
קוהלת § QOHELETH

In the Hebrew Bible, *Qoheleth* figures among the 'Writings'; it is one of the five *Megillot*, or 'feast scrolls' and is read at Succoth. The title of the book (and its author) is from קהלת, which means the leader of an assembly/congregation, hence the Greek (*ἐκκλησια*) and Latin (*Ecclesiastes*) names; the term, 'Preacher', goes back to Jerome (*Concionator*). The book's theme – the futility of all things human – progresses fitfully: ideas are stated, repeated, and then amended. Knowledge, wealth, love, and life itself, are all illusory. Life is no more than a succession of unrelated and meaningless events (3:1–11), ending in senility (12:1–7) and death befalling wise and foolish, rich and poor, human and animal alike (3:18–20).

Qoheleth represents only one stage in the religious development of Israel; it cannot be assessed in isolation from what has gone before and what will follow. By underlining the inadequacies of earlier notions and by compelling reconsideration of the human enigma, it exposes the need for a new revelation. It warns against attachment to the goods of this world and, by denying that the rich are happy, prepares the world for hearing 'blessed are the poor' (Lk 6:20).

AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

Some have attempted to explain the apparent incoherence in the book's doctrine by suggesting multiple authors but it is preferable to attribute this to the oscillation of one man's mind, when he is confronted with such mysteries and lacking the data for a solution. Hebrew thought is here at the crossroads and foreign influence on Qoheleth's thinking has been suggested; however, the mentality of the author is remote from that of his contemporary Greek (and other) philosophers.

The editor of the book, likely one of the author's students, added the superscription identifying him as 'son of David' (1:1), and hence the work was attributed to Solomon, to whom the text makes clear reference (1:16, cf. 1K 3:12, 5:10–11, 10:7, and 2:7–9, cf. 1K 3:13, 10:23); but this is just a literary device: the author commends his thoughts to the public under the name of the greatest sage in Israel. The late language (close to the style of the *Mishnah*) and the nature of the work make this attribution essentially impossible. Qoheleth is a Palestinian Jew, probably a citizen of Jerusalem; he writes using a late form of Hebrew, peppered with Aramaisms, and includes two words from Persian. This indicates a date well after the Exile but before the beginning of the 2nd Century BCE, when Ben Sira made use of the book; fragments of Qo found in the Qumran Scrolls have been dated at *circa* 150 BCE. The 3rd Century BCE is therefore the most likely date of composition. The book as a whole has been edited by one of the writer's disciples, who added the concluding verses (12:9–14).

קוהלת פרק א

QOHELETH 1

א דְּבַרֵי קֹהֵלֶת בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם: 1 The words of Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem.
ב הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים אָמַר קֹהֵלֶת הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים הַכֹּל הַבֵּל: 2 Futility of futilities, Qoheleth says. Futility of futilities: everything is futile!
ג מִה־יִתְרוֹן לָאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שִׁיעֵמַל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: 3 What profit can we show for all our toil, toiling under the sun?
ד דּוֹר הַלֵּךְ וְדוֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת: 4 A generation goes and a generation comes; yet, the earth stands firm forever.
ה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ קֹמָה וְהַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָרָד וְשָׁבָה אֶל־מְקוֹמָהּ: 5 The sun rises, the sun goes down; then, to its place it speeds, and there it rises.
ו הַרוּחַ יִפּוֹף לְדָרְוֹם וְשָׁבָה אֶל־צָפוֹן וְשָׁבָה אֶל־צָפוֹן וְשָׁבָה אֶל־דָּרְוֹם וְשָׁבָה אֶל־צָפוֹן: 6 The wind blows to the south, then goes around to the north; round and round turns the wind; then back to its

QOHELETH 1

- ¹ The title, 'son of David, king in Jerusalem' is a literary fiction identifying the author with Solomon, model of sages (1K 5:9–14); after 'king', the LXX adds 'of Israel' (*Ἰσραηλ*, cf. v. 12).
- ² The phrase, *הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים*, is a superlative genitive construction; when a plural genitive follows a singular construct noun of the same root, it indicates the most outstanding example of the person or thing described.
- ³ The word here translated as 'toil' (*עַמְלָה*) usually carries the sense of hard work, such as is performed by slaves (see Dt 26:7), whence labour and suffering. The word occurs very often in Ecclesiastes: as a noun, twenty times; as a verb, thirteen times.
- ⁴ The root *הלך* ('to walk', 'to go') is repeated in this section (vv. 6^a, 6^b, 7^a, 7^b, 7^c) to emphasise the continual action and constant motion of everything in nature.
- ⁵ The verb *שׁוֹאֵף* ('speeds') has a three-fold range of meanings: 1 'to gasp', 2 'to long for', and 3 'to hasten'. The related Aramaic root means 'to be thirsty'. The Hebrew verb is used of 'gasp' for breath, like a woman in the travail of childbirth (Is 42:14), 'panting' with eagerness or desire (Job 5:5,7:2,36:20, Ps 119:131, Jr 2:24) or 'panting' with fatigue (Jr 14:6). Here, it personifies the sun, panting with fatigue, as it hastens to its destination. The participle form depicts continual, uninterrupted, durative action (present universal use). Like the sun, man, for all his efforts, never really changes anything; all he accomplishes in his toil is to wear himself out.
- ⁶ The root *סבב* ('to circle around') is used four times in this verse to depict the wind's continual motion. This repetition is designed for a rhetorical purpose – to emphasize that the wind is locked into a never-ending cycle. This vicious circle of monotonous action does not change anything. The participle form (*סוֹבֵב*) occurs three times to emphasise continual, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). Despite the fact that the wind is always changing direction, nothing really new ever happens. The constant shifting of the wind cannot hide the fact that this is nothing but a repeated cycle; nothing new happens here (e.g. vv. 9–10).

הַרְוֹחַ: אַ כְּלֵהֲנַחֲלִים הַלְכִים אֶל־הֵים וְהֵים אֵינְנוּ
מִלֵּא אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהֲנַחֲלִים הַלְכִים שֵׁם הֵם שְׂבִים
לְלַכְתּ: ח כְּלֵהֲדַבְּרִים יִגְעִים לֹא־יִכָּל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר
לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֵין לְרֵאוֹת וְלֹא־תִמְלֵא אָזן מִשְׁמַע:

ט מה־שֶׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁהָיָה
וּמֵה־שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה הוּא שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה
וְאֵין כְּל־חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:

י יֵשׁ דְּבַר שֶׁיֵּאמֵר רֵאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא כְּבָר הָיָה
לְעֵלְמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ: יא אֵין זְכוּרֹן לְרֵאשִׁינִים
וְגַם לְאַחֲרֵנִים שֶׁיְהִיוּ לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זְכוּרֹן עִם
שֶׁיְהִיוּ לְאַחֲרֵנָה: {פ}

circling goes the wind. ⁷ Into the sea go all the rivers, and yet the sea is never full, and still to their goal the rivers go. ⁸ All things are wearisome, more so than one can express: the eyes have not had enough of seeing, or the ears their fill of hearing.

⁹ What was, will be again,
what has been done, will be done again,
and there is nothing new under the sun!

¹⁰ Take anything that people acclaim as being new: it existed in the centuries preceding us. ¹¹ No memory remains of the past, and so it will be for the centuries to come – nor will there be any remembrance by their successors.

⁷ This verse does not refer to the cycle of evaporation or the return of water by underground streams, as sometimes suggested. Rather, it describes the constant flow of river waters to the sea. For all the action of the water, nothing new is accomplished.

⁸ Another reading of this verse is, “Everything is (more) wearisome (than) one can describe. The eye is not content with what it can see, nor the ear satisfied by what it has heard.” The meaning is probably that Qoheleth could have multiplied examples (beyond the sun, the wind, and the streams) of the endless cycle of futile events in nature; however, no tongue could ever tell, no eye could ever see, no ear could ever hear all the examples of this continual and futile activity.

⁹ In the 1st line, the form of the Hebrew verb ‘to be’ is first in the perfect (שֶׁהָיָה) and then in the imperfect of future (שֶׁיְהִיָּה).

¹⁰ This verse does not deny man’s creativity or inventiveness, only the ultimate newness of his accomplishments. For example, there is no essential difference between the first voyage to the moon and the discovery of America (different point of arrival, different vehicles of travel, but the same essential action and results).

¹¹ The terms ‘past’ and ‘centuries to come’ create two polar extremes that encompass everything in between; this encompasses all secular achievements – in human history past to future things yet to be done. According to Qoheleth, nothing new really happens under the sun: apparent observations of what appears to be revolutionary are due to a lack of remembrance by subsequent generations of what happened long before their time in past generations; and what will happen in future generations will not be remembered by the generations that come after them.

יב אָנִי קִהַלְתִּי הַיְיְתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַם:
 יג וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לְדָרוּשׁ וּלְתוֹר בַּחֲכָמָה עַל כָּל־
 אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא | עֲנִין רַע נָתַן
 אֱלֹהִים לְבַנֵּי הָאָדָם לְעֲנוּת בּוֹ: יד רְאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־
 הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הַבֶּל
 וְרָעוּת רוּחַ:

טו מְעוּת לֹא־יֻכַל לְתַקֵּן
 וְחֶסְרוֹן לֹא־יֻכַל לְהַמְנוֹת:

טז דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לִבִּי לֵאמֹר אָנִי הִנֵּה הַגִּדְלָתִי
 וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חֲכָמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵי עַל־
 יְרוּשָׁלַם וְלִבִּי רָאָה הַרְבֵּה חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת: יז וְאַתָּנָה
 לִבִּי לְדַעַת חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת הוֹלָלֶת וְשִׁכְלוֹת יִדְעָתִי
 שֶׁגִּסְיָהּ הוּא רַעִיוֹן רוּחַ:

12 I, the Teacher, have reigned over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 Wisely, I have applied my mind to the investigation and to the exploration of everything that happens under heaven. It is a wearisome task that God has given the sons of men to keep us busy! 14 I have seen all the deeds that are done under the sun: and see how futile it all is, mere chasing after the wind!

15 What is twisted cannot be straightened;
 what is lacking cannot be counted.

16 I thought to myself: I have acquired a greater stock of wisdom than anyone before me in Jerusalem. I myself have mastered every kind of wisdom and knowledge. 17 I have applied myself to understanding wisdom and knowledge, stupidity, and folly, and now I realise that even all this is chasing after the wind.

¹² The NJB does not translate 'the Teacher', here following the NRSV.

¹³ The phrase עֲנִין רַע ('wearisome task') is used only in Ecclesiastes (here, 2:23, 26, 3:10, 4:8, 5:2, 13, 8:16), where it usually carries a pejorative sense: work, seen as a source of worry and fatigue.

¹⁴ 'Chasing after the wind' (literally, 'feeding on the wind') is a paraphrase for useless effort, a waste of time. The term תִּכְלָת ('everything') is often limited in reference to the specific topic at hand in the context. The argument here, like in vv. 3-11, focuses on secular human achievement.

¹⁵ The noun חֶסְרוֹן ('what is lacking') is used in the Hebrew Bible only here; it is an Aramaic loanword meaning 'deficit'. The LXX translators misunderstood the term and rendered it as ὑστέρημα ('deficiency'), and it is also misunderstood by a few English versions: 'nor can you count up the defects in life' (Moffatt) and 'the number of fools is infinite' (Douay).

¹⁶ The literal translation of 'I thought to myself' is 'I spoke, I, with my heart'. In place of 'knowledge' (following the NRSV), the NJB has 'science', as also in the following verse (the LXX has γῶσις); some LXX MSS lack this last sentence.

¹⁷ In place of 'wisdom' (following the NRSV, which lacks 'and knowledge'), the NJB has 'philosophy' (the LXX has σοφία). 'Stupidity' (the NRSV has 'madness') translates literally as 'stupid actions'.

יח
כִּי בְרַב חִכְמָה רַב־כָּעַס
וְיֹסִיף דַּעַת יֹסִיף מְאֹב:

¹⁸ For, in much wisdom is much grief
and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.

¹⁸ Both as a process and as achievement, in much wisdom is much vexation: the greater the awareness that human efforts cannot alleviate inequities, irregularities and deficiencies of life, the more the frustration, mental anguish and sorrow a wise man has!

קוהלת פרק ב

QOHELETH 2

אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי לְכֹה־נָא אֲנִסְכָּה בְשִׂמְחָה * 1 I thought to myself, "Very well, I will try pleasure and see what enjoyment has to offer." Again, this was futile too. 2 This laughter, I reflected, is madness, this pleasure no use at all. 3 I decided to hand my body over to drinking wine, my mind still guiding me in wisdom; I resolved to embrace folly, to discover the best way for people to spend their few days under the sun.

וְרֵאָה בְטוֹב וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא הֶבֶל: ב לְשִׁחּוֹק אָמַרְתִּי מְהוֹלָל וּלְשִׂמְחָה מֵה־זֶה עֲשֵׂה: ג תָּרַתִּי בְלִבִּי לְמִשְׁוֹךְ בֵּיזַן אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי וּלְבִי נִהַג בְּחִכְמָה וּלְאַחֲזוֹ בְּסִכְלוֹת עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה אִי־זֶה טוֹב לְבַנְי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם מִסֵּפֶר יָמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם: 4 I worked on a grand scale: built myself palaces, planted vineyards; 5 made myself orchards and parks, planting every kind of fruit tree in

ד הִגְדַּלְתִּי מַעֲשֵׂי בְנֵיתִי לִי בְתַיִם נֹטְעֵתִי לִי בְרָמִים: 5 עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִנּוֹת וּפְרָדִסִּים וְנֹטְעֵתִי בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל־

QOHELETH 2

- 1 The verb לְכֹה־נָא (*'very well'*) is a weak imperative, used merely as an introductory word (Gn 19:32,31:44, Jg 19:11, 1S 9:9-10,11:14, 2K 3:7, Ps 66:5, Sg 7:12, Is 1:18,2:3, Mi 4:2). Whenever this term introduces an exhortation, it functions as an invitation to the audience to adopt a course of action that will be beneficial to the addressee or mutually beneficial to both the speaker and the addressee. Here, Qoheleth personifies his 'heart' (לְבִי) and addresses himself: the examination of self-indulgent pleasure is designed to be beneficial to Qoheleth.
- 2 The term שִׁחּוֹק (*'laughter'*) has a fourfold range of meanings: 1 'joyful laughter' (Ps 126:2, Pr 14:13, Job 8:21); 2 'frivolous laughter', 'merrymaking' (Qo 7:3,6); 3 'pleasure', 'sport' (Pr 10:23, Qo 10:19); and 4 'derision', 'mockery' (Jr 20:7,48:26,27,39, Job 12:4, Lm 3:14). In this book, the term is always used in contexts of self-indulgent banqueting, drinking, frivolous partying, and merrymaking, as distinct from 'healthy' joy and laughter (Ps 126:2, Job 8:21).
- 3 Instead of reading לְמִשְׁוֹךְ (literally, 'draw', 'drag', whence 'hand ... over'), some correct to לְשִׁמוֹךְ and translate 'I sustained my body with wine'.
- 4 The expression 'myself' is repeated eight times in 2:4-8 to emphasise that Qoheleth did not deny himself any acquisition. He indulged himself in acquiring everything he desired. His vast resources as king allowed him the unlimited opportunity to indulge himself; he could have anything his heart desired, and he did.
- 5 The noun פְּרָדִס (*'park'*) is a loanword that occurs only three times in biblical Hebrew (Sg 4:13, Qo 2:5, Ne 2:8). The original Old Persian term designated the enclosed parks and pleasure grounds that were the exclusive domain of the Persian kings and nobility. A related Babylonian term, 'marvellous garden' referred to the enclosed parks of the kings; the term passed into Greek as *παράδεισος* ('pleasure-ground'), referring to the enclosed parks and gardens of the Persian kings, and has been transliterated into English as 'paradise'.

פְּרִי: ^ו עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְרָכוֹת מֵיִם לְהַשְׁקוֹת מֵהֶם יַעַר
 צוֹמַח עֵצִים: ^ז קָנִיתִי עֲבָדִים וְשִׁפְחוֹת וּבְנֵי-בֵית
 הָיָה לִי גַם מִקְנֵה בָקָר וְצֹאן הַרְבֵּה הָיָה לִי מִכָּל
 שֶׁהָיוּ לִפְנֵי בִירוֹשָׁלַם: ^ח כָּנַסְתִּי לִי גַם-כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב
 וְסִגְלַת מְלָכִים וְהַמְדִינֹת עָשִׂיתִי לִי שָׁרִים וְשָׁרוֹת
 וְתַעֲנֻגוֹת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם שָׂדֵה וְשִׁדוֹת:

^ט וְגִדְלָתִי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי מִכָּל שֶׁהָיָה לִפְנֵי בִירוֹשָׁלַם אֲךָ
 חֲכַמְתִּי עִמָּדָה לִי: ^י וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאֲלוּ עֵינַי לֹא
 אֶצְלָתִי מֵהֶם לֹא-מִנַּעַתִּי אֶת-לִבִּי מִכָּל-שִׂמְחָה כִּי-
 לִבִּי שָׂמַח מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי וְזֶה-הָיָה חִלְקִי מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי:
^{יא} וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי בְכָל-מַעֲשֵׂי שִׁעְשׂוֹ יָדַי וּבְעֵמֶל
 שִׁעְמַלְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הִבֵּל וְרַעוֹת רוּחַ וְאִין
 יִתְרוֹן תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:

^{יב} וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי לְרֵאוֹת חֲכָמָה וְהוֹלָלוֹת וְסִכְלוֹת כִּי
 מָה הָאָדָם שִׁיבֹא אַחֲרַי הַמֵּלֶךְ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-כָּבַר

them; ⁶ I had pools made for watering the young trees of my plantation.

⁷ I bought slaves, male and female, had home-born slaves as well; herds and flocks I had too, more than anyone in Jerusalem before me. ⁸ I also amassed silver and gold, and the treasures of kings and provinces; I acquired singers, men and women, and every human luxury, chest upon chest of it.

⁹ Thus, I grew great, surpassing all who were before me in Jerusalem; yet, my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰ I denied my eyes nothing that they desired and refused my heart no pleasure, for I found all my hard work a pleasure, such was the return for all my efforts. ¹¹ I then reflected on all that my hands had achieved and all the effort I had put into it. What futility it all was, what chasing after the wind! There is no profit under the sun.

¹² My reflections then turned to wisdom, stupidity, and folly. For, what can the successor of a king do? Only what has been done already.

⁶ A more literal translation of this verse is, "To water them from a grove (forest) of flourishing trees."

⁷ The literal translation of 'home-born slaves' (בְּנֵי-בֵית) is 'sons of my house', referring to those born into slavery from male and female servants in the master's possession, e.g., Eleazar of Damascus (Gn 15:3). Apparently confusing the sense of the phrase with the referent of the phrase in Gn 15:3, JPS erroneously suggests 'stewards'.

⁸ 'Chest upon chest' is the meaning of the phrase שָׁדֵה וְשִׁדוֹת in post-Biblical Hebrew. Others interpret 'a princess, princesses' or 'a concubine, concubines' (the NRSV has 'many concubines'), seeing an allusion to Solomon's harem. JPS ends the verse with "... and the delights of the sons of men, women very many," and the LXX with, "(and) male wine-servers and female wine-servers" (οἰνοχόου καὶ οἰνοχόας).

⁹ Qoheleth retained his wisdom and objectivity despite his great wealth.

¹⁰ The term לִבִּי ('my heart') is a synecdoche of part (the heart) for the whole (the person); the term is repeated for emphasis.

¹¹ Pleasure was achieved (v. 1), but it is judged as vain.

¹² 'What can ... do' and 'what has been done' are conjectural (following the NJB); the MT has 'who' and 'what people have done to him' respectively.

עֲשׂוּהוּ: י¹³ וְרֵאִיתִי אֲנִי שֵׁשׁ יִתְרוֹן לַחֲכָמָה מִן־
הַסְּכָלוֹת בִּיתְרוֹן הָאֹר מִן־הַחֹשֶׁךְ:

¹³ More is to be gained from wisdom than from folly, just as one gains more from light than from darkness; this, of course, I see:

י¹⁴ הַחֲכָם עֵינָיו בְּרֹאשׁוֹ

¹⁴ The wise have their eyes open;

וְהַכֹּסֵל בַּחֹשֶׁךְ הוֹלֵךְ

the fool walks in the dark.

וַיֵּדַעְתִּי גַם־אֲנִי

No doubt, but I know, too,

שֶׁמִּקְרָה אֶחָד יִקְרָה אֶת־כֻּלָּם:

that one fate awaits them both.

י¹⁵ וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי בְּמִקְרָה הַכֹּסֵל גַּם־אֲנִי יִקְרָנִי
וְלָמָּה חֲכַמְתִּי אֲנִי אֲזִ יִתֵּר וְדַבַּרְתִּי בְלִבִּי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה
הֵבֵל: כִּי¹⁶ אֵין זְכוּרוֹן לַחֲכָם עַם־הַכֹּסֵל לְעוֹלָם
בְּשִׁכְבָּר הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים הַכֹּל נִשְׁכַּח וְאֵיךְ יָמוֹת
הַחֲכָם עַם־הַכֹּסֵל: י¹⁷ וְשָׁנֵאתִי אֶת־הַחַיִּים כִּי רָע
עָלִי הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־הֵבֵל הֵבֵל
וְרַעוֹת רוּחַ:

¹⁵ “Since what happens to the fool,” I thought to myself, “will also happen to me, what is the point of my having been so excessively wise?” Then I realised that this too is futile. ¹⁶ For, there is no enduring memory of the wise, like for the fools, since, in days to come, both will be long forgotten; the wise, no less than the fool, must die. ¹⁷ Life I have come to hate, for what is done under the sun disgusts me, since all is futility and chasing after the wind.

¹³ The LXX (and NRSV) lacks ‘this, of course, I see’, here following the MT (and NJB).

¹⁴ The literal translation of ‘have their eyes open’ is ‘have eyes in their head’; the term עֵינָיו (‘eyes’) is used figuratively in reference to mental and spiritual faculties – a metonymy of cause (eye) for effect (sight and perception).

¹⁵ This rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “I gained nothing!”

¹⁶ The preposition עִם (normally ‘with’) may occasionally function in a comparative sense, meaning ‘together with’, ‘even as’, or ‘like’ (1:11, 2:16, 7:11, Job 9:26, 1Ch 14:10,20:6,25:8). When used to describe a common lot, it connotes ‘together with’ (Gn 18:23,25, 1Ch 24:5, Job 3:14,15,30:1, Ps 26:9,28:3,69:29, Is 38:11), hence ‘like’ (Ps 73:5,106:6 and here). The verb נִשְׁכַּח (‘forgotten’) is a future perfect – it describes an event that is portrayed as a past event from the perspective of the future. The emphasis of the past perfect is not simply that the future generations will begin to forget him, but that he will already have been forgotten long ago in the past by the time of those future generations.

¹⁷ The term הַחַיִּים (‘life’) functions as a metonymy of association, that is, that which is associated with life – the futility of human secular achievement. The root עָשָׂה (‘to do’) is repeated in הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה (‘what is done’ – literally, ‘the deed that is done’) for emphasis. Here, the term ‘deed’ does not refer to human accomplishment, as in 2:1–11, but to the fact of death that destroys any relative advantage of wisdom over folly (2:14^a–16): Qoheleth metaphorically describes death as a ‘deed’ that is ‘done’ to man.

ח וְשָׂנְאֵתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁאֲנִי עָמַל תַּחַת
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ שֶׁאֲנִיחֵנוּ לְאָדָם שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָי: יט וְכִי יוֹדֵעַ
הַחֶכֶם יִהְיֶה אִו סָכַל וַיִּשְׁלַט בְּכָל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁעֲמַלְתִּי
וַיִּשְׁחַכְמֵתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הֵבֵל:

כ וְסִבּוֹתַי אֲנִי לִיאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־הָעֲמָל
שֶׁעֲמַלְתִּי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: כא כִּי־יֵישׁ אָדָם שֶׁעֲמָלוֹ
בְּחִכְמָה וּבִדְעָת וּבִכְשָׁרוֹן וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמַל־בוֹ
יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ גַּם־זֶה הֵבֵל וְרַעַה רַבָּה: כב כִּי מֵה־הַזֶּה
לְאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ וּבְרַעֲיוֹן לְבוֹ שֶׁהוּא עָמַל תַּחַת
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: כג כִּי כָל־יָמָיו מִכְּאָבִים וְכַעַס עֲנִיָּנוּ גַם־
בַּלַּיְלָה לֹא־שָׁכַב לְבוֹ גַּם־זֶה הֵבֵל הוּא:

כד אֵין־טוֹב בְּאָדָם שִׁיאֲכַל וְשָׁתָה וְהִרְאָה אֶת־
נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בְּעֲמָלוֹ גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִיַּד

18 All that I have toiled for under the sun, and now bequeath to my successor, I have come to hate; 19 for, who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet, he will be master of all the work into which I have put my efforts and wisdom under the sun. That is futile too.

20 I have come to despair of all the efforts I have expended under the sun. 21 For, here is one who has laboured wisely, skilfully, and successfully and must leave what is his own to someone who has not toiled for it at all. This is futile too, and grossly unjust; 22 for, what does he gain for all the toil and strain that he has undergone under the sun – 23 since all his days are full of sorrow, his work is full of stress and, even at night, he has no peace of mind? This is futile too.

24 There is no happiness except to eat and drink, and to enjoy one's labours; and I see that this too comes from God's hand; 25 for who could

18 The term עֲמָלִי ('my toil') is repeated throughout 2:18-21. In each case, it functions as a metonymy of cause (toil) for effect (fruit of labour).

19 The *vav* on וַיִּשְׁלַט (conjunction + Qal imperfect third person masculine singular from שָׁלַט, 'to be master') is adversative ('yet').

20 The literal translation of 'I have come to despair' is 'I turned aside to allow my heart aside despair'; לִבִּי is a synecdoche of part (heart) for the whole.

21 Qoheleth laments the injustice that a person who works diligently in wisdom must one day hand over the fruit of his labour to his successor.

22 The rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: "Man acquires nothing."

23 This verse has been interpreted differently: 1 The phrase, כָּל־יָמָיו ('all his days') as the subject of a verbless clause and the noun מְכָאָבִים ('sorrow') as a predicate of apposition; likewise, the noun עֲנִיָּנוּ ('his work') is the subject of a 2nd clause (also lacking a verb): "All his days are sorrow and his work is stress." 2 עֲנִיָּנוּ ('his work') is the subject of both nouns, which are predicate nominatives, while כָּל־יָמָיו ('all his days') is an adverbial accusative: "All day long, his work is sorrow and stress." The latter option is supported by the parallelism between 'even at night' and 'all day long'.

24 This maxim is a polemical argument. Although the author makes use of it as a refrain (3:12-13, 5:17, 8:15, 9:7), it does not represent his whole view of life: he does not recommend pleasure, as the ultimate motive for human action, to the exclusion of all sense of duty.

25 'Drink' follows the LXX (φείσεται) and Peshitta (and NJB); the MT has 'hurry'. 'Did not all this come from him' (literally 'apart from him') follows the LXX (πάρεξ αὐτοῦ), Peshitta and Tg; the MT has 'apart from me' (בְּמִנִּי).

הַאֱלֹהִים הַיָּא: כִּי מִי יֵאכֹל וּמִי יִחַוֵּשׁ חוּץ מִמֶּנִּי:
כִּי לְאָדָם שְׂטוּב לְפָנָיו נָתַן חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת וְשִׂמְחָה
וְלַחֹטֵא נָתַן עֲגִיז לְאַסֵּף וְלִכְנוֹס לְתַת לְטוּב לְפָנָיו
הַאֱלֹהִים גַּם־זֶה הַבָּל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ:

get anything to eat or drink, unless all this came from him? ²⁶ Wisdom, knowledge and joy, God gives to those who please him, but to the sinner, he gives the task of gathering and storing up for someone else who is pleasing him. This too is futility and chasing the wind.

²⁶ Joy is a gift of God, but God is quite arbitrary, dispensing it as he pleases. No moral judgement is intended by 'those who please him' or by 'sinner' (i.e. one who misses the mark, a bungler, compare 9:18).

קוהלת פרק ג

QOHELETH 3

לְכֹל זְמַן וְעֵת לְכָל־חֶפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם: {פ} ^א 1 For everything, there is a season, a time for every task under heaven:

ב	עֵת לִלְדֹת וְעֵת לָמוּת עֵת לִטְעַת וְעֵת לְעַקֹּר נִטּוּעַ:	2	A time for giving birth, and a time for dying; a time for planting, and a time for uprooting what has been planted.
ג	עֵת לְהַרוֹג וְעֵת לְרַפֹּא עֵת לְפָרוֹץ וְעֵת לְבָנוֹת:	3	A time for killing, and a time for healing; a time for hacking down, and a time for building.
ד	עֵת לְבָכּוֹת וְעֵת לְשִׂחֹק עֵת סְפֹד וְעֵת רְקוֹד:	4	A time for tears, and a time for laughter; a time for mourning, and a time for dancing.

QOHELETH 3

- ¹ Half of human occupations are ill-omened, half have to do with sorrow. Death casts its shadow on life, which is a series of contradictory acts (vv. 2–8), without any other goal (vv. 9–13) than death, itself meaningless (vv. 14–22). This verse is arranged in an A-B-B'-A' chiasm: A = 'for everything' (לְכֹל); B = 'a season' (זְמַן); B' = 'a time' (עֵת); A' = 'for every occupation' (לְכָל־חֶפֶץ). The terms 'season' and 'time' are parallel and, in light of its parallelism with 'every occupation', the term 'everything' must refer to events and situations in life.
- ² The NRSV has 'to be born' in place of 'for giving birth'. The verb יָלַד ('to bear') is used in the active sense of a mother giving birth to a child; however, in light of its parallelism with 'a time to die', it should be taken as a metonym of cause (to give birth to a child) for effect (to be born).
- ³ In vv. 2–8, Qoheleth uses fourteen sets of merisms (using polar opposites to encompass everything in between, cf. Dt 6:6–9, Ps 139:2–3).
- ⁴ The NRSV uses the infinitive forms of verbs ('to weep', 'to laugh', 'to mourn', 'to dance') rather than nouns ('tears', 'laughter') and gerunds ('mourning', 'dancing'), here following the NJB.

<p> עַת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים ה וְעַת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים עַת לְחַבֵּק וְעַת לְרַחֵק מִחֶבֶק: עַת לְבַקֵּשׁ ו וְעַת לְאַבֵּד עַת לְשָׁמֹר וְעַת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ: עַת לְקַרֹּעַ ז וְעַת לְתַפּוֹר עַת לְחַשׂוֹת וְעַת לְדַבֵּר: עַת לְאַהֲבַּח וְעַת לְשִׂנְאָה עַת מִלְחָמָה וְעַת שְׁלוֹם: </p>	<p> 5 A time for throwing stones away, and a time for gathering them; a time for embracing, and a time to refrain from embracing. 6 A time for searching, and a time for losing; a time for keeping, and a time for discarding. 7 A time for tearing, and a time for sewing; a time for keeping silent, and a time for speaking. 8 A time for loving, and a time for hating; a time for war, and a time for peace. </p>
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⁵ The NRSV repeats 'stones' in place of the pronoun 'them', here following the NJB.

⁶ The term לְאַבֵּד (Piel infinitive construct from אָבַד, 'to destroy') means 'to lose' (cf. Jr 23:1) as the contrast with בְּקֵשׁ ('to seek to find') indicates. This is the declarative sense of the Piel: 'to view something as lost'.

⁷ As in v. 4, the NRSV uses infinitives ('to rip', 'to sew') rather than gerunds ('tearing', 'sewing', here following the NJB).

⁸ As in vv. 4 & 7, the NRSV here uses infinitives ('to love', 'to hate') rather than gerunds ('loving', 'hating', here following the NJB).

ט מה־יתרון העושה באשר הוא עמל: ראייתי את־
הענין אשר נתן אלהים לבני האדם לענות בו:
יא את־הכל עשה יפה בעתו גם את־העלם נתן
בלבם מבלי אשר לא־ימצא האדם את־המעשה
אשר־עשה האלהים מראש ועד־סוף:

יב ידעתי כי אין טוב בם כי אם־לשמוח ולעשות
טוב בחייו: יג וגם בל־האדם שיאכל ושתה וראה
טוב בכל־עמלו מתת אלהים היא:

יד ידעתי כי כל־אשר יעשה האלהים הוא יהיה
לעולם עליו אין להוסיף וממנו אין לגרע והאלהים
עשה שיראו מלפניו:

9 What do the workers gain from the efforts they make? 10 I contemplate the task that God gives the sons of men, at which to labour. 11 All that he does is beautiful for its time; but, although he has given us an awareness of the passage of time, we can grasp neither the beginning nor the end of what God does.

12 I know there is no happiness for them except in pleasure and enjoyment through life. 13 Moreover, when we eat and drink, and find happiness in all our achievements, this is a gift from God.

14 I know that whatever God does will be forever; to this, there is nothing to add, from this, there is nothing to subtract, and the way God acts inspires dread.

⁹ The term העושה (article + Qal active participle from עשה - 'to do') functions substantively ('the workers'): a figurative description of man (metonymy of association), playing on the repetition of עשה (verb: 'to do', noun: 'work') throughout the passage. In the light of God's orchestration of human affairs, man's efforts cannot change anything; it refers to man in general with the article functioning generically.

¹⁰ In place of 'sons of man', here following the MT and NJB, the NRSV has 'everyone'.

¹¹ An alternative reading for 'he has given us an awareness of the passage of time' is 'God has set eternity in their hearts'. This phrase, however, is not to be taken in the Christian sense; it means simply that God has given the human mind awareness of 'duration', he has endowed it with the power of reflecting on the sequence of events and thus of controlling the present. Nevertheless, the author adds, this awareness is deceptive; it does not reveal the meaning of life.

¹² In place of 'for them' (בם), here following the MT and NRSV, the NJB has the conjectural 'for a human being' (ב־אדם).

¹³ The referent of the 3F independent person pronoun ('this') is probably the preceding statement: 'eat and drink, and find happiness', which would be an example of an anacoluthon.

¹⁴ In the conventional theory of retribution, death is the punishment for sin. For Qoheleth, death is no more than the common lot; moral considerations are irrelevant. The fates of human and animal are identical. Even in the realm of justice, might is the criterion of right (vv. 16, 18), though God himself shows preference for the weak (v. 15).

טו מה־שֶׁהִיָּה כְּבָר הוּא
וְאֲשֶׁר לִהְיוֹת כְּבָר הִיָּה
וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת־נִרְדָּף:

טז וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ
מְקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט שָׁמָּה הַרְשָׁע
וּמְקוֹם הַצְּדָק שָׁמָּה הַרְשָׁע:

יז אֲמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי אֶת־הַצְּדִיק וְאֶת־הַרְשָׁע יִשְׁפֹּט
הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־עַת לְכָל־חִפְזָא וְעַל כָּל־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שֵׁם:
יח אֲמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְלִבִּי עַל־דְּבַרְתָּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְבָרֵם
הָאֱלֹהִים וְלִרְאוֹת שֶׁהֵם־בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם: יט כִּי
מְקַרְהַ בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם וּמְקַרְהַ הַבְּהֵמָה וּמְקַרְהַ אֶחָד
לָהֶם כְּמוֹת זֶה בֶּן מוֹת זֶה וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לְכֹל וּמוֹתָר
הָאָדָם מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין כִּי הַכֹּל הַבָּל:

כ הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד
הַכֹּל הִיָּה מִן־הָעֶפֶר
וְהַכֹּל שָׁב אֶל־הָעֶפֶר:

15 What is, has been already,
what will be, is already;
God seeks out anyone who is persecuted.

16 Again, I observe under the sun:
crime is where justice should be;
the criminal is where the upright one should be.

17 I think to myself: God will judge both the upright and the criminal, since there is a time for every thing and every action here. 18 I think to myself: where human beings are concerned, this is so that God can test them, to show that they are animals. 19 For the fate of human and the fate of animal is the same: as the one dies, so the other dies; both have the self same breath. Humans are in no way better off than animals – since all is vanity.

20 All go to the same place,
all come from the dust,
all return to the dust.

15 'Persecuted' follows the *Midrash Qoheleth Rabba*; the literal translation is 'pursued' and the NRSV interprets as 'what has gone by'.

16 'The upright one' follows the LXX (ὁ ἀσεβής) and Tg; the MT has 'uprightness'.

17 In place of 'every action here', following the NJB, the NRSV has 'every work'.

18 'To show that' follows the LXX (δειξάν ... ὅτι) and *Peshitta*; the MT has 'and that they see clearly' (לְבָרֵם ... וְלִרְאוֹת). At the end of the verse, the MT adds two words, literally 'them for them', which could be translated 'to each other'; however, the context hardly favours this: as appears later, the comparison with the animals is concerned not with wickedness, but with the inevitability of death.

19 In the last sentence, the LXX has 'cattle' (κτῆνος) in place of 'animals'.

20 In place of 'all' (thrice), here following the NRSV, the NJB has 'everything'; others have 'both', referring to the 'humans' and 'animals' of v. 19.

כא מי יודע רוח בני האדם העלה היא למעלה ורוח
הבהמה הירדת היא למטה לארץ:

21 Who knows if the human spirit mounts upward or if the animal spirit goes downward to the earth?

כב וראיתי כי אין טוב מאשר ישמח האדם במעשיו
כיהוא חלקו כי מי יביאנו לראות במה שיהיה
אחריו:

22 I see there is no contentment for a human being except happiness in achievement; such is the lot of human beings. No one can tell us what will happen after we are gone.

²¹ The passing doubt is enough to invest death with terror. The end of the book is less radically pessimistic: human life returns to God, who gave it (12:7).

²² For the last sentence, here following the *NJB*, the *NRSV* reads: "Who can bring them to see what will be after them?"

קוהלת פרק ד

QOHELETH 4

א * וּשְׁבַתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשָׁקִים אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשִׂים
תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה | דִּמְעַת הָעֲשָׁקִים וְאִין לָהֶם
מְנַחֵם וּמִיַּד עֲשָׁקִיהֶם כָּח וְאִין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם: ב * וּשְׁבַח
אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים שְׂכָבָר מָתוּ מִן־הַחַיִּים אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה
חַיִּים עֲדָנָה: ג * וְטוֹב מִשְׁנִיָּהֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָדוֹן לֹא הָיָה
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאָה אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה הַרָּע אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת
הַשָּׁמֶשׁ: ד * וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָל וְאֶת כָּל־בְּשָׂרוֹן
הַמַּעֲשֵׂה כִּי הִיא קִנְאֵת־אִישׁ מִרְעָהוּ גַם־זֶה הַבָּל
וְרַעוּת רוּחַ:

ה * הַבָּסִיל חֲבַק אֶת־יָדָיו
וְאָכַל אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ:

1 Then again, I contemplate all the oppression that is committed under the sun; and behold, the tears of the oppressed but they had no comforter! Their oppressors wield power but they had no comforter! 2 Therefore, rather than the living, who still have lives to live, I praised the dead, those long dead; 3 happier than both of these is he who is yet unborn and has not seen the evil things that are done under the sun. 4 Again, I see that all effort and all achievement spring from one person's rivalry with another. This too is futility and chasing after the wind.

5 The fool folds his arms and eats his own flesh away.

QOHELETH 4

- 1 The noun הָעֲשָׁקִים is plural and articted (literally 'the oppressions'); the article indicates a generic class ('oppression') and the plural may be classified in one of three ways: 1 a plural of number, which refers to specific kinds of oppression that occur on earth ('the various kinds of oppression'); 2 an abstract plural, which is used to refer to abstract concepts ('all the oppression'); or 3 a plural of intensity, which describes the oppression at hand as particularly grievous ('awful/severe oppression'). The LXX renders it as a plural of number: *συκοφαντίας* ('oppressions'), as does the Vg (*calumnias*).
- 2 The verb שְׁבַח has 2 possible meanings: 1 'to praise' (as WEBBE) and 2 'to congratulate' (as NJB). The LXX translates it as *ἐπήνεσα* ('I praised').
- 3 The word 'unborn' does not appear in the MT and is here added, following the NJB, for clarity.
- 4 The noun קִנְאֵת has a wide range of meanings: zeal, jealousy, envy, rivalry, competition, suffering, animosity, anger, and wrath. Here, as in 9:6, it denotes 'rivalry' (following the NRSV) or 'competitive'. The LXX renders *ζῆλος* ('envy'), as does the NJB.
- 5 'Folds his arms' is symbolic for 'does not work' (Pr 6:10, 24:33). These two sayings (vv. 5 & 6) more or less cancel each other; neither laziness nor over-achievement is profitable. Some translations attempt to explain the idiom, 'eats his own flesh away': 'lets life go to ruin' (Moffatt), 'wastes away' (NEB), and 'ruins himself' (NIV).

טוֹב מְלֵא כַף נַחַת ^ו
מִמְלֵא חֲפָנִים עֵמֶל
וְרַעוֹת רוּחַ:

⁶ Better is one hand full of repose
than two hands full of achievements
and chasing after the wind.

^ז וְשִׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה הַבֵּל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: ^ח יֵשׁ אֶחָד
וְאֵין שְׁנַי גַּם בֵּן וְאָח אֵין-לוֹ וְאֵין קָץ לְכָל-עֲמָלוֹ גַּם-
עֵינָו עֵינָיו לֹא-תִשְׂבַּע עֶשֶׂר וְלָמִי | אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמְחַסֵּר
אֶת-נַפְשִׁי מִטוֹבָה גַּם-זֶה הַבֵּל וְעִנְיָן רָע הוּא:

⁷ Again, something else futile I observe under the sun; ⁸ a person is alone: no child, no brother; yet there is no end to his efforts, his eyes never have their fill of riches: “For whom, then, do I work so hard and grudge myself pleasure?” This too is futile, a sorry business.

^ט טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם מִן-הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלְּהֶם שֹׂכֵר טוֹב
בְּעֵמֶלָם: ^י כִּי אִם-יִפְּלוּ הָאֶחָד יִקֵּם אֶת-חֲבֵרוֹ וְאֵילוֹ
הָאֶחָד שִׁיפּוֹל וְאֵין שְׁנַי לְהִקְיָמוֹ: ^{יא} גַּם אִם-יִשְׁכְּבוּ
שְׁנַיִם וְחָם לָהֶם וְלֹא-אֶחָד אֵיךְ יִחָם: ^{יב} וְאִם-יִתְקַפּוּ
הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם יַעֲמְדוּ נִגְדָו וְהַחוּט הַמְּשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא
בְּמַהֲרָה יִנְתַּק:

⁹ Better two than one alone, since thus their work is really rewarding.

¹⁰ If one should fall, the other helps him up, but woe to the person with no one to help him up when he falls! ¹¹ Again: if two sleep together, they keep warm, but how can anyone keep warm alone?

¹² Where one alone would be overcome, two will put up resistance; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

טוֹב יֶלֶד מְסָכֵן וְחָכֵם ^{יג}
מִמְלֶךְ זָקֵן וּכְסִיל

¹³ Better a youngster poor and wise
than a monarch old and silly

⁶ The last line follows the MT (and NRSV); the NJB has the conjectural ‘to chase after the wind’.

⁷ The prefixed *vav* on וְשִׁבְתִּי (*vav* + perfect, from שׁוּב ‘to turn’) might be: **1** introductory (and not translated, as here); **2** a consequence of the preceding statement: ‘Thus, I observed again’; or **3** a continuation of the preceding statement: ‘And I observed again’.

⁸ The adjective רָע (‘evil’) here means ‘misfortune’ or ‘injustice’, ‘wrong’. The phrase וְעִנְיָן רָע (‘sorry business’) is used only in Qoheleth (1:13, 2:23, 26, 3:10, 4:8, 5:2, 13, 8:16). The noun עִנְיָן (‘business’), following the *Qere*, refers to something that keeps a person occupied or busy; it is from the Aramaic loanword עִנְיָנָא (‘concern’, ‘care’); the *Ketiv* has עֵינָיו.

⁹ An alternative reading of this verse is, “Two people are better than one because they can reap more benefit from their labour.”

¹⁰ ‘Woe to’ follows the NRSV; the NJB has ‘what of’.

¹¹ Another reading for this verse is: “Furthermore, if two lie together, they can keep each other warm, but how can one person keep warm by himself?”

¹² The verbal root הִקָּף means ‘to overpower’, ‘to prevail over’ (cf. Job 4:20, 15:24; Qo 6:10).

¹³ An alternative reading of the last line, here following the NJB and NRSV, is “who no longer knows how to receive advice.”

אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעַ לְהִזְהַר עוֹד:

יְד כִּי־מִבֵּית הַסּוּרִים יֵצֵא לְמֶלֶךְ

כִּי גַם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נוֹלַד רָשׁ:

טו רְאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַחַיִּים הַמְהַלְכִים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ עַם

הַיָּלֵד הַשֵּׁנִי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֵד תַּחְתּוֹ: טז אֵין־קֶץ לְכָל־הָעַם

לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־הִיא לְפָנֶיהֶם גַּם הָאֲחֵרוֹנִים לֹא יִשְׁמַחוּ־בּוֹ

כִּי־גַם־זֶה הַבָּל וְרַעֲיוֹן רוּחַ:

יז שְׁמַר רַגְלֶיךָ רַגְלֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ אֶל־בַּיִת הָאֱלֹהִים

וְקָרוֹב לְשִׁמְעַ מִתַּת הַכְּסִילִים זָבַח כִּי־אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים

לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע:

who will no longer take advice.

14 One can indeed step from prison to the throne, even though born a beggar in his kingdom.

15 I observe that all who live and move under the sun support the young newcomer who takes over. 16 He takes his place at the head of innumerable subjects; but his successors will not think the more kindly of him for that. This too is futile and chasing after the wind.

17 Watch your step when you go to the House of God: drawing near to listen is better than the offering of a sacrifice by fools, though they do not know that they are doing wrong.

¹⁴ This verse is a conjectural translation of obscure text; the 1st line follows the *NRSV*, the 2nd the *NJB* (but changing 'that' for 'his', following the *MT*). It is unclear whether the 3MS suffix ('his') on בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ ('his kingdom') refers to the old foolish king or to the poor but wise youth of v. 13.

¹⁵ An alternative reading of 'the young newcomer who takes over' is simply 'the successor' (literally, 'the man who replaces him'). The *NSRV* has 'that (the second) youth who replaced the king' but it is unclear whether הַשֵּׁנִי ('the second') refers to the young man who succeeds the old king or a second youthful successor.

¹⁶ The term עַם (literally, 'people') here refers to the subjects of the king.

¹⁷ The literal translation of 'watch your steps' is 'guard your feet' (רגליך) according to the *Ketiv* or 'guard your foot' (רגלך) according to the *Qere*, which is preserved in the *LXX* (πόδα σου), *Tg & Peshitta*. An alternative translation for 'listen' is 'obey': the term לְשִׁמְעַ (preposition + Qal infinitive construct) may be taken either literally (to listen) in contrast to speak, or figuratively (to obey) in contrast to sacrifice; the *LXX* assumes the former (τοῦ ἀκούειν) and English translations reflect both the former (*NRSV*, *NIV*) and the latter (*Douay*, *JPS*). Another reading of the last phrase is 'since they know nothing, except how to do wrong'. This whole verse (5:1 in most English Bibles) is obscure; the *NRSV* reads: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil."

קוהלת פרק ה

QOHELETH 5

- א אֶל-תְּבַהֵל עַל-פִּיךָ וּלְבָבְךָ אֶל-יְמַהֵר לְהוֹצִיא דְבָר-
לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה עַל-
הָאָרֶץ עַל-כֵּן יִהְיוּ דְבָרֶיךָ מְעֻטִּים:
ב כִּי בָא הַחֲלוֹם בְּרַב עֲנִין
וְקוֹל כְּסִיל בְּרַב דְּבָרִים:
ג בְּאִשֶׁר תִּדְרֹךְ נֶדֶר לְאֱלֹהִים אַל-תִּאָּחֵר לְשַׁלְּמוֹ כִּי
אֵין חֶפֶץ בַּכְּסִילִים אֵת אֲשֶׁר-תִּדְרֹךְ שְׁלֹם:
ד טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִדְרֹךְ מִשִּׁתְּדוֹר וְלֹא תִשְׁלֹם: ה אַל-
תִּתֵּן אֶת-פִּיךָ לַחֲטִיָּא אֶת-בְּשָׂרְךָ וְאַל-תֵּאֱמַר לְפָנַי
- 1 Never be rash with your mouth; do not hastily declare yourself before God, for God is in heaven, and you are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few:
2 From too much worrying comes illusion; from too much talking, the rash vow of a fool.
3 If you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it, for God has no love for fools. Discharge your vow.
4 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not discharge it. 5 Do not allow your mouth to make a sinner of you, and do

QOHELETH 5

- 1 This verse is numbered 5:2 in the *NRSV*; all verse numbers therein are accordingly incremented (see #4:17).
2 In place of 'rash vow of a fool', the *NJB* has 'accents of folly'. The term קוֹל (*voice*) is used as a metonymy of cause (voice) for the contents (the thing said) – cf. Gn 3:17, 4:23; Ex 3:18, 4:1, 9, Dt 1:45, 21:18, 20, 1S 2:25, 8:7, 9, 2S 12:18. Contextually, this refers to a rash vow made by a fool who made a mistake in making it because he is unable to fulfil it.
3 The literal translation of 'make a vow' (תִּדְרֹךְ) is 'vow a vow'; the phrase is a Hebrew idiom in which the root is repeated for emphasis. The verb תִּדְרֹךְ ('to vow') refers to the action of making a solemn promise to Yahweh to perform an action or offer a sacrifice (Lv 27:8, Nb 6:21, 30:11, Dt 23:23–24, Jon 2:10, MI 1:14, Ps 76:12,132:2). The noun נֶדֶר ('a vow') was a gift or offering promised to be given to Yahweh (Nb 30:3, Dt 12:11,23:19, Is 19:12, Na 2:1, Ps 61:6,9); it was usually a sacrifice or free will offering (Dt 12:6, Ps 66:13) that was often promised during times of pressure (Jg 11:30, 1S 1:11, 2S 15:7–8, Ps 22:25,66:13,116:14,18, Jon 2:9).
4 The pronoun, 'it', at the end of this verse is not present in the *MT*; it is here added for clarity, following the *NJB*.
5 The literal translation of 'make a sinner of you' (the *NRSV* has 'lead you into sin') is 'bring your flesh into guilt'. The 'messenger' (הַמְלַאֲךָ) may be the angel before whom excuses must be made, since one of the functions of the angels was to keep a register of good works (see #Tb 12:12 and Ac 10:4) or alternatively the priest who assists at the fulfilment of a vow (see MI 2:7). The *LXX* replaces the word with θεοῦ (*God*), probably reflecting orthographic confusion with הָאֱלֹהִים.

הַמְּלֵאךְ כִּי שָׁגָגָה הִיא לִמָּה יִקְצֹף הָאֱלֹהִים עַל-
קוֹלְךָ וְחָבַל אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֶיךָ: not say to the messenger that it was a mistake. Why give God occasion
to be angry with you and ruin all the work that you have done?

וְהַבְּלִים כִּי בְרַב חֲלָמוֹת וְהַבְּלִים
וְדַבָּרִים הַרְבֵּה
כִּי אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא: ⁶ From too many illusions
come futility and too much talk.
Therefore, fear God.

אִם־עָשָׂק רָשׁ וְגִזְלֵ מִשְׁפָּט וְצַדִּיק תִּרְאֶה בַּמְּדִינָה
אֶל־תִּתְמָה עַל־הַחֶפֶץ כִּי גְבִיָּה מֵעַל גְּבִיָּה שֹׁמֵר
וְגְבִיָּהִים עֲלֵיהֶם: ⁷ וְיִתְרוֹן אֶרֶץ בְּכֹל הִיא הוּא מִלְּךָ
לְשָׂדֵה נִעֲבָד: ⁸ If in a province you see the oppression of the poor and violation of fair
judgement and justice, do not be surprised, for over every official there
watches a higher one, and over these, higher officials still. ⁸ But, what
the land yields is for the benefit of all; a king is served by the fields.

אִהָב כֶּסֶף לֹא־יִשְׂבַּע כֶּסֶף
וּמִי־אִהָב בְּהֶמְזוֹן לֹא תְבוֹאָה
גַּם־זֶה הַבֵּל: ⁹ No one who loves money ever has enough;
no one who loves luxury has any income;
this, too, is futile.

⁶ This little proverb (literally: ‘from too many delusions: futilities and too much talking’) is probably mutilated. Some correct in line with v. 2 and read ‘from too much worrying come illusions, and from too much talking, futility’ – or again, ‘from too many illusions comes futility, a great deal of talk, dissipation of spirit’. However, these conjectural readings have no support in ancient manuscripts.

⁷ An alternative translation of ‘oppression’ (עָשָׂק) is ‘extortion’; however, the former meaning is more common, and is followed by the LXX (συκοφαντία). The literal translation of ‘violation’ (גִּזְלֵ) is ‘robbery’: just as a thief robs victims through physical violence, so corrupt government officials ‘rob’ the poor through perversion of justice.

⁸ This is a literal translation of a very obscure verse; the NRSV reads, “But all things considered, this is an advantage for a land: a king for a ploughed field,” and JPS has, “But the profit of a land every way is a king that makes himself servant to the field.” The LXX ending of the verse, “βασιλεύς τοῦ ἀγροῦ εἰργασμένου,” can be translated, “even a king needs the working of a field.” It is possibly alluding to acts of injustice excused on the grounds of having been committed in obedience to a higher authority, but that result in depriving the poor of the income from their land, and ultimately in harming even the rulers. The Kethib/Qere difference here may be a simple case of vav/yod confusion.

⁹ The remainder of this chapter, and the following, is a satire not (as in Proverbs) on the wicked plutocrat but on money itself, ill or well acquired, ill or well used. ‘Money’ (כֶּסֶף) (literally, ‘silver’; the term is repeated for emphasis) secures neither life nor happiness. This evaluation prepares

בְּרִבּוֹת הַטּוֹבָה רַבּוֹ אוֹכְלֶיהָ
 וּמֵה־כֶּשֶׁרוֹן לְבַעְלֶיהָ כִּי
 אִסְדָּאוֹת רֵאִית עֵינָיו:

¹⁰ Where goods abound, parasites abound:
 where is the owner's profit,
 apart from feasting his eyes?

י"א מִתּוֹקָה שְׁנַת הָעֵבֶד אִסְמַעַט וְאִסְהֲרֵבָה יֹאכֵל
 וְהַשֶּׁבַע לְעֹשֵׂיר אֵינָנו מְנִיחַ לוֹ לִישׁוֹן:

¹¹ The labourer's sleep is sweet, whether he has eaten little or much, but the surfeit of the rich will not let them sleep at all.

י"ב יֵשׁ רָעָה חוֹלָה רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עֹשֵׂר שָׁמֹר
 לְבַעְלָיו לְרַעְתּוֹ:

¹² Something grossly unjust I observe under the sun: riches stored and turning to loss for their owner.

י"ג וְאֶבֶד הָעֹשֵׂר הֵהוּא בְּעִנְיָן רָע וְהוֹלִיד בֵּן וְאִין
 בְּיָדוֹ מְאוֹמָה: י"ד כַּאֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ עָרוֹם יָשׁוּב
 לְלֶכֶת כְּשֶׁבֵא וּמְאוֹמָה לֹא־יֵשָׂא בְּעַמְלוֹ שְׂיִלְדָּ
 בְּיָדוֹ: ט"ו וְגַם־זֶה רָעָה חוֹלָה כָּל־עַמַּת שָׁבָא כִּן יֵלֵד:

¹³ An unlucky venture, and the riches are lost; a son is born to him and he has nothing to leave him. ¹⁴ Naked from his mother's womb he came; as naked as he came will he depart; not one of his achievements can he take with him. ¹⁵ This also is grossly unjust: for as he came, so must he

the ground for the Gospel teaching on detachment (Mt 6:19–21, 24, 25–34). The sequence of ideas is as follows: money is badly distributed (v. 9), squandered (v. 10), hard to come by (v. 11), and painful to lose (vv. 12–16). Therefore, it is as well to spend money as it comes (vv. 17–19). Ch. 6 gives three examples of all this: wealth that goes to another (6:1–2); the rich without a tomb (6:3–6), and poverty aping plenty (6:7–11).

¹⁰ In place of 'profit', the LXX has 'courageous thing' (ἀνδρεία). The Kethib/Qere difference here may be a simple case of vav/yod confusion.

¹¹ Since desires are insatiable, riches are dangerous.

¹² In place of 'something grossly unjust', the LXX has 'there is a sickness' (ἔστιν ἀρρωστία). Vv. 12–16 give an example of the uncertainty of relying upon material possessions.

¹³ The basic meaning of עִנְיָן ('venture') is 'business', 'affair' or 'occupation', 'task'; the term is used in a specific sense in reference to business activity (8:16), as well as in a more general sense in reference to events that occur on earth (1:13, 4:8). Some suggest that the phrase בְּעִנְיָן רָע refers to a bad business deal but others prefer 'bad luck', hence 'unlucky venture'.

¹⁴ For this verse, here following the NJB, the NRSV reads, "As they came from their mother's womb, so they shall go again, naked as they came; they shall take nothing for their toil, which they may carry away with their hands."

¹⁵ 'For as' follows the LXX (ὡσπερ) and Peshitta; the MT is corrupt.

וּמַה־יִתְרוֹן לוֹ שִׁיעֵמַל לְרוּחַ: טז גַּם כָּל־יָמָיו בַּחֹשֶׁךְ
יֹאכַל וְכָעַס הַרְבֵּה וְחָלָיו וְקִצְף:

יז הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־רָאִיתִי אֲנִי טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יָפָה לְאָכֹל־
וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִרְאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ | שִׁיעֵמַל תַּחַת־
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מִסֵּפֶר יָמֵי־חַיָּו אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־
הוּא חֶלְקוֹ: יח גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
עֹשֶׂר וְנִכְסִים וְהַשְׁלִיטוֹ לְאָכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ וְלִשְׂאֹת אֶת־
חֶלְקוֹ וְלִשְׂמַח בְּעֲמָלוֹ זֶה מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא: טט כִּי
לֹא הַרְבֵּה יִזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמָיו חַיָּו כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים מַעֲנֶה
בְּשִׂמְחַת לְבָבוֹ:

go; what can he gain after toiling for the wind,¹⁶ as he spends the rest of his days in darkness, mourning, sorrow, sickness, and exasperation.

¹⁷ Therefore, my conclusion is this: it is fitting to find happiness in eating and drinking and enjoying whatever has been achieved under the sun, in the few days of life that God has given us; for, this is the portion of humans.¹⁸ Likewise, whenever God gives one wealth and possessions, with the ability to eat from them, to receive his reward, and to find contentment in his labours, this is a gift from God.¹⁹ For, such a person will hardly notice the passing of time, so long as God keeps his heart occupied with joy.

¹⁶ 'In darkness, mourning' follows the LXX (ἐν σκοτει, πένθει) and NJB; the MT (and NRSV) has 'he eats in darkness, mourning'.

¹⁷ The term לָקוּ ('portion') has a wide range of meanings: 1 'share of spoils' (Gn 14:24, Nb 31:36, 1S 30:24); 2 'portion of food' (Lv 6:10, Dt 18:8, Hab 1:16); 3 'portion (or tract) of land' (Dt 10:9, 12:12, Jos 19:9); 4 'possession' (Nb 18:20, Dt 32:9); 5 'inheritance' (2K 9:10, Am 7:4); 6 'award' (Job 20:29, 27:13, 31:2, Is 17:14); and 7 'profit', 'reward' (Qo 2:10, 21, 3:22, 5:17–18, 9:6, 9). Throughout Ecclesiastes, the term is used in reference to man's temporal profit from his labour and his reward from God (3:22, 9:9).

¹⁸ The syntax of this verse is difficult. The best approach is to view וְהַשְׁלִיטוֹ ('he has given him the ability') as governing the three following infinitives: לְאָכֹל ('to eat'), וְלִשְׂאֹת ('and to lift' = 'to receive'), and וְלִשְׂמַח ('and to rejoice' = 'to find contentment'). This statement parallels 2:24–26, which states that no one can find enjoyment in life unless God gives him the ability to do so.

¹⁹ The verb יִזְכֹּר ('to remember') may be interpreted 'call to mind', 'think about', or 'notice' (cf. Is 47:7, Lm 1:9, Job 21:6, 36:24, 40:32, Qo 11:8).

קוהלת פרק ו

QOHELETH 6

- א יש רעה אשר ראיתי תחת השמש ורבה היא על-האדם: ב איש אשר יתזלו האלהים עשר ונכסים וכבוד ואיגנו חסר לנפשו | מכל אשר-יתאוה ולא-ישליטנו האלהים לאכל ממנו כי איש נכרי יאכלנו זה הבל וחלי רע הוא: ג 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:
- ד כי-בהבל בא ובחשך ילך ובחשך שמו יכסה:
- ה גם-שמש לא-ראה ולא ידע נחת לזה מזה: ו ואלו חיה אלף שנים פעמים וטובה לא ראה
- 1 I see another evil under the sun, which goes hard upon people;
2 suppose someone has received from God riches, property, honours – nothing at all left to wish for; but God does not give the chance to enjoy them, and some stranger enjoys them. This is futile, and grievous suffering too.
3 On the other hand, take someone who has had a hundred children and lived for many years and, having reached old age, has never enjoyed the good things of life and has not even got a tomb; it seems to me, a stillborn child is happier.
4 In futility, it came, into darkness, it departs, and in darkness will its name be buried.
5 It has never seen or known the sun, so it will rest more easily than a person,
6 who would never have known the good things of life, even by

QOHELETH 6

- ¹ The phrase **היא על-האדם** has been interpreted in two basic ways: **1** commonality, 'it is common among men', as in the LXX – *και πολλή ἐστίν* ('and it is abundant'); **2** oppressiveness, 'which goes hard upon people' (as here). The preposition **על** ('upon') argues against the first in favour of the second; the notion of commonality would be denoted by the preposition **ב** ('among').
- ² The expression **איש נכרי** ('stranger') sometimes refers not to a foreigner or someone that the person does not know, but simply to someone else other than the subject (Pr 27:2). In the light of vv. 3–6, it might even refer to the man's own heirs.
- ³ The phrase **וגם-קבורה לא-היתה** ('has not even got a tomb') is traditionally treated as part of a description of the man's sorry final state, that is, he is deprived of even a proper burial. However, the preceding parallel lines suggest that this is a hyperbolic usage: "If he were to live one hundred years ... even if he were never buried" (i.e., were to live forever); a similar idea occurs elsewhere (Ps 49:9, 89:48).
- ⁴ This verse refers to the 'stillborn child' of v. 3: the birth of in vain – it did it no good to be born and its name is not remembered.
- ⁵ The term translated 'rest' refers to freedom from toil, anxiety, and misery – part of the misfortune that the miserly man of wealth must endure.
- ⁶ The rich man who lives two thousand years and the stillborn who never lived one day go to the same place – the grave.

הָלֹא אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד הַכֹּל הוֹלֵךְ׃
^ז כָּל־עֵמֶל הָאָדָם לִפְיָהוּ
וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלֵא׃
^ח כִּי מֵה־יֹתֵר לְחָכָם מִז־הַכְּסִיל
מֵה־לְעַנִּי יוֹדֵעַ לְהֵלֵךְ נֶגֶד הַחַיִּים׃
^ט טוֹב מֵרְאֵה עֵינַיִם מִהֵלֵךְ־נֶפֶשׁ
גַּם־זֶה הַבָּל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ׃
^י מֵה־שָׁהִיָּה כְּבָר נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
וְנוֹדַע אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אָדָם
וְלֹא־יֻכַּל לְדִין עִם שֶׁהִתְקִיף שֶׁתְּקִיף מִמֶּנּוּ׃
^{יא} כִּי יִשְׁדַּבְּרִים הַרְבֵּה מֵרַבִּים הַבָּל מֵה־יֹתֵר
לְאָדָם׃ ^{יב} כִּי מִי־יֹדַע מֵה־טוֹב לְאָדָם בְּחַיִּים מִסֶּפֶר
יְמֵי־חַיֵּי הַבָּלוּ וַיַּעֲשֵׂם כְּצֶל אֲשֶׁר מִי־יִגִּיד לְאָדָם
מֵה־יִהְיֶה אַחֲרָיו תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ׃

living a thousand years twice over. Do we not all end in the same place?
⁷ All toil is for the mouth,
yet the appetite is never satisfied.
⁸ What advantage has the wise over the fool?
And what of the pauper who knows how to behave in society?
⁹ Better the object seen than the sting of desire:
for the latter, too, is futile and chasing after the wind.
¹⁰ What has been is already defined:
we know what people are:
they cannot contend with who is stronger than they are.
¹¹ The more we say, the more futile it is: what good can we derive from
it? ¹² For, who knows what is best for someone during life, during the
days of futile life that are spent like a shadow? Who can tell anyone what
will happen after him under the sun?

⁷ The term ‘mouth’ is a synecdoche of part for the whole (person), as suggested by the parallelism with הַנֶּפֶשׁ (*‘his appetite’*).
⁸ The meaning of the 2nd line is uncertain, but it is possibly a wry comparison between the sage and the person who knows how to keep up appearances. The NRSV reads, “And what do the poor have who know how to conduct themselves before the living?”
⁹ ‘Desire’ translates נֶפֶשׁ, which usually means ‘soul’, but whose primary sense is ‘throat’ or ‘appetite’ (cf. v. 7).
¹⁰ The literal translation of ‘already defined’ is ‘already its name was called’. The Kethib/Qere difference here would benefit from an explanation.
¹¹ An alternative reading of this verse is: “The more man argues with words, the less he accomplishes. How does that benefit him?”
¹² The suffix on וַיַּעֲשֵׂם refers to the phrase מִסֶּפֶר יְמֵי־חַיֵּי הַבָּלוּ (*‘the days of his futile life’*); it may be taken as an objective genitive: ‘he spends them like a shadow’ or as a subjective genitive: ‘they pass like a shadow’. At least one LXX MS includes this verse (and the end of v. 11) as 7:1.

קוהלת פרק ז

טוֹב שֵׁם מִשֶּׁמֶן טוֹב א
וַיּוֹם הַמּוֹת מִיּוֹם הַוּלְדוֹ:
טוֹב לָלֶכֶת אֶל־בַּיִת־אֲבֵל ב
מִלֶּכֶת אֶל־בַּיִת מִשְׂתֵּה
בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא סוֹף כָּל־הָאָדָם
וְהַחַי יִתֵּן אֶל־לִבּוֹ:
טוֹב כְּעַס מִשְׂחֹק ג
כִּי־בָרַע פָּנִים יֵיטֵב לֵב:
לֵב חֲכָמִים בְּבַיִת אֲבֵל ד
וְלֵב כְּסִילִים בְּבַיִת שְׂמֵחָה:
טוֹב לִשְׁמַע גְּעֵרַת חָכָם ה
מֵאִישׁ שֹׁמֵעַ שִׁיר כְּסִילִים:

QOHELETH 7

- 1 Better a good name than costly oil,
the day of death than the day of birth.
- 2 Better to go to the house of mourning
than to the house of feasting;
for to this end, everyone comes,
let the living take this to heart.
- 3 Better sadness than laughter,
for sadness of countenance gladdens the heart.
- 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
the heart of fools in the house of mirth.
- 5 Better to attend to the reprimand of the wise
than listen to a song sung by a fool.

QOHELETH 7

- ¹ The term שֶׁמֶן ('oil') refers to fragrant perfume, cologne, or ointment (Am 6:6, Qo 10:1, Sg 1:3, 4:10). Bodily oils and perfumes were expensive (1K 17:12, 2K 2:4) and their possession was a sign of prosperity (Dt 32:8, 33:24, Job 29:6, Pr 21:17, Ezk 16:13, 20). Wearing them was associated with joy (Ps 45:8, Qo 9:8, Is 61:3) because they were worn on festive occasions (Pr 27:9). The similar sounding שֵׁם ('name') creates a wordplay. Note that the opening ט is presented as an enlarged letter, as it appears in almost all *Hebrew MSS*.
- ² Qoheleth recommends that people soberly reflect on the brevity of life and the reality of death than to waste one's life in the foolish pursuit of pleasure. Sober reflection on the brevity of life and reality of death has more moral benefit than frivolous levity.
- ³ Alternative translations for 'sadness' are 'sorrow', 'grief' (NEB) and 'vexation' (JPS).
- ⁴ The expression 'house of mirth' refers to a banquet where those who attend engage in self-indulgent feasting and riotous drinking.
- ⁵ The antithetical parallelism between 'reprimand' (גְּעֵרַת) and 'song' (שִׁיר) suggests that the latter is figurative (metonymy of association) for praise (flattery), which is 'music' to the ears. However, the collocation of 'song' (שִׁיר) with 'laughter' (שְׂחֹק) in the next verse suggests simply frivolous merrymaking: 'song of fools'.

וּ כִּי כְקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר
 כִּן שְׂחֹק הַבְּסִיל
 וְגַם־זֶה הַבֶּל:

ז כִּי הָעֵשֶׂק יְהוֹלֵל חָכָם
 וַיֹּאבֵד אֶת־לֵב מִתְּנָה:

ח טוֹב אַחֲרֵית דְּבַר מִרְאשִׁיתוֹ
 טוֹב אַרְךְ־רוּחַ מִגְּבַה־רוּחַ:

ט אַל־תִּבְהַל בְּרוּחְךָ לִכְעוֹס בְּכַעַס בְּחִיק פְּסִילִים
 ינֹחַ: ' אַל־תֹּאמַר מָה הָיָה שֶׁהַיָּמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים הָיוּ
 טוֹבִים מֵאֵלֶּה בְּכִי לֹא מִחֲכָמָה שָׁאֵלְתָּ עַל־זֶה:

יא טוֹבָה חֲכָמָה עִם־נַחְלָה
 וַיִּתֵּר לְרֹאֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:

יב כִּי בַצֵּל הַחֲכָמָה

6 For, like the crackling of thorns under the cauldron is the laughter of fools: and that too is futile.

7 Surely, oppression drives a sage mad, and a present corrupts the heart.

8 Better the end of a matter than its beginning, better patience than ambition.

9 Do not be too easily exasperated, for exasperation dwells in the hearts of fools. 10 Do not ask why the past was better than the present, for it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

11 Wisdom is as good as a legacy, profitable to those who enjoy the light of the sun.

12 For, as money provides protection, so does wisdom,

6 The term הַסִּירִים (*thorns*) refers to twigs from wild thorn bushes which were used as fuel for quick heat but burn out quickly before a cooking pot can be properly heated (Ps 58:9, 118:12). It is difficult to determine whether the term הַבֶּל means *'fleeting'* or *'futile'* in this context.

7 This is an obscure verse but the corrections suggested are unsatisfactory. Qoheleth may merely indicate the weakness of the sage himself, whose serenity cannot withstand misfortune or excessive favour. For *'corrupts'*, the MT has וַיֹּאבֵד (conjunction + Piel imperfect 3MS from אָשַׁד *'to destroy'*), but a Qumran MS (4QQoh^a) reads ויעוה (*'twists'* or *'perverts'*). The verb עוה is used in reference to moral perversion (2S 7:14, 19:20, 24:17, 1K 8:47, Job 33:27, Pr 12:8, Jr 9:4). The verb ויאבד is used similarly in reference to moral corruption (Qo 3:6, 9:18, Jr 23:1).

8 In place of *'patience'*, the LXX has *'lenience'* (μακρόθυμος).

9 The literal translation of the opening clause is, *"Do not be hasty in your spirit to become angry."*

10 An alternative reading opens with, *"Do not ask why the old days were better than these..."*

11 An alternative translation for the first line is, *"Wisdom with an inheritance is good."* This use of the preposition עִם may denote either accompaniment (*'together with'*) or comparison (*'as good as'*).

12 The literal translation of *'protection'* (צֶל) is *'shade'* (cf. Gn 19:8, Jg 9:36, Is 25:5, 32:2, Jr 48:45, Jon 4:5); the term is frequently used in a figurative sense to connote *'protection'* from calamity (Nb 14:9, Is 49:2, Ho 14:8, Ps 17:8, 36:8, 57:2, 63:8, 91:1, 121:5, Lm 4:20).

בְּצֵל הַכֶּסֶף
וַיִּתְרוֹן דָּעַת הַחֲכָמָה תַּחֲיָהּ בְּעֲלִיָּהּ:

יג רְאֵה אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים
כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָוְתוּ:
יד בַּיּוֹם טוֹבָה הִיָּה בְטוֹב וּבַיּוֹם רָעָה רְאֵה רְאֵה
גַּם אֶת־זֶה לְעַמְתָּזָה
עֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־דַּבְּרֹת
שׁוּלָא יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אַחֲרָיו מְאוֹמָה:
טו אֶת־הַכֹּל רְאִיתִי בַיְמֵי הַבְּלִי
יֵשׁ צְדִיק אֲבָד בְּצַדִּיקוֹ
וַיֵּשׁ רָשָׁע מֵאַרְיָד בְּרַעְתּוֹ:
טז אֶל־תְּהִי צְדִיק הַרְבֵּה
וְאֶל־תִּתְחַכֵּם יוֹתֵר
לְמָה תִּשׁוּמֵם:
יז אֶל־תִּרְשַׁע הַרְבֵּה וְאֶל־תְּהִי סָבֵל
לְמָה תָּמוּת בְּלֹא עֲתִיד:

and the advantage of knowledge is this:
that wisdom bestows life on those who possess her.

- 13 Consider God's Creation:
for, who can straighten what God has bent?
- 14 When things are going well, enjoy yourself,
and when they are going badly, consider this:
God has designed the one as well as the other,
so that we should take nothing for granted.
- 15 In my futile life, I have seen both:
sometimes, the upright person perishing in uprightness
and sometimes the wicked person surviving in wickedness.
- 16 Do not be excessively upright
and do not make yourself unduly wise:
why should you destroy yourself?
- 17 Do not be wicked to excess and do not be a fool:
why die before your time?

¹³ An alternative reading for 'God's Creation' is 'the work of God'.

¹⁴ The literal translation of the last line is 'so that man should find nothing behind him'; or it may mean 'so that man should discover nothing of what is to come' (as in the NRSV).

¹⁵ As is the case throughout Qo, the term הַכֹּל should be interpreted as 'both' rather than 'all' or 'everything' (as in the NJB). The term יֵשׁ ('sometimes') is often used in aphorisms to assert the existence of a particular situation that occurs sometimes. It may indicate that the situation is not the rule but that it does occur on occasion (Pr 11:24, 13:7, 23, 14:12, 16:25, 18:24, 20:15, Qo 2:21, 4:8, 5:12, 6:1, 8:14).

¹⁶ The adjective יוֹתֵר ('excessively') is derived from the root יָתַר ('what is left over').

¹⁷ Some turn the rhetorical question of the last line into a statement: "otherwise, you might die before your time."

י' טוֹב אֲשֶׁר תִּאָחַז בָּזֶה
 וְגַם־מִזֶּה אַל־תִּנְחַ אֶת־יָדְךָ
 כִּי־יִרְא אֱלֹהִים יֵצֵא אֶת־כָּל־לָם:
 יט' הַחֲכָמָה תִּעֲזוּ לַחֲכָם מִעֲשֶׂרָה שְׁלִיטִים אֲשֶׁר הֵיוּ
 בְּעִיר: כ' כִּי אָדָם אֵין צַדִּיק בְּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה־טוֹב
 וְלֹא יַחֲטֵא: כא' גַּם לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּרוּ אֶל־
 תַּתָּן לִבְךָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִשְׁמַע אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ מִקְּלָלְךָ:
 כב' כִּי גַם־פְּעָמִים רַבּוֹת יִדַּע לִבְךָ אֲשֶׁר גַּם־אַתָּה
 אַתָּה קָלַלְתָּ אֲחֵרִים: כג' כָּל־זֶה נִסִּיתִי בַחֲכָמָה
 אֲמַרְתִּי אֲחַפְּכָמָה וְהִיא רַחוּקָה מִמְּנִי:
 כד' רַחוּק מֵה־שָׁהִיָּה וְעֵמֶק |
 עֵמֶק מִי יִמְצְאוּ:

18 It is wise to hold on to one
 and not let go of the other,
 since the god-fearing will find both.

19 Wisdom makes the wise stronger than ten governors in a city do.
 20 For surely, there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without
 ever sinning. 21 Again, do not take heed of all the words that people say,
 otherwise, you might hear your servant abusing you. 22 For often, as you
 very well know, you have similarly abused others. 23 Thanks to wisdom,
 I have found all this to be true; I have resolved to achieve wisdom, but
 this was beyond my reach!

24 The past is out of reach, buried deep –
 who can discover it?

18 'Will find' is conjectural (ימצא); the MT has 'will come out' (יצא). Possibly, we should understand the meaning to be 'will bring to a good end'; the NRSV has 'will succeed in'.

19 Some translate the opening as, "Wisdom gives the wise man more protection..."

20 The introductory particle כִּי is rendered variously: 'for' (NJB, NJPS), 'indeed' (NASB), 'surely' (NRSV), and even not translated (NIV). The particle functions in an explanatory sense, explaining the need for wisdom in v. 19. Righteousness alone cannot always protect a person from calamity (vv. 15–16); therefore, something additional, such as wisdom, is needed. The need for wisdom as protection from calamity is particularly evident in the light of the fact that no one is truly righteous (vv. 19–20).

21 The imperfect tense verb תִּשְׁמַע (from שָׁמַע 'to hear') functions in a modal sense, denoting possibility.

22 The *Kethib*/*Qere* difference here would benefit from an explanation. The LXX expands this verse, slightly altering its impact:

ὅτι πλειστάκις πονηρεύσεταιί σε και καθόδους πολλάς κακώσει καρδίαν σου, ὅπως και γε σύ κατηράσω ἑτέρους.

For often, he will wickedly inflict your heart, as also you have abused others.

23 The cohortative אֲחַפְּכָמָה (from הָכָם 'to be wise') emphasises the resolve (determination) of Qoheleth to become wise enough to understand the perplexities of life.

24 For this verse, here following the NJB, the NRSV reads, "That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?"

<p>כה סְבוֹתֵי אֲנִי וּלְבִי לְדַעַת וּלְתוֹר וּבִקֵּשׁ חֲכָמָה וְחִשְׁבוֹן וּלְדַעַת רָשָׁע פֶּסֶל וְהַסְכָּלוֹת הוֹלְלוֹת: כו וּמוֹצֵא אֲנִי מֵר מַמּוֹת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מְצוּדִים וְחַרְמִים לְבָהּ אֲסוּרִים יְדִיהָ טוֹב לְפָנַי הָאֱלֹהִים יִמְלֹט מִמָּנָה וְחוֹטֵא יִלְכַּד בָּהּ: כז רָאָה זֶה מֵצֵאתִי אֹמְרָה קִהַלְתִּי אֶחָת לְאֶחָת לְמֵצֵא חִשְׁבוֹן: כח אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא מֵצֵאתִי אָדָם אֶחָד מֵאֲלֶף מֵצֵאתִי וְאִשָּׁה בְּכָל־אֱלֹה לֹא מֵצֵאתִי: כט לְבַד רָאָה־זֶה מֵצֵאתִי אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהֵמָּה בִקְשׁוּ חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת רַבִּים:</p>	<p>25 I turned my mind to know and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that folly is madness.</p> <p>26 I find woman bitterer than Death; she is a snare, her heart is a net and her arms are chains. The man who is pleasing to God eludes her, but she captures the sinner.</p> <p>27 This is what I think, says Qoheleth, adding one thing to another to draw some conclusion, which I am still looking for, although unsuccessfully: one man in a thousand, I may find, but a woman better than other women – never.</p> <p>29 This alone is my conclusion: God has created man straightforward, and human artifices are human inventions.</p>
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²⁵ The literal translation of ‘I have reached the point’ is ‘I have come in my heart’ (following the Tg) or ‘and my heart’ (following the MT). ‘Something stupid’ is a conjectural translation (cf. 10:13); the MT has ‘stupid things’.

²⁶ The phrase חֲכָמָה וְחִשְׁבוֹן (‘wisdom and the scheme of things’) is a hendiadys (a figure of speech in which two nouns connote one idea): ‘wisdom in the scheme of things’.

²⁷ For the 1st line, here following the NJB, the NRSV reads, “See, this is what I found, says the Teacher.”

²⁸ Some put a sterner emphasis in the last line: “but I have not found one upright woman among all of them.”

²⁹ For the last line, here following the NJB, the NRSV reads, “but they have devised many (evil) schemes.”

קוהלת פרק ח

QOHELETH 8

א	מי כִּהְחֹכֵם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דְּבָר חֲכַמַּת אָדָם תֵּאִיר פְּנֵיו וְעַז פְּנֵיו יִשְׁנָא:	1	Who compares with the sage? Who else knows how to explain things? Wisdom lights up the face, enlivening a grim expression.
ב	אֲנִי פִי־מֶלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר וְעַל דְּבַרְתָּ שְׂבוּעַת אֱלֹהִים:	2	Obey the king's command and, because of the divine promise,
ג	אֶל־תִּבְהַל מִפְּנֵיו תִּלְדָּךְ אֶל־תִּעַמַּד בְּדַבַּר רָע כִּי כָל־אֲשֶׁר יַחְפֹּץ יַעֲשֶׂה:	3	be in no hurry to depart from him; do not be obstinate in a bad cause, since the king will do as he likes in any case.
ד	בְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־מֶלֶךְ שְׁלִטוֹן וּמִי יֹאמַר־לוֹ מִה־תַּעֲשֶׂה:	4	Since the word of a king is sovereign, what is the point of saying, "Why do that?"
ה	שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יִדַּע דְּבַר רָע וְעַתּוֹת וּמִשְׁפָּט יִדַּע לֵב חָכָם:	5	One who obeys the command will come to no harm; the heart of the sage knows the right moment and verdict.

QOHELETH 8

- ¹ The MT vocalizes יִשְׁנָא as יִשְׁנָא ('enlivening', Pual imperfect 3MS from שָׁנָה 'to change'). However, the LXX (*μισηθήσεται*) reflects an alternate vocalisation of יִשְׁנָא (Niphal imperfect from שָׁנָא 'to hate'), while the Vg has *commutabit*, reflecting שָׁנָה ('to repeat').
- ² For the 1st line, the MT reads, "I obey the kings command," where אֲנִי is the first person independent personal pronoun (JPS conjecturally inserts 'counsel you'); other Hebrew MSS, the LXX (*στόμα*), Tg and Peshitta preserve an alternate tradition of the definite accusative marker (אֶת־), introducing the direct object, as translated here. External evidence supports the alternate textual tradition: the MT is guilty of simple orthographic confusion between similar looking letters. The 'divine promise' may be the promise given by God to the king (2S 7, Ps 89) or else the oath sworn to God either by the king or by his subjects.
- ³ For the 2nd line, here following the NJB and NJPS, the NRSV reads, "do not delay when the matter is unpleasant."
- ⁴ Alternative readings for 'sovereign' (here following the NJB) are 'powerful' (NRSV) and 'absolute'.
- ⁵ The term עֵת ('moment') connotes a proper, suitable time for an event.

ו כי לְכֹל־חֹפֶץ יֵשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט
 ז כִּי־רַעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו:
 ח כִּי־אֵינְנו יֹדַע מַה־שִּׁיְהִי
 ט כִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מִי יֵגִיד לוֹ:
 אין אָדָם שְׁלִיט בְרוּחַ לְכָל־אֶת־הָרוּחַ
 ואֵין שְׁלִטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמּוֹת
 ואֵין מִשְׁלַחַת בַּמִּלְחָמָה
 ולֹא־יִמְלֹט רָשָׁע אֶת־בַּעֲלָיו:

6 For, there is a right moment and verdict for everything;
 but misfortune lies heavy upon anyone.
 7 For, he does not know what the outcome will be;
 no one is going to say how things will turn out.
 8 No one can control the wind and stop it from blowing;
 no one can control the day of death.
 From war, there is no escape;
 no more can wickedness save the person who commits it.

ט אֶת־כָּל־זֶה רָאִיתִי וְנִתְּוֵן אֶת־לִבִּי לְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה
 אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ עֵת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַט הָאָדָם
 בְּאָדָם לְרַע לוֹ: ' וּבִכְן רָאִיתִי רָשָׁעִים קְבָרִים וּבָאוּ
 וּמִמְקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יִהְלְכוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְעִיר אֲשֶׁר כָּן
 עָשׂוּ גַם־זֶה הַבַּל:
 יא אֲשֶׁר אֵין־נַעֲשָׂה פְתָגָם מֵעֲשֵׂה הַרְעָה מֵהֲרָה
 עַל־כֵּן מִלֵּא לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם בָּהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע:

9 I have seen all this to be so, having carefully studied everything taking
 place under the sun, while one man tyrannises over another to the
 other's detriment. 10 Then again, I have observed the wicked carried to
 their graves, and people leaving the holy place and, once in the city,
 forgetting how the wicked used to behave; how futile this is too!
 11 Because the sentence on the evildoer is not carried out on the instant,
 the hearts of the sons of men are full of the desire to do evil. 12 Though

6 For the 2nd line, the NRSV reads, "although the troubles of mortals lie heavy upon them."
 7 We take the 1st line to mean that whatever happens to a person seems to him worse because he cannot foresee the outcome. Others understand "man's great disadvantage is that he does not know..."
 8 Some emend 'wickedness' (רָשָׁע) to 'wealth' (אֲשֶׁר) and translate 'no more can wealth save its possessor'.
 9 The article on הָאָדָם ('the man') can be taken in a particular sense ('one man', as in the LXX - ἄνθρωπος) or in a collective sense ('mankind').
 10 'Carried' follows the LXX (εἰσαχθέντας) and Peshitta; the MT has 'and they go' (וּבָאוּ). The LXX reads, "...and, in the city, people will praise the way they used to behave."
 11 The noun פְתָגָם ('sentence') is a loanword from Persian; it occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible (here and Est 1:20), twice in the Apocrypha (Si 5:11, 8:9), and five times in the Qumran MSS (11Q^gJob 9:2, 29:4, 30:1, 34:3, 1Q^{ap}Gen 22:27).
 12 The literal translation of 'lives on' (here following the NJB) is 'prolongs his life' (as in the NRSV).

יב אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עֲשֵׂה רַע מֵאֵת וּמֵאַרְיָד לֹא כִּי גַם־
 יוֹדַע אָנִי אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־טוֹב לִירְאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר
 יִירָאוּ מִלְּפָנָיו: יג וְטוֹב לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְרָשָׁע וְלֹא־יִאֲרִיד
 יָמִים כְּצֶלֶם אֲשֶׁר אֵינְנוּ יִרָא מִלְּפָנֵי אֱלֹהִים: יד יֵשׁ־
 הַבֶּלֶם אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר | יֵשׁ צְדִיקִים
 אֲשֶׁר מַגִּיעַ אֱלֹהִים כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים וְיֵשׁ רְשָׁעִים
 שְׂמַגִּיעַ אֱלֹהִים כְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצְּדִיקִים אִמְרָתִי שְׁגַם־זֶה
 הַבֶּלֶם:

טו וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשְּׂמֵחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב לְאָדָם
 תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׂמֹחַ
 וְהוּא יִלְוֶנוּ בְּעַמְלּוֹ יְמֵי חַיָּיו אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים
 תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

טז כְּאֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לְדַעַת חֲכָמָה וְלִרְאוֹת
 אֶת־הָעֲנִיָּן אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ כִּי גַם בַּיּוֹם
 וּבַלַּיְלָה שְׁנָה בְּעֵינָיו אֵינְנוּ רֹאֶה: יז וְרִאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־

the sinner who does wrong a hundred times lives on, yet I surely know that there is good in store for people who fear God, who are reverent before him. ¹³ However, there is no good in store for the wicked because he does not fear God and so, like a shadow, he will not prolong his days.

¹⁴ Another futile thing that happens on earth: righteous men being treated as though they were wicked and wicked men being treated as though they were righteous. To me, this is one more example of futility.

¹⁵ Therefore, I praise joy, since man has no better happiness under the sun than eating and drinking, and in taking pleasure, and that this should be with him in his work all the days of his life, which God has given him under the sun.

¹⁶ Having applied myself to acquiring wisdom and to observing the activity taking place in the world – even though during neither day nor night do our eyes enjoy rest – ¹⁷ I have scrutinised God’s whole Creation:

¹³ The phrase כְּצֶלֶם (*‘like a shadow’*) modifies the verb (*‘prolong’*) rather than the noun (*‘days’*). Several English versions misconstrue the line: *“he will not prolong his days, (which are) like a shadow”* (KJV, ASV), *“the man who does not fear God is like a shadow”* (NEB) and *“he will not prolong his shadowy days”* (NAB). Unlike a shadow that lengthens at sunset, the wicked do not normally live long.

¹⁴ The term יֵשׁ (*‘another’*) is often used in aphorisms to assert the existence of a particular situation that occurs sometimes; it may indicate that the situation is not the rule but that it does occur on occasion, and is often translated as *‘sometimes’* (Pr 11:24, 13:7,23, 14:12, 16:25, 18:24, 20:15, Qo 2:21, 4:8, 5:12, 6:1, 7:15).

¹⁵ The construction אִם ... כִּי is used as a particle of exception to limit the preceding clause (cf. Gn 28:17, 39:9, Lv 21:2, Nb 14:30, Dt 10:12, 1S 30:22, 2K 4:2, 5:15, 2Ch 21:17, Es 2:15, 5:12, Qo 3:12, Is 42:19, Dn 10:21, Mc 6:8).

¹⁶ The phrase גַּם כִּי expresses a concessive sense: *‘even though’* (cf. Ps 23:4, Pr 22:6, Qo 4:14, Is 1:15, Lm 3:8, Ho 8:10, 9:16).

¹⁷ The particle אִם (*‘even if’*) introduces the protasis in a real conditional clause. The last sentence is missing from the LXX.

מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי לֹא יוּכַל הָאָדָם לְמַצּוֹא אֶת־
הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת־הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּשֵׁל אֲשֶׁר
יַעֲמֹל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמָּצֵא וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר
הַחֲכָם לְדַעַת לֹא יוּכַל לְמַצּוֹא:

you cannot get to the bottom of everything that is happening under the sun; you may wear yourself out in the search, but you will never find it. Not even a sage can get to the bottom of it, even if he says that he has done so.

קוהלת פרק ט

א כי את־כָּל־זֶה נִתְּתִי אֶל־לְבִי וּלְבוֹר אֶת־כָּל־זֶה
אֲשֶׁר הַצְדִּיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים וְעַבְדֵיהֶם בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים

גַּם־אֶהְבָּה גַּם־שֹׂנְאָה

אֵין יוֹדַע הָאָדָם הַכֹּל לִפְנֵיהֶם: ב הַכֹּל

כַּאֲשֶׁר לְכֹל מִקְרָה אֶחָד

לַצְדִּיק וְלַרָשָׁע לְטוֹב

וְלַטָּהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא

וְלַזֹּבֵחַ וְלֹאֲשֶׁר

אֵינָנו זֹבֵחַ כְּטוֹב כַּחֲטָא

הַנִּשְׁבַּע כַּאֲשֶׁר שְׂבוּעָה יֵרָא:

ג זֶה הוּא רָע בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־נֹעֵשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ כִּי־
מִקְרָה אֶחָד לְכֹל וְגַם לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם מְלֹא־רָע

וְהוֹלִלּוֹת בְּלִבָּבָם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם וְאַחֲרָיו אֶל־הַמֵּתִים:

ד כִּי־מִי אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יִחְבֹּר אֶל כָּל־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ

בְּטַחֲוֹן כִּי־לְכַלֵּב חַי הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת:

ה כי החיים יודעים שימתו והמתים אינם יודעים

מאומה ואין־עוד להם שכר כי נשכח זכרם: ו גם

QOHELETH 9

¹ Yes, I have applied myself and experienced all this to be so: that the upright and the wise, with their activities, are in the hands of God.

We do not understand either love or hate,

where we are concerned, both of them are ² folly.

Moreover, for all of us, is reserved a common fate,

for the upright and the wicked, for the good and the bad;

whether we are clean or unclean,

whether we offer sacrifice or not:

it is the same for the good and for the sinner,

for someone who swears, as for someone who shuns an oath.

³ This is another evil occurring under the sun: that there should be the same fate for everyone. Also, the human heart is full of wickedness; folly lurks in our hearts all our lives, until we end among the dead.

⁴ But there is hope still linked to the rest of the living:

better to be a live dog than a dead lion.

⁵ The living are at least aware that they are going to die, but the dead know nothing whatever. No more wages for them, since their memory

QOHELETH 9

¹ 'I have applied myself' is conjectural (cf. 1:13, 17); the MT has 'I have put towards my heart'. 'Their activities' is conjectural: ועבדיהם is a suspect Aramaic word. Though humans experience love and hate, they remain a mystery to us. Like death, like fate, love is blind and inexorable.

² 'Folly' follows the LXX (ματαιότης) & Peshitta; the MT has 'all' (הכל - dittography). 'And for the bad' follows the LXX (καὶ τῶ κακῶ) & Peshitta; it is not present in the MT.

³ 'We end' (literally 'their end') follows Symmachus; the MT has 'after them'.

⁴ 'Linked' (יחבר) follows the marginal Qere; the Ketiv has 'chosen' (יבחר) - the difference involves transposition of the letters, ב & ח.

⁵ The literal translation of 'their memory' is 'memory of them' (the pronominal suffix is an objective genitive).

אֲהַבְתֶּם גַּם־שִׂנְאֹתֵיכֶם גַּם־קִנְיָתְכֶם כִּבֵּר אַבְדָּה
 וַחֲלַק אִין־לָהֶם עוֹד לְעוֹלָם בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת
 הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

is forgotten. ⁶ Their love, their hate, their jealousy, have perished long since, and they will never have any further part in what goes on under the sun.

ז לֶךְ אֲכַל בְּשִׂמְחָה לַחֲמֶךָ
 וּשְׂתֵה בְּלִב־טוֹב יִיגֶךָ
 ח כִּי כִבֵּר רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־מַעֲשֶׂיךָ:
 בְּכָל־עֵת יִהְיוּ בְּגָדֶיךָ לְבָנִים
 וְשִׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשְׁךָ אַל־יִחְסֹר:
 ט רְאֵה חַיִּים עִם־אִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ כָּל־יְמֵי
 חַיֵּי הַבְּלָךְ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ תַּחַת
 הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כֹּל יְמֵי הַבְּלָךְ כִּי הוּא חֶלְקְךָ
 בַּחַיִּים וּבַעֲמָלְךָ
 אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה עֹמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:
 י כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ
 לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכַחַךְ עֲשֵׂה
 כִּי אִין מַעֲשֵׂה וַחֲשָׁבוֹן וְדַעַת וַחֲכָמָה
 בְּשֵׂאוֹל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה הֹלֵךְ שָׁמָּה:

⁷ So, eat your bread in joy,
 drink your wine with a glad heart,
 since God has already approved your actions.
⁸ At all times, dress in white
 and keep your head well scented.
⁹ Spend your life with the woman you love,
 all the days of futile life God gives you under the sun,
 throughout your futile days,
 since this is your lot in life
 and in the effort you expend under the sun.
¹⁰ Whatever work you find to do,
 do it with all your might;
 for, there is neither achievement, nor planning, nor science,
 nor wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

{ס}

⁶ The inevitability of death modifies the following invitation to enjoy life (vv. 7–8, see #2:24), with its advice to remain faithful to one’s lifelong love until the final separation, for which no consolation is foreseen.

⁷ In place of ‘already’ (following the NJB), the NRSV has ‘long ago’.

⁸ For this verse, the NRSV reads, “Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head.”

⁹ The phrase כָּל־יְמֵי הַבְּלָךְ (‘your futile days’) is present in the MT but absent from the LXX and Tg. Its appearance in the MT may be due to dittography (a scribe wrote twice what should have been written once) from כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֵּי הַבְּלָךְ (‘all the days of futile life’) that appears in the preceding line. Or, its omission in other traditions may be due to haplography (accidental omission of repeated words) with the earlier line.

¹⁰ Here, and elsewhere, the LXX translates ‘Sheol’ (שְׂאוֹל) as ‘Hades’ (ᾗδης) and JPS uses ‘grave’.

א' שְׁבִתִּי וְרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
 כִּי לֹא לַקְּלַיִם הַמְּרוֹץ וְלֹא לַגְּבוּרִים
 הַמְּלַחֲמָה וְגַם לֹא
 לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם וְגַם
 לֹא לַנְּבֹנִים עֶשֶׂר
 וְגַם לֹא לַיֹּדְעִים חֵן
 כִּי־עַתָּה וּפְגַע יִקְרָה אֶת־כָּל־אֶתְּכֶם:

ב' כִּי גַם לֹא יֵדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עֵתוֹ
 כַּדָּגִים שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים בַּמְצוּדָה רָעָה
 וְכַצְּפִירִים הָאֶחָזוּת בַּפֶּח כִּהֵם יוֹקְשִׁים בְּנֵי
 הָאָדָם לַעַת רָעָה
 כַּשֶּׁתְּפוּל עֲלֵיהֶם פֶּתְאִים:

ג' גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי חֲכָמָה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְגִדּוּלָהּ הִיא
 אֵלַי:

ד' עִיר קְטַנָּה וְאֲנָשִׁים בָּהּ מְעַט וּבֵא־אֵלֶיהָ מֶלֶךְ
 גָּדוֹל וְסָבַב אֶתָּהּ וּבָנָה עָלֶיהָ מְצוּדִים גְּדֹלִים:

11 Another thing I have observed under the sun:
 that the race is not won by the speediest,
 nor the battle by the champions;
 it is not the wise who get food,
 nor the intelligent wealth,
 nor the learned favour;
 chance and mischance befall them all.

12 We do not know when our time will come:
 like fish caught in the treacherous net,
 the birds caught in the snare,
 just so are we all trapped by misfortune
 when it suddenly overtakes us.

13 Here is another example of the wisdom I have acquired under the sun
 and it strikes me as important:

14 There was a small city, with only a few men in it; a mighty king made
 war on it, besieged it, and built great siege-works around it. ¹⁵ Now,

¹¹ For the last line, here following the *NJB*, the *NRSV* reads, “but time and chance happen to them all.”

¹² Some suggest that עָה ('time') refers to an 'uncertain time' but others nuance it as 'destined time', that is, “We do not know our hour of destiny.” It is used parallel to זְמַן ('appointed time') in 3:1 (3:9–15 teaches God's sovereignty over the appointed timetable of human events).

¹³ The literal translation of 'strikes me as important' is 'seems great to me'.

¹⁴ 'Siege-works' (or 'terracing') follows the *LXX* (χαρακας) and *Peshitta*; the *MT* has 'snares' (מְצוּדִים). The story of the wise man who saved his city is nullified by the way he was treated; similarly, the power of wisdom can be undone by one sinner (v. 18).

¹⁵ The verb וּמָלַט ('to saved') is functioning either in an indicative sense ('he saved') or in a modal sense ('he could have saved'). The literal meaning of זָכַר ('to remember') later in the verse harmonizes with the indicative; however, the modal is supported by v. 16. Most translations favour the indicative approach (*NJB*, *NRSV*, *NIV*); however, some adopt the modal nuance (*JPS*).

טו ומצא בה איש מסכן חכם ומלט־הוא את־העיר
בַּחֲכָמָתוֹ וְאָדָם לֹא זָכַר אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַמְּסָכֵן הַהוּא:
טז ואמַרְתִּי אָנִי

there was found in that city a poverty-stricken sage who, by his wisdom,
delivered the city, but no one remembered this poor man afterwards.
16 So, I say:

טז טובה חכמה מגבורה
וחכמת המסכן בזויה
ודבריו אינם נשמעים:

Wisdom is more effective than brute force,
but the wisdom of a poor man is not valued:
no one listens to what he has to say.

יז דברי חכמים בנחת נשמעים מזעקת מושל
בכסילים:

17 The calm words of the wise make themselves heard above the shouts
of someone commanding an army of fools.

יח טובה חכמה מפלי קרב
וחוטא אחד יאבד טובה הרבה:

18 Wisdom is worth more than weapons of war,
but a single sinner undoes a deal of good.

¹⁶ The participle form נשמעים (Niphal participle masculine plural from שָׁהַע, 'to listen') is used verbally to emphasise a continual action.

¹⁷ For this verse, here following the NJB, the NRSV reads: "The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools."

¹⁸ 'Sinner' follows the MT (the NRSV has 'bungler'); the NJB, following the Peshitta, has 'sin'.

קוהלת פרק י

QOHELETH 10

- א זְבוּבֵי מוֹת יִבְאִישׁ יִבְיַע שֶׁמֶן רוֹקַח
יִקַּר מִחֲכָמָה מִכְבוֹד סְכָלוֹת מְעֵט:
ב לֵב חָכָם לְיְמִינוֹ
וְלֵב כָּסִיל לְשִׁמְאֹלוֹ:
ג וְגַם־בְּדַרְךָ כִּשְׁהִסְכַּל כְּשֶׁסָּכַל הַלֵּךְ לְבוֹ חָסֵר
וְאָמַר לְכָל סָכַל הוּא:
ד אִם־רוּחַ הַמוֹשֵׁל תִּעַלָּה עָלֶיךָ
מִקוֹמְךָ אַל־תִּנָּח
כִּי מִרְפָּא יִנִּיחַ חֲטָאִים גְּדוֹלִים:
ה יֵשׁ רָעָה רְאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כְּשֶׁגָּגָה שִׁיֵּצֵא
מִלְפָּנָי הַשְּׁלִיט: וְנִתַּן הַסֶּכֶל בְּמִרוּמִים רַבִּים
וְעֹשִׂירִים בְּשֶׁפֶל יֵשְׁבוּ: ז רְאִיתִי עֲבָדִים עַל־סוּסִים
וְשָׂרִים הֹלְכִים בְּעַבְדִּים עַל־הָאָרֶץ:
- 1 Dead flies can spoil the perfumer's oil;
a grain of stupidity outweighs wisdom and glory.
2 The sage's heart inclines to his right hand,
but the fool's heart to his left hand.
3 A fool walks down the road, he has no wit –
and everyone remarks, "How silly he is!"
4 If the anger of the ruler rises against you,
do not leave your post;
composure mitigates grave offences.
5 Another evil I have observed under the sun: the sort of misjudgement
to which rulers are prone – 6 folly is promoted to the top and the rich
take the lowest place. 7 I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes
on foot like slaves.

QOHELETH 10

- ¹ The literal translation of 'dead flies' is 'flies of death'; after יִבְאִישׁ ('can spoil', literally, 'to cause to stink'), the MT adds 'infect': יִבְיַע – a dittography.
² The phrase 'right hand' is an idiom for the place of protection (cf. Ps 16:8, 110:5, 121:5). In ancient warfare, the shield of the warrior on one's right-hand side protected one's right hand. Qoheleth's point is that wisdom provides protection (cf. Qo 7:12).
³ Although Qoheleth criticises traditional wisdom, folly is not an option (See vv. 12–15): a fool's lack of wisdom is obvious to everyone, even when he is engaged in the simple, ordinary actions of life. The *Kethib*/*Qere* difference here would benefit from an explanation.
⁴ The term מִקוֹמְךָ ('post') denotes a position or office (1K 20:24, Qo 8:3). The noun מִרְפָּא (literally, 'calmness') is used in reference to keeping one's composure with a peaceful heart (Pr 14:30) and responding to criticism with a gentle tongue (Pr 15:4).
⁵ The term 'another' is not in the MSS but is supplied to indicate that this is not the first 'evil' described by Qoheleth (see 5:13, 16; 6:1–2).
⁶ For this verse (here following the NJB), the NRSV reads, "folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place."
⁷ In place of 'slaves', some translators prefer 'servants'.

<p>ח חפר גומץ בו יפול ופרץ גדר ישכנו נחש: ט מסיע אבנים יעצב בהם בוקע עצים יסכן במ:</p>	<p>8 He who digs a pit may fall into it; he who undermines a wall may be bitten by a snake. 9 He who quarries stones may get hurt by them; he who chops wood may take a risk from it.</p>
<p>י אסקה הברזל והוא לא־פנים קלקל וחילים יגבר ויתרון הכשיר חכמה: יא א־ישך הנחש בלוא־לחש ואין יתרון לבעל הלשון: יב דברי פ־חכם תן ושפתות כסיל תבלענו: יג תחלת דברי־פיהו סכלות ואחרית פיהו הוללות רעה:</p>	<p>10 If, for want of sharpening, the blade is blunt, you have to work twice as hard; but it is the outcome that makes wisdom rewarding. 11 If, for want of charming, the snake bites, the snake-charmer gets nothing out of it. 12 The sayings of a sage give pleasure; what a fool says procures his own ruin: 13 His words have their origin in stupidity and their ending in treacherous folly.</p>

⁸ The four imperfect verbs in vv. 8–9 may be taken as indicatives (‘will...’) or in a modal sense denoting possibility (‘may...’). The LXX renders them with indicatives, as do many English translations (*NRSV*, *JPS* – the *NJB* uses the present tense); however, it is better to take them in a modal sense (*NIV* and here): one who digs a pit does not necessarily fall into it, but he may under the right conditions.

⁹ The LXX translates the verbs in this verse in the indicative (definite future) sense (see #8):

ἐξαίρων λίθους διαπονηθήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς, σχίζων ξύλα κινδυνεύσει ἐν αὐτοῖς.

The one lifting away stones shall work hard among them; the one chopping wood shall be exposed to danger in them.

¹⁰ The LXX reads rather differently for this verse:

ἐὰν ἐκπέσῃ τὸ σιδήριον, καὶ αὐτὸς πρόσωπον ἐτάραξεν, καὶ δυνάμεις δυναμώσῃ, καὶ περισσεΐα τοῦ ἀνδρείου σοφία.

If an iron implement should fall off and his injure him, then he shall strengthen his power, and abundance, if the man is wise.

¹¹ The literal translation of ‘snake-charmer’ is ‘master of the tongue’; the LXX has ‘the one charming’ (τῷ ἐπάδοντι).

¹² An alternative reading of ‘give pleasure’ (תן) is ‘are gracious’, as in the LXX (χάρις).

¹³ The terms ‘origin’ and ‘ending’ form a merism, a figure of speech in which two opposites are contrasted to indicate totality (cf. Dt 6:7, Ps 139:8, Qo 3:2–8). The words of a fool are madness from start to finish.

<p>וְהַסְכֵּל יִרְבֶּה דְבָרִים לֹא־יָדַע הָאָדָם מִה־שִׁיחֵיהָ וְאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מֵאַחֲרָיו מִי יִגִּיד לוֹ: עֲמַל הַכְּסִילִים תִּיגַעְנֻ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע לָלֶכֶת אֶל־עִיר: אֵי־לָךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֹלֶכֶךָ נָעַר וְשָׂרִיךְ בְּבֹקֶר יֹאכְלוּ: אֲשֶׁרִיךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֹלֶכֶךָ בְּזַחֲוֹרִים וְשָׂרִיךְ בָּעֵת יֹאכְלוּ בְּגִבּוֹרָה וְלֹא בַשְּׂתִי: בְּעֲצֻלְתֵּימָם יִמְךָ הַמְּקָרָה וּבְשִׁפְלוֹת יָדִים יִדְלָף הַבַּיִת: לְשַׁחֲוֹק עֹשִׂים לָחֶם</p>	<p>ד' טו טז יז יח יט</p>	<p>14 A fool talks a great deal, but none of us in fact can tell the future; what will happen after us, who can tell? 15 A fool finds hard work very tiring, he cannot even find his own way into town. 16 Woe to you, country with a lad for a king, and where princes start feasting in the morning! 17 Happy the land whose king is nobly born, where princes eat at a respectable hour to keep themselves strong and not merely to revel! 18 Thanks to idleness, the roof gives way; thanks to carelessness, the house lets in the rain. 19 We give parties to enjoy ourselves,</p>
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¹⁴ The 1st line is best taken as the 3rd line of a triplet including v. 13.

¹⁵ In place of ‘a fool’, here following the *Tg* and *NJB* (and *LXX* – ἀφρόνως), the *MT* (and *NRSV*) has ‘fools’ (הַכְּסִילִים). Such a ‘plural of intensity’ (referring to a single person characterised by an habitual quality of foolishness) is favoured because the two verbs (תִּיגַעְנֻ, ‘wearies him’ and לֹא־יָדַע ‘he does (not) know’) in this verse are both singular in form.

¹⁶ The *NRSV* has ‘servant’ in place of ‘lad’; the term נָעַר has a range of meanings: in reference to age, it may refer to an infant (Ex 2:6, Jg 13:5, 1S 1:22, 4:21, 2S 12:16), a child just weaned (1S 1:24), an adolescent (1S 16:11), or a young man of marriageable age (Gn 34:19, 2S 14:21, 18:5, 12). Its titular use denotes ‘servant’ (Nb 22:22, Jg 7:10–11, 19:3, 1S 3:9, 2S 16:1, 2K 4:12,25, 19:6), ‘attendant’ or ‘follower’ (Gn 14:24, 1S 25:5, 2S 2:14, 2K 19:6, Is 37:6, Job 1:15–17, Ne 4:10,17) and ‘soldier’ (1K 20:15–16). The *LXX* rendered it with νεώτερος (‘youthful’). When used in reference to rulers, it emphasizes incompetence, naïveté, inexperience, and immaturity (Is 3:4,9, 1K 3:7); this use must be understood in the light of the parallel antonym (v. 17): ‘nobly born’ (בְּזַחֲוֹרִים), suggesting one who was not well trained and prepared by noble birth to ascend to the throne.

¹⁷ *JPS* translates: “Happy are you, O land, when your king is a free man, and your princes eat in due season, in strength, and not in drunkenness!”

¹⁸ The literal translation of ‘carelessness’ (the *NRSV* has ‘indolence’) is ‘lowering of hands’ (the *LXX* has ἀργία χειρῶν – ‘idleness of hands’).

¹⁹ The term לָחֶם (‘parties’) is used literally of ‘bread’ and figuratively for a ‘feast’. This obscure line has occasioned numerous proposals: ‘a feast

וַיֵּזֶן יִשְׂמַח חַיִּים
וְהַכֶּסֶף יַעֲנֶה אֶת־הַכֹּל:
גַּם בְּמַדְעָךָ מֶלֶךְ אֶל־תִּקְלָל
וּבְחֻדְרֵי מִשְׁכַּבְּךָ אֶל־תִּקְלָל עֹשִׂיר
כִּי עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹלִיךְ אֶת־הַקּוֹל
וּבַעַל הַכַּנְפַּיִם כְּנַפַּיִם יִגִּיד דְּבָר:

wine makes us cheerful
and money has an answer for everything.

²⁰ Do not abuse the king, even in thought;
do not abuse a rich man, even in your bedroom,
for a bird of the air might carry the news,
a winged messenger might repeat what you have said.

is made for laughter' (NIV), 'feasts are made for laughter' (NRSV), 'the table has its pleasures' (NEB), 'they (the rulers) make a banquet for revelry' (JPS), 'for laughter they make bread and wine, that the living may feast' (Douay), and 'bread (and oil) call forth merriment' (NAB).

²⁰ The phrase **וּבַעַל הַכַּנְפַּיִם** ('winged messenger') – following the *Ketiv* (the *Qere* has **כְּנַפַּיִם**) – is an idiom for a winged creature or bird (Pr 1:17).

קוהלת פרק יא

QOHELETH 11

א	שֶׁלַח לַחֲמֵךְ עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם כִּי־בְרֹב הַיָּמִים תִּמְצָאֲנוּ:	1	Cast your bread on the water, eventually you will recover it.
ב	תִּזְחַלֵּק לְשִׁבְעָה וְגַם לְשִׁמוֹנָה כִּי לֹא תִדְעַ מַה־יְהִיָּה רָעָה עַל־הָאָרֶץ:	2	Offer a share to seven or eight people, for, you can never tell what disaster may occur.
ג	אִם־יִמְלֵאוּ הָעָבִים גִּשְׁם עַל־הָאָרֶץ יִרְיָקוּ וְאִם־יִפֹּל עֵץ בְּדָרוֹם וְאִם בְּצָפוֹן מִקּוֹם שִׁיפֹל הָעֵץ שָׁם יְהוּא:	3	When the clouds are full of rain, they will shed it on the earth. If a tree falls, whether north or south, where it falls, there it will lie.
ד	שִׁמְרֵ רוּחַ לֹא יִזְרַע וְרֵאָה בְּעָבִים לֹא יִקְצֹר:	4	Keep watching the wind and you will never sow; keep staring at the clouds and you will never reap.

QOHELETH 11

This passage on taking chances throws light on the attitude Qoheleth wishes to instil into his disciple: he wishes not to discourage him for discouragement's sake, but to rob him of his illusions and thus save him from error. After all, risks do have to be taken.

- ¹ The verb שֶׁלַח ('to send', 'to cast') refers to the action of sending something to someone (Ne 8:12). The term is traditionally rendered here as 'cast' (NJB, NASB, NIV); however, some render it 'send' (JPS, NRSV, NEB); the LXX uses Ἀπόστειλον ('send'). Some take this to mean bait thrown in the water by the fisherman and recovered in the form of his catch; others interpret 'your bread' (לֶחֶםְךָ) as merchandise, shipped abroad and bringing home a profit.
- ² The phrase, 'seven or eight', is a graded numerical saying depicting an indefinite plurality. The collocation of a numeral with the next above it is a rhetorical device employed in numerical sayings to express a number, which need not, or cannot, be more exactly specified. It must be gathered from the context whether such formulae are intended to denote only an insignificant number (Is 17:6, 'two' or at the most 'three') or a considerable number (Mi 5:4). Sometimes, however, this juxtaposition serves to express merely an indefinite total, without the collateral idea of intensifying the lower by means of the higher number. A modern interpretation of this is: "Don't put all your eggs in one basket!"
- ³ Whether one counts on the future ('clouds ... rain') or realises that it is impenetrable ('there it will lie'), one must act (v. 4).
- ⁴ The farmer who delays planting until there is no wind to blow away the seed, and reaping until there is no rain to ruin a harvest, will never do anything but sit around waiting for the right moment.

<p>כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ מֵה־דֶּרֶךְ הַרוּחַ ה כַּעֲצָמִים בְּבֶטֶן הַמְּלֵאָה כֹּכָה לֹא תִדְעַ אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַכֹּל: בַּבֹּקֶר זָרַע אֶת־זֵרְעֶךָ ו וְלָעֶרֶב אַל־תִּנַּח יָדְךָ כִּי אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ אִי זֶה יִכָּשֵׁל הַזֶּה אוֹ־זֶה וְאִם־שְׁנֵיהֶם כָּאֶחָד טוֹבִים: וּמִתּוֹק הָאֹזֶר וְטוֹב לְעֵינַיִם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: כִּי אִם־שָׁנִים הַרְבֵּה יִחִיָּה הָאָדָם בְּכֹל־שָׁמַח וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ כִּי־הַרְבֵּה יִהְיוּ כָל־שָׁבָא הַבָּל: שִׂמַּח בְּחֹר בְּיַלְדוּתְךָ וַיִּטִּיבֵךְ לִבְךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּחֹרֹתֶיךָ</p>	<p>ה ו ז ח ט</p>	<p>5 You do not understand how the wind blows, or how the breath comes to the bones in a woman’s womb: no more can you know the work of God, the Creator of all.</p> <p>6 In the morning, sow your seed, until evening, do not cease from labour, for of any two things you do not know which will succeed, or which of the two is the better.</p> <p>7 How sweet light is, how delightful it is to see the sun!</p> <p>8 However many years you live, enjoy them all, but remember, the days of darkness will be many: futility awaits you at the end.</p> <p>9 Young man, enjoy yourself while you are young, make the most of the days of your youth,</p>
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⁵ There is debate whether *מה-דרך הרוח* refers to the wind (*‘how the wind blows’*, following the *NJB*) or the human spirit of a child in the mother’s womb (*‘how the breath comes’*, following the *NRSV*). The *LXX* understood it as the wind: *ἡ ὁδὸς τοῦ πνεύματος* (*‘the way of the wind’*); however, the *Tg* and *Vg* take it as the human spirit.

⁶ The terms *בוקר* (*‘morning’*) and *ערב* (*‘evening’*) form a merism (a figure of speech using two polar extremes to include everything in between) that connotes *‘from morning until evening’*. The point is not that the farmer should plant at two times in the day (morning *and* evening) but that he should plant all day long (*from morning until evening*).

⁷ The term *האזר* (*‘light’*) is used figuratively in reference to *‘life’* (cf. Job 3:20, 33:30, Ps 56:14). By contrast, death is described as *‘darkness’* (v. 8, 12:6–7). The term *מתוק* (*‘sweet’*) is often used elsewhere in reference to honey; the point is that life is sweet and should be savoured like honey.

⁸ Long life was the reward promised to the Israelites in the discourses of Deuteronomy (Dt 5:16, 33, 11:9, 21, 22:7 *et cetera*) and was the greatest happiness the sages had to offer the virtuous. For Qoheleth, old age brings not happiness but fear of death, regrets for youth (11:9–12:2), slowing down of life (12:3–5) and a waiting for the irremediable (12:5–7).

⁹ This verse is perhaps a popular saying about youth, to which Qoheleth adds a prudent reminder of youth’s futility.

וְהִלֵּךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לִבְךָ וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינֶיךָ
וְדַע כִּי
עַל-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים יִבְיָאֲךָ הָאֱלֹהִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט:
וְהִסַּר כְּעַס מִלִּבְךָ
וְהֵעֵבֶר רָעָה מִבְּשָׂרְךָ
כִּי-הֵילָדוֹת וְהַשְּׁחָרוֹת הַבָּל:

follow the prompting of your heart and desire of your eye,
but remember,

God will call you to account for everything.

¹⁰ Rid your heart of indignation,

keep your body clear of suffering,

though youth and the age of black hair are both futile.

¹⁰ In place of 'the age of black hair' (וְהַשְּׁחָרוֹת) - a metonym for youthfulness), the LXX has 'thoughtlessness' (ἀνοία).

קוהלת פרק יב

זָכֹר אֶת־בּוֹרְאֶיךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּחַוְרַתְּךָ
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָבֹאוּ יָמֵי הַרְעָה וְהִגְיעוּ
שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵין־לִי בָהֶם חֶפֶץ:
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִחַשֵׁד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהָאֹזֶר
וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְהַכּוֹכָבִים
וְשָׁבוּ הָעָנָנִים אַחֵר הַגֶּשֶׁם:
בַּיּוֹם שִׁיזְעוּ שֹׁמְרֵי הַבַּיִת
וְהִתְעוּתוֹ אֲנָשֵׁי הַחֵיל
וּבִטְלוּ הַטְּחָנוֹת כִּי מְעֻטּוֹ
וַחֲשָׁבוּ הָרְאוֹת בְּאַרְבּוֹת:
וְסָגְרוּ דְלָתַיִם בְּשׁוֹק
בְּשֹׁפֵל קוֹל הַטְּחָנָה
וַיִּקְוֶם לְקוֹל הַצִּפּוֹר
וַיִּשְׁחוּ כָּל־בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר:
גַּם מִגְבֵּה יִרְאוּ

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QOHELETH 12

- 1 Remember your Creator while you are still young,
before the bad days come,
before the years come that, you will say, give you no pleasure;
- 2 before the sun and the light grow dim
and the moon and stars,
before the clouds return after the rain;
- 3 the time when your watchmen become shaky,
when strong men are bent double,
when the grinders quit because they are too few, and,
as they look out of the window, find their sight growing dim.
- 4 When the street-door is kept shut,
when the sound of grinding fades away,
when the first cry of a bird wakes you up,
when all the singing has stopped;
- 5 when going uphill is an ordeal

QOHELETH 12

- ¹ The imperative, זָכֹר ('remember'), is a figurative expression (a metonymy of association) for obeying God and acknowledging his lordship over one's life (cf. Nb 15:40, Dt 8:18, Ps 42:6-7, 63:6-8, 78:42, 103:18, 106:7, 119:52,55, Jr 51:50, Ezk 20:43, Jon 2:7, Ml 4:4).
- ² The phrase 'the light ... and the moon' is a hendiadys (two separate terms denoting one idea) or perhaps even a *hendiatris* (three separate terms denoting one idea) for 'the light of the moon and stars' (cf. Gn 1:14).
- ³ The word translated as 'grinders' (הַטְּחָנוֹת) is feminine; many translate as 'grinding women' or 'women who grind'; or, it could refer to molar teeth.
- ⁴ 'Singing has stopped' is a conjectural translation (ויחשו); the MT has 'have been humiliated' (וישחו). The allusion to the light sleep of the aged (in the 3rd line) seems out of place: literally, "you get up at the cry of the bird;" for 'you get up' (ויקום), some propose the correction, 'you stop' (וידם).
- ⁵ 'Loses its tang' is an uncertain translation, based on substituting the passive (ותפר) for an unattested form. It can also mean 'is without effect'.

וְחִתְחַתִּים בְּדַרְךָ
וַיִּנְאֵץ הַשָּׂקֵד
וַיִּסְתַּבֵּל הַחֲגָב
וַתִּפְרַח הָאֲבִיוֹנָה
כִּי־הִלַּךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בַּיִת עוֹלָמוֹ
וַסִּבְּבוּ בַשּׁוּק הַסּוֹפְדִים:
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְתַּק יָרַחַק חֶבֶל הַכֶּסֶף
וַתִּרְוֵץ גִּלְתֵּי הַזָּהָב
וַתִּשְׁבֵּר כָּד עַל־הַמְּבֹוע
וַנִּרְץ הַגִּלְגָּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר:
וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעֶפֶר עַל־הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה
וַהֲרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַנָּה:
הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים אָמַר הַקּוֹהֵלֶת הַכֹּל הַבֵּל:^ח

and you are frightened at every step you take –
yet the almond tree is in flower
and the locust is weighed down
and the caper bush loses its tang;
while you are on the way to your everlasting home
and the mourners are assembling in the street;
6 before the silver thread gives way,
or the golden bowl is cracked,
or the pitcher shattered at the fountain,
or the pulley broken at the wellhead:
7 the dust returns to the earth from which it came,
and the spirit return to God who gave it.
8 Sheer futility, the Teacher says, everything is futile!

וַיִּתֵּר שֶׁהָיָה קֹהֵלֶת חָכָם עוֹד לְמַדְדֵּעַת אֶת־^ט
הָעַם וְאָזַן וַחֲקַר תִּקְוֵן מְשָׁלִים הַרְבֵּה: ' בִּקְשׁ
קֹהֵלֶת לְמַצָּא דְבַר־חֶפֶץ וּכְתוּב יִשֶׁר דְּבַר־י אֱמַת:^ט

9 Besides being a sage, Qoheleth taught the people that he himself knew,
having weighed, studied, and emended many proverbs. ¹⁰ Qoheleth
took pains to write in an attractive style and, by it, to convey truths.

sometimes, it is corrected to 'gives its fruit', thus continuing the image of the return of spring.

⁶ 'Gives way' follows the *Ketiv* (ירחק), *Symmachus* and the *Peshitta*; the *Qere* (יִרְתַּק) has 'has been taken away', as does the *NRSV*.

⁷ An alternative reading for 'spirit' is 'breath'; the likely referent is the life's breath that originates with God (cf. 3:19, as well as Gn 2:7, 6:17, 7:22).

⁸ For this verse, here (loosely) following the *NJB*, the *WEBBE* has, "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher. All is vanity!"

⁹ This appendix (vv. 9–14) is not by the same hand as the rest of the book; it is perhaps the work of one of Qoheleth's disciples.

¹⁰ The form וְכָתוּב has been vocalised in 3 ways: 1 The *MT* reads וְכָתוּב (conjunction + Qal passive participle MS from כָּתַב, 'to write') – "Qoheleth took pains to write," which is supported by the *LXX* (καὶ γεγραμμένον = conjunction + MS accusative perfect passive participle from γράφω, 'to write'). 2 The *BHS* editors suggest וְהִתּוּב (conjunction + Qal infinitive absolute); the infinitive ('and to write') in the B-line would parallel the infinitive of purpose לְמַעַא ('to find') in the A-line: "Qoheleth took pains to find pleasant words, and to write accurately words of truth." 3 Several *Medieval MSS* preserve an alternate textual tradition of וְכָתַב, (conjunction + Qal perfect 3MS), reflected in *Aquila*, *Symm*, *Peshitta* and the *Vg*.

יא דְבָרַי חֲכָמִים כְּדַרְבָּנוֹת וְכַמְשֻׁמְרוֹת נְטוּעִים
 בְּעֵלֵי אֶסְפוֹת נִתְּנוּ מֵרַעָה אֶחָד:
 יב וְיִתֵּר מִהֶמָּה בְּנֵי הַזְּהָר עֲשׂוֹת סִפְרִים הַרְבֵּה אֵין
 קֶץ וְלִהְיֵה הַרְבֵּה יִגְעַת בְּשָׂר:
 יג סוֹף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמַע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרְאֵ וְאֶת־
 מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמֹר כִּי־זֶה כָּל־הָאָדָם: ^ד כִּי אֶת־כָּל־
 מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֵא בְּמִשְׁפָּט עַל כָּל־נַעֲלָם אִם־
 טוֹב וְאִם־רָע:
 {ש}

סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם § At the end of the day, everything is obeyed. Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole man.

11 The goad to urge the animals forward and the pegs to keep them tied up are both used by the shepherd when he sees fit, not as his own caprice, but as the good of his flock dictates. The shepherd may be an allusion to Moses, to Solomon, or to God; but the text is perhaps corrupt.
 12 This exhortation may be understood in two ways: **1** to avoid any so-called wisdom sayings beyond those mentioned in vv. 10–11; **2** the exhortation refers to the concerns of v. 12^b, namely, diligent study is wearisome.
 13 ‘Duty’ is conjectural; it is missing (elided) in the *MT*. Note that the opening **ד** is presented as an enlarged letter, as it appears in almost all *MSS*.
 14 Some have conjectured that vv. 13–14 were added by an ‘orthodox’ editor; but the comment is not hostile to Qoheleth – it goes beyond him, bringing in the commandments and affirming judgement more than he ever does (compare 11:9, 3:17).
 § This ‘verse’ is presented in the *MAM* text at the end of Qo 12. No explanation is given therein but we reproduce it here.