ecclesiastes favors a balanced life. This includes diligence as opposed to foolish laziness, but also rest as opposed to overwork (Eccl 4:5-6). Social relationships are important (Eccl 4:7-12). Avarice may kill joy (Eccl 5:9), and cause a lot of joyless toil (Eccl 5:15-16). Lack of rest may be sinful (Eccl 2:26, see section 3.5.3), a point of similarity with sabbath theology.

The book of Ecclesiastes emphasizes the value of joy, and it gives some suggestions for pursuing it. These suggestions are not very specific. The book is not a manual of psychological joy skills. Yet clearly skills are needed, assuming that few people intentionally choose to live an unhappy life. The study of what skills are needed and how to enhance joy is an important area of research. It belongs to the field of psychology.

Qohelet would probably include in the list social skills needed to develop and maintain important social relationships (Eccl 4:7-12) and the balance between rest and work along with the ability to balance one's schedule between other tasks and the time needed to rest and maintain and develop these relationships. One is to find joy in the simple things of life, such as eating and drinking. Nothing special is needed as an occasion of joy. Rather one should learn to enjoy the common things of life. This is not to say that such enjoyment is always possible, but when it is available in God's will, the opportunity should not be wasted because it is God's gift. Neither is this to say that special occasions of joy should not be cherished and valued, though the theme of special occasions of joy is not discussed in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Psalms 131 speaks of contentment as the result of accepting one's intellectual limitations. Qohelet speaks of human limitations with respect to lack of justice on earth together with joy (Eccl 3:16-22, 8:8-15). Accepting one's limitations and the external reality is important as it helps one have joy. By accepting I do not mean not trying to change it. Rather, not accepting

reality will not change the reality but results in misplaced energy of denying it or fighting what cannot be changed.

It is possible to create a religious version of the kind of achievement-centered life the book of Ecclesiastes argues against. When one thinks that he can take his achievements to eternal life with him, it is quite easy to focus one's attention to achievements. The biblical antidote to this is that the results of divine judgment are eternal, not achievements even in Christian work. Divine judgment is based on deeds and motives, not achievements or results. Part of divine judgment is enjoyment of life as a divine gift. The question of joy in the Christian life is not just a nice bonus. According to the book of Ecclesiastes, it is very important to take good care of joy in one's work, including Christian service.

Happiness has been studied from a psychological point of view. Veenhoven (2003) discusses life skills that are needed for a virtuous life and for a hedonistic life. She makes a distinction within hedonism between a narrow hedonism with a focus on pleasure and overall life satisfaction. The skills needed for living according to each of these ideals differ. The book of Ecclesiastes interestingly does not exclude any of these goals. The book is not purely hedonistic with its view of the divine judgment and reverence for God. Neither is it purely virtue-centered because of its emphasis on joy, or perhaps it could be said that it raises joy to the level of virtue.

The book can be seen as a corrective to the kind of sense of obligation that loses sight of the importance of joy. This serves as an important corrective to the kind of Christianity that overemphasizes Christian duties. God's gifts are meant to be enjoyed in a real way and appreciated as such. These include both long term enjoyment and deriving joy also of pleasures. The latter is indicated by the frequent mention of enjoying food and drink together with joy. Yet it is to be noted that in the book of Ecclesiastes, this kind of hedonism is submitted to obedience to God.

For virtuous life, Veenhoven (2003:374) discusses conformity to an external set of rules as one kind of virtue. This requires knowledge of how one is expected to behave. In the book of Ecclesiastes this can be seen in advice for behavior before a king (8:2-6, 10:20). She notes that determination, pain tolerance, and ability to deal with contradictions in the rules are skills sometimes needed.

If the virtuous life is understood as living up to an ideal, it requires an ability to translate the abstract moral ideal to concrete behavioral goals, a good understanding of the world, and of the consequences of one's behavior, an ability to select goals one can handle, self-sacrifice and motivation, and worldly competencies. Concretization of the abstract virtues is helped by prototypes. (Veenhoven 2003:374-375.) This highlights the importance of the ability to concretize abstract ideals. It in turn requires understanding of life. The book of Ecclesiastes along with other wisdom literature, especially the book of Proverbs, offers prototypical advice in life situations. The person interested in applying the Bible in his own life should be a student of life, not just of the Bible alone.

If the goal is to be authentic to self, this requires reflective skills, such as self-awareness and emotional differentiation, and also ability to recognize how others see you and awareness of social forces to see oneself in a certain way. The difficulty is then to give concrete form to this knowledge of self. This particular view is connected with little value in living up to rules or ideals, and sees the main value in the expression of oneself. (Veenhoven 2003:375-376.) These values are not in accordance with biblical values in that the Bible depicts high ideals to be followed, but nevertheless there is a point of contact with the book of Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes 11:9 the young man is encouraged to follow his heart, taking divine judgment into account. This would, of course, include taking into account any knowledge the person has about God's will.

For narrow hedonism, Veenhoven discerns two different approaches: maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Maximizing pleasure (greedy life) requires good taste to be able to enjoy sophisticated enjoyments, social skill and good manners (because much of enjoyment is social in nature), some guts to violate some rules with enough discipline to keep oneself from serious trouble. (Veenhoven 2003:376-377.) A contribution of the book of Ecclesiastes is that hedonic pleasure is a gift of God to be enjoyed, whenever it is available in the will of God (or to use Qohelet's phraseology, knowing that God will bring you to judgment, Eccl 11:9).

The book of Ecclesiastes mentions repeatedly eating and drinking. Macht, Meininger, and Roth (2005:144-146, 153, 156) note that social factors are important in hedonic eating, though there are individual differences. As the book of Ecclesiastes frequently discusses eating and drinking as a source of joy, the advice of Macht and others (2005:157-158) is relevant to the application of the book. They say that individual strategies that can enhance

the enjoyment of food include “improving goal-directed activities that heighten the salience of food stimuli, allow for an appropriate selection of environmental and social conditions as well as for an appropriate tuning of somato-psychic state. Individuals can also be instructed to slow down eating rate and to focus on food-related sensations and feelings.”

In the pain-minimizing approach, some social skills are needed, though less than the pleasure-maximizing approach, and the ability to enjoy contemplation and discussion. (Veenhoven 2003:377.) The book of Ecclesiastes has a brief note on pain minimization (11:10). It does not elaborate on how to do it. By wisdom and precaution one may avoid some pain.

For life satisfaction, Veenhoven (2003:377-379) thinks that capabilities to cope with life problems are important. Social competence is particularly important, especially the keeping up of love-relationships. Also good awareness of one's emotional reactions is very important. Self-knowledge and ability to learn from experience are needed. By self-knowledge she means knowing what one wants and what one can. Ability to learn from experience is part of wisdom. It requires reflection. Yet it is possible to engage in self-rumination that decreases one's joy (Abbe, Tkach, and Lyubomirsky 2003:394-395). It is a skill to use self-reflection for learning but also a skill to stop it when it is no longer useful and it is also a skill not to enter into a cycle of useless self-blame that robs one joy.

Abbe and others (2003:388) think that “people may be happier if they cease reviewing their options as soon as they select one that is good enough, rather than continuing to consider all the possible outcomes for other options”. Happy people also tend to be less sensitive to social comparisons (Abbe and others 2003:390-394). Ruminative self-reflection, especially when done in a negative mood, tends to decrease one's happiness (Abbe and others 2003:394-395). They note that self-reflection may be a source of wisdom. I think this implies that a proper amount and manner of self-reflection should be aimed at. They report that happy people tend to resist giving failure more than its due amount of contemplation whereas unhappy people tend to dwell on failure and dig up memories of other failures (Abbe and others 2003:395-396).

The book of Ecclesiastes discusses the benefits of social relationships and gives some advice for relationships when one is dealing with an authority figure (Eccl 4:7-12, 8:2-6), but its emphasis is more on the need than actual skill. Their relative homiletic importance depends

on the homiletic situation, but both are potentially important. Also the book of Ecclesiastes singles out a love-relationship as a source of joy (Eccl 9:7-9). Furthermore, the book is appreciative of wisdom and notes its usefulness (2:13-14). Qohelet is an example of a person who had a quest of growing in wisdom. This required self-reflection. He exemplifies this in his own critique of the limitations of wisdom, his own quest (2:15).

Happy people tend to construe positive life events as more positive and negative events as less negative than unhappy people (Abbe and others 2003:398-399). Abbe and others (2003:400) note that two possible means of increasing happiness is practicing gratitude and committing acts of kindness. They predict that their research will show that “students who actively engage in gratitude and kindness with concerted effort and commitment will experience increases in happiness that persist over time”. Bryant, Smart, and King (2005) argue that positive reminiscing increases happiness.

There are different life skills. Veenhoven's argument is that different life goals influence which skills are most needed. The book of Ecclesiastes offers several life goals: joy, doing good, and living in the light of divine judgment. Living in light of divine judgment may be considered the one by which the value of the other goals can be judged, though joy may be a value in its own right. For the book of Ecclesiastes, joy is accepted and recommended, and the pursuit of joy must be done in a manner consistent with divine judgment. What doing good implies is not discussed in detail. To work it out, one needs to have a set of abstract ideals and an ability to concretize them in life decisions. The rest of the Bible gives more details on biblical ideals. A concrete goal is given in Matt 28:18-20.

There are inappropriate ways of pursuing joy (Eccl 10:16). Not all pursuit of joy is God's will. The book of Ecclesiastes does not spend much ink discussing the differences of appropriate and inappropriate ways of finding joy, but it refers to remembering divine judgment, which is a sufficient criterion, though so abstract that concretization is both needed and difficult. Jesus was quite adamant that the pursuit of joy must not compete with submitting to God's will even in the face of a painful death of crucifixion (Mt 16:24-26). This is not a contradiction with the book of Ecclesiastes, though it is in tension. The tension is to be resolved by noting the difference between enjoyment in God's will and outside of it.

### **5.4.3 Homiletic implications of judgment**

The book of Ecclesiastes is clear that on earth there will not be complete justice (8:14). To expect that to happen is not realistic. Everything should not be expected to be the best in some mysterious way in a world that God has made crooked (7:13), even though God may use anything to help people grow into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:28-29). Rather people should realize that they do not know whether good or bad things will happen to them (Eccl 9:1-2). This remains so despite promises of divine protection. It may be difficult to accept that an omnipotent and loving God allows the world to be crooked, as the book of Job documents. No amount of human effort will change that fact. Accepting the fact rather than fighting it mentally helps direct one's energies in a more meaningful way.

Divine judgment should be the source of values for the believer. In other words, God will judge according to his values, and they should be internalized by the believer. An example of this is found in Paul's discussion of his own future in Philippians 1:19-25. Jesus warned that seeking approval based on the evaluation of others rather than divine judgment may be an obstacle to faith (Jn 5:44). Ultimately this is a question of the source of values. God is to be the source of one's values if the goal is to live in light of the future divine judgment.

### **5.4.4 Other homiletic implications**

The book of Ecclesiastes is rich in homiletic material. I briefly note several themes touched in this study, the value of work, the value of rest, accepting one's limitations, overcoming greed, having a limited window of opportunity to act, and avoiding futile pursuits that waste energy. The book of Ecclesiastes affirms strongly the value of work. It notes that the possibility to do something in this life is temporally limited and therefore one should be active while he can (9:10). It also notes the danger of laziness (4:5). The book also discusses the value of rest (Eccl 4:4-6). Both work and rest are needed and should be in balance. Balancing them requires both willingness and skill. At least one needs to be aware of one's own needs for rest and to know how to meet those needs effectively, as not all rest is equally refreshing.

Accepting one's limitations may be very painful (Eccl 2:16-17). The book of Ecclesiastes calls its readers to accept their own mortality. Mortality implies losing everything one has in this life at some point. Limitations include also one's inability to control one's own future and one's fame. This is related also to the need for rest. Accepting these limitations is somewhat easier to do when one derives a sense of self-worth from God rather than achievement.



Accepting these limitations helps one have joy (Eccl 3:16-22, 8:1-15), though it may be initially very painful. It also helps overcome greed. The book of Ecclesiastes talks about the futility of attempting to achieve something in this life that one will not lose. Thinking of the end and living in view of the end is Qohelet's advice (Eccl 7:1-2, 9:3-10).

The book of Ecclesiastes also notes that we have a limited window of opportunity to act in this life (9:10). We are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity. One way of missing the opportunity is always to wait for the right moment (Eccl 11:4-6). Avoiding failure too much may be a huge failure in life. There are a number of futile pursuits mentioned in the book. These include a quest for a permanent name (Eccl 1:11, 2:16), securing an outcome on earth after one's life (Eccl 2:19), and securing permanent possessions for oneself (Eccl 2:11). Understanding the futility of these helps one direct his efforts in a more meaningful way.

#### **5.4.5 Conclusion of homiletic implications**

There are several skills that are needed in applying the message of the book of Ecclesiastes. My purpose is only to broach this theme. A thorough study of how to acquire and grow in these skills is outside the scope of this dissertation. One obvious skill that is needed is the ability to reflect and internalize good values. The Bible is a book that teaches a great deal about values, but knowing them does not automatically translate into them becoming deeply ingrained values by a simple choice of will. Internalizing a value has several components. One is intellectual. One needs to understand what the proposed value is, why the proposed value is valuable, how to integrate the value with other values, and how that is modeled in real life choices in harmony with other values. Another component is affective. Meaningful emotional experiences can be helpful in internalizing a value. To grow in biblical values requires also understanding of the Bible and what it reveals of God's value system.

Several skills are required for the application of the message of the book of Ecclesiastes to an individual's life. Some of them were broached. Each of them is a field rich for psychological and educational research and in homiletic applications. The book of Ecclesiastes discusses also values. The relationship between joy and divine judgment offers good homiletic material to balance between obligation and happiness as life orientations. Specifically, the book constitutes a powerful argument not to neglect the value of joy but rather to incorporate joy into one's work.

## **5.5 Areas for further research**

### **5.5.1 Different themes related to the overall message of the book of Ecclesiastes**

This study made a case for the overall message of the book and the theology and function of divine judgment in the book. The research methods mostly used were lexical studies and exegesis. Consequently other important areas have not received much attention. There are many other themes that the book of Ecclesiastes could be studied for, such as joy, the system of values as expressed in the book, and its relationship to human authority, oppression, corruption, wealth, and work. There are many great comments in commentaries on these topics, and that would give a good start for any such study. Yet there would be value in systematizing the contribution of the book to these themes and the contribution of these themes to the argument of the book.

### **5.5.2 Full study of the biblical theology of divine judgment**

The theme of divine judgment could be studied for different contributions and viewpoints in different books of the Bible. This would help form a balanced view of divine judgment as part of systematic theology. Such a study could be used to integrate the findings of biblical theology into systematic theology. Furthermore it would help understand different viewpoints and approaches to the theme within the biblical canon. This would be of interest to biblical theologians and students of progressive revelation.

### **5.5.3 Study of the function of paragraphs in the book of Ecclesiastes**

To fully appreciate the message of the book of Ecclesiastes, it would be important to study each section in the book for its function in the developing argument of the book. Such a study would be necessary to understand the contribution of many details to the argument of the book. A study of the contribution of each passage would facilitate the comparison of the contribution of different themes to the main argument.

### **5.5.4 Study of main points versus supportive material (grounding)**

Another interesting area of research that receives little discussion in this study is what the main points of the author of the book of Ecclesiastes are versus supportive material. In this study it is mentioned that judgment is used as supportive material in 3:17 and 8:10-15 and it

is directly related to the main point in 11:9 and 12:13-14. A more rigorous study of the main points as opposed to supporting material throughout the book, including a study of linguistic means of signaling the distinction, would be helpful. This would help avoid subjectivity in evaluating the contribution of a passage or theme to the book. A study of the linguistic means would contribute to understanding how different text types are used and embedded in the book.

### **5.5.5 Word order studies**

Word order was used in arguments for the meaning of Ecclesiastes 3:17 (see section 4.2.1.2). A systematic study of word order in classical Hebrew in general and the book of Ecclesiastes in particular would help evaluate these arguments more rigorously.

### **5.5.6 Study of authorial assumptions of the readers**

It was also noted that the theme of futility and the importance of joy were argued for by the author of the book of Ecclesiastes. Thus he did not take for granted that the readers agreed or were aware of the arguments. This observation is nothing more than an isolated observation in a field rich in research questions. Under-researched questions that are very relevant to understanding the message of the book include what the author assumed the readers to know or agree on as opposed to what he attempts to convince the readers of. Specifically relevant for the message of the book as a whole would be a study of the theme of joy from this perspective, including questions of what increases or decreases joy. A study along these lines would add to knowledge of authorial assumptions about the readers and thus indirectly of the audience the book was originally written to.

### **5.5.7 Further testing of the hypothesis of an allusion to the Egyptian view of the afterlife**

I have made a case for an allusion to the Egyptian view of the afterlife in Ecclesiastes 3:21. This possibility has not been adequately researched to my knowledge. Further research would be useful in either strengthening or weakening the suggestion. I laid out several criteria which must be satisfied by any potential view of the afterlife, and I compared it with major ancient near-eastern views. However, there are a multitude of Greek views. Researching whether there is some Greek view that would satisfy the criteria would help evaluate whether the view of Greek influence for the worldview of the book of Ecclesiastes in the area of death is

viable. Also further research into animals in the afterlife in Egyptian thought is desirable. It is possible that additional insight into other passages in the book of Ecclesiastes is gained by comparing them with ancient Egyptian views. More research is needed to confirm or disconfirm this.

### **5.5.8 Expressions רעות רוח and רעיון רוח**

The possible Aramaic borrowing of expressions רעיון רוח and רעות רוח needs more research. I tentatively accepted that they are Aramaic borrowings because that interpretation gave the best contextual fit for the usage in the book of Ecclesiastes of all the views studied. However, this was not put in a larger context of the relationship and borrowings between Hebrew and Aramaic. Neither were all the possible senses of רוח 'wind', 'spirit' studied.

### **5.5.9 Summary of areas for further research**

Interesting areas for further research include thematic studies of the book, the study of the contribution of each passage to the developing argument, the distinction of main points from supporting material, word order in classical Hebrew and more specifically the book of Ecclesiastes, authorial assumptions of the readers, further testing of my hypothesis of allusion to the Egyptian view of afterlife in Ecclesiastes 3:21 and also testing of the possibility of some Greek view meeting the criteria required by the text, and expressions רעיון רוח 'windy thought' and רעות רוח 'desire of wind' (glosses are tentative). Connections between the message of the book and life philosophy and psychology are also a fertile area of potential further research.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The book of Ecclesiastes makes a case for valuing joy as a very important part of life. Work is important and should be done with joy. An achievement-centered attitude to work may kill joy, as people try to gain security through achievement. That kind of security is an illusion, because all achievements will be lost at death. Achievements may be lost before that by circumstances. People may toil to the point of losing joy for practically no real purpose. It is better to fully understand the futility of work in securing a permanent outcome in order to give work its rightful place. It is useful but the results are uncertain and temporal. So work should have a balanced place in life, avoiding the extremes of overwork and laziness. Life offers a window of opportunity to do something and to enjoy life.

These opportunities are precious and not to be wasted. To enjoy life, social relationships are important. Also it is healthy to seek joy responsibly in view of divine judgment. This reading of the book of Ecclesiastes is based on the conclusion made in this study that the key word הבל 'futility' has a singular meaning for most of its occurrences, and that it is related to failure to gain permanent profit, and the conclusion that the book does not recommend pleasure as an escape but rather recommends genuine joy.

I have argued for a harmonistic reading of the book of Ecclesiastes in the area of divine judgment. This is based on the conclusion that the book teaches a personal, eschatological judgment of all deeds in the afterlife at least in the epilogue, and quite possibly in the body of the work as well. This divine judgment covers all deeds, making each of them significant. This highlights the significance of deeds. The view of afterlife presented in the book was studied and found compatible with this. It was hypothesized that in Ecclesiastes 3:21 an allusion is made to the Egyptian view of the afterlife.

If reading this dissertation helps the reader have joy, do good, and live in light of the future divine judgment, then the purpose of the author of the book of Ecclesiastes is served in the life of the reader of this dissertation.

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