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## קוהלת § QOHELETH

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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 (ἐκκλησία) 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 דְּבַרִּי קֹהֶלֶת בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם: 1 The words of Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem.
- ב הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים אָמַר קֹהֶלֶת הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל הֵבֵל: 2 Futility of futilities, Qoheleth says. Futility of futilities: everything is futile!
- ג מִהֵי־תִרְוֶן לָאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שִׁיעֲמַל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: 3 What profit can we show for all our toil, toiling under the sun?
- ד דֹּוֹר הֵלֵךְ וְדֹוֹר בָּא וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֲמָדָת: 4 A generation goes and a generation comes; yet, the earth stands firm forever.
- ה וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְאֵל־מְקוֹמוֹ הִסְפִּיד, וְשָׁם הִזְרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: 5 The sun rises, the sun goes down; then, to its place it speeds, and there it rises.
- ו הַרוּחַ הִזְרַח הָרָחֹק וְשָׁם הִזְרַח הָרָחֹק וְעַל־סִבְיָתוֹ שָׁב צָפוֹן סוֹבֵב | סִבֵּב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ וְעַל־סִבְיָתוֹ שָׁב 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

- <sup>1</sup> 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).
- <sup>2</sup> The phrase, *הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים*, 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.
- <sup>3</sup> The word here translated as 'toil' (*עָמַל*) 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.
- <sup>4</sup> The root *הלך* ('to walk', 'to go') is repeated in this section (vv. 6<sup>a</sup>, 6<sup>b</sup>, 7<sup>a</sup>, 7<sup>b</sup>, 7<sup>c</sup>) to emphasise the continual action and constant motion of everything in nature.
- <sup>5</sup> The verb *שָׁאָף* ('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 'gasping' 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.
- <sup>6</sup> 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).

הַרוּחַ: <sup>ז</sup> כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים הַלֵּכִים אֶל־הַיָּם וְהַיָּם אֵינָנוּ  
מִלֵּא אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הַלֵּכִים שָׁם הֵם שְׂבִים  
לָלֶכֶת: <sup>ח</sup> כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים לֹא־יִכְלֵ אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר  
לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֵין לִרְאוֹת וְלֹא־תִמָּלֵא אָזן מִשְׁמַע:

<sup>ט</sup> מִה־שֶׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁיְהִי  
וּמִה־שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה הוּא שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה  
וְאֵין כָּל־חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:

<sup>י</sup> יֵשׁ דְּבָר שֶׁיֹּאמֶר רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא כְּבֹר הָיָה  
לְעָלָמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ: <sup>יא</sup> אֵין זְכוֹרֹן לְרֹאשֵׁינִים  
וְגַם לְאַחֲרֵינִים שֶׁיְהִיוּ לֹא־יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זְכוֹרֹן עִם  
שֶׁיְהִיוּ לְאַחֲרָנָה: {פ}

circling goes the wind. <sup>7</sup> Into the sea go all the rivers, and yet the sea is never full, and still to their goal the rivers go. <sup>8</sup> 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.

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

<sup>10</sup> Take anything that people acclaim as being new: it existed in the centuries preceding us. <sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

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

<sup>10</sup> 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).

<sup>11</sup> 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 הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַם:  
 יג וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־לְבִי לְדָרוֹשׁ וּלְתוֹר בַּחֲכָמָה עַל כָּל־  
 אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא | עֲנִין רָע נָתַן  
 אֱלֹהִים לְבַנֵּי הָאָדָם לַעֲנוֹת בּוֹ: יד רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־  
 הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל  
 וְרָעוֹת רוּחַ:

טו מַעֲנוֹת לֹא־יֻכָּל לְתַקֵּן  
 וְחֶסְרוֹן לֹא־יֻכָּל לְהַמְנוֹת:

טז דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לְבִי לֵאמֹר אֲנִי הִנֵּה הִגְדַּלְתִּי  
 וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חֲכָמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵי עַל־  
 יְרוּשָׁלַם וּלְבִי רָאָה הֲרֵבָה חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת: יז וְאַתָּה  
 לְבִי לָדַעַת חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת הוֹלֵלֶת וְשִׁכְלוֹת יָדַעְתִּי  
 שֶׁגִּסְזָה הוּא רַעְיוֹן רוּחַ:

<sup>12</sup> I, the Teacher, have reigned over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> 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! <sup>14</sup> I have seen all the deeds that are done under the sun: and see how futile it all is, mere chasing after the wind!

<sup>15</sup> What is twisted cannot be straightened;  
 what is lacking cannot be counted.

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> The NJB does not translate ‘the Teacher’, here following the NRSV.

<sup>13</sup> The phrase עֲנִין רָע (*‘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.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Chasing after the wind’ (literally, ‘feeding on the wind’) is a paraphrase for useless effort, a waste of time. The term תִּכְלָה (*‘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.

<sup>15</sup> The noun חֶסְרוֹן (*‘what is lacking’*) is used in the OT 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).

<sup>16</sup> 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 γνῶσις); some LXX MSS lack this last sentence.

<sup>17</sup> 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-פֶּעַס  
וְיוֹסִיף דַּעַת יוֹסִיף מַכְאוֹב:

<sup>18</sup> For, in much wisdom is much grief  
and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.

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<sup>18</sup> 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

- א אִמַּרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי לָכֶּה־נָּא אֲנִסְכָּה בְּשִׂמְחָה וְרֵאָה בְּטוֹב וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא הֶבֶל: ב לְשִׁחּוֹק אִמַּרְתִּי מְהוֹלָל וּלְשִׂמְחָה מַה־זֶּה עֲשֵׂה: ג תִּרְתִּי בִלְבִי לְמִשׁוֹךְ בַּיִן אֶת־בְּשָׂרִי וּלְבִי נִהְגַּ בְּחִכְמָה וּלְאַחֲזוֹ בְּסִכְלוֹת עַד אֲשֶׁר־אֶרְאֶה אִיזָה טוֹב לִבְנֵי הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם מִסָּפֶר יָמֵי חַיֵּיהֶם: ד הִגְדַּלְתִּי מַעֲשֵׂי בְנִיתִי לִי בְּתִים נִטְעַתִּי לִי כְרָמִים: ה עָשִׂיתִי לִי גִנּוֹת וּפְרָדִסִּים וְנִטְעַתִּי בָהֶם עֵץ כָּל־
- 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.
- 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

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- 1 The verb לָכֶּה (*‘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 לְמִשׁוֹךְ (literally, ‘draw’, ‘drag’, whence ‘hand ... over’), some correct to לְשִׁמּוֹךְ 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 παρὰδεισος (*‘pleasure-ground’*), referring to the enclosed parks and gardens of the Persian kings, and has been transliterated into English as ‘paradise’.

פָּרִי: <sup>ו</sup> עָשִׂיתִי לִי בְרָכוֹת מֵיִם לְהַשְׁקוֹת מֵהֶם יָעַר  
צֹמֶחַ עֵצִים: <sup>ז</sup> קָנִיתִי עֲבָדִים וְשִׁפְחוֹת וּבְנֵי-בֵית  
הָיָה לִי גַם מִקְנֶה בָּקָר וְצֹאן הַרְבֵּה הָיָה לִי מִכָּל  
שֶׁהָיוּ לִפְנֵי בִירוּשָׁלַם: <sup>ח</sup> כָּנַסְתִּי לִי גַם-כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב  
וּסְגַלַת מַלְכִים וְהַמְדִּינוֹת עָשִׂיתִי לִי שָׁרִים וְשָׁרוֹת  
וְתַעֲנֻגּוֹת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם שָׂדֵה וְשִׁדּוֹת:

<sup>ט</sup> וְגִדַּלְתִּי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי מִכָּל שֶׁהָיָה לִפְנֵי בִירוּשָׁלַם אָף  
חֲכַמְתִּי עִמָּדָה לִי: <sup>י</sup> וְכָל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאֲלוּ עֵינַי לֹא  
אֶצְלַתִּי מֵהֶם לֹא-מִנַּעְתִּי אֶת-לִבִּי מִכָּל-שִׂמְחָה כִּי-  
לִבִּי שִׂמַּח מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי וְזֶה-הָיָה חֲלָקִי מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי:  
<sup>יא</sup> וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי בְּכָל-מַעֲשֵׂי שִׁעְשׁוֹ יָדַי וּבַעֲמָל  
שִׁעְמַלְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה הִכָּל הַבָּל וְרַעוֹת רוּחַ וְאֵין  
יְתָרוֹן תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ:

<sup>יב</sup> וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי לִרְאוֹת חֲכָמָה וְהוֹלָלוֹת וְסִכְלוֹת כִּי  
מִה הָאָדָם שִׁיבֹא אַחֲרַי הַמֵּלֶכֶד אֶת אֲשֶׁר-כָּבַר

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

<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> Thus, I grew great, surpassing all who were before me in Jerusalem; yet, my wisdom remained with me. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> 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'.

<sup>8</sup> 'Chest upon chest' is the meaning of the phrase שָׂדֵה וְשִׁדּוֹת 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).

<sup>9</sup> Qoheleth retained his wisdom and objectivity despite his great wealth.

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

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

<sup>12</sup> '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: יִרְאִיתִי אֲנִי שִׁישׁ יִתְרוֹן לַחֲכָמָה מִן־  
הַסִּכָּלוֹת בִּיתְרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן־הַחֹשֶׁךְ:

יִד הַחֲכָמִם עֵינָיו בְּרָאשׁוֹ  
וְהַסִּכָּל בַּחֹשֶׁךְ הוֹלֵךְ  
וַיִּדְעָתִי גַם־אֲנִי

שֶׁמֶקְרָה אֶחָד יִקְרָה אֶת־כֻּלָּם:

טו וְאֶמְרָתִי אֲנִי בִלְבִי בְּמִקְרָה הַסִּכָּל גַּם־אֲנִי יִקְרָנִי  
וְלָמָּה חֲכַמְתִּי אֲנִי אֲזִי יִתֵּר וְדִבַּרְתִּי בִלְבִי שֶׁגַּם־זֶה  
הֵבֵל: טז כִּי אֵין זִכְרוֹן לַחֲכָמִם עַם־הַסִּכָּל לְעוֹלָם  
בְּשִׁכְכָּר הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים הַכֹּל נִשְׁכָּח וְאֵיךְ יָמוֹת  
הַחֲכָמִם עַם־הַסִּכָּל: יז וְשִׁנְאַתִּי אֶת־הַחַיִּים כִּי רָע  
עָלִי הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־הֵבֵל הֵבֵל  
וְרָעוֹת רוּחַ:

<sup>13</sup> 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:

<sup>14</sup> The wise have their eyes open;  
the fool walks in the dark.  
No doubt, but I know, too,  
that one fate awaits them both.

<sup>15</sup> “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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Life I have come to hate, for what is done under the sun disgusts me, since all is futility and chasing after the wind.

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

<sup>14</sup> 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).

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

<sup>16</sup> 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 נִשְׁכָּח (‘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.

<sup>17</sup> 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<sup>a</sup>–16): Qoheleth metaphorically describes death as a ‘deed’ that is ‘done’ to man.

ח וְשָׁנָאתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁאֲנִי עָמַל תַּחַת  
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ שֶׁאֲנִיחָנוּ לָאָדָם שִׁיְהִיָּה אַחֲרָיִ: יט וְמִי יוֹדֵעַ  
הַחֶכֶם יִהְיֶה אִזּוֹ סָכָל וְיִשְׁלֹט בְּכָל־עֲמָלִי שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי  
וְשִׁחַכְמָתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ גַּם־זֶה הֵבֵל:

כ וְסִבּוֹתַי אֲנִי לִיאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־הָעֲמָל  
שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: כא כִּי־יֵשׁ אָדָם שֶׁעָמַל  
בְּחִכְמָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכִשְׁרוֹן וּלְאָדָם שֶׁלֹּא עָמַל־בּוֹ  
יִתְּנֵנוּ חֶלְקוֹ גַּם־זֶה הֵבֵל וְרָעָה רַבָּה: כב כִּי מִה־הַנֶּהוּ  
לְאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ וּבִרְעִיזוֹ לָבוֹ שֶׁהוּא עָמַל תַּחַת  
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: כג כִּי כָל־יָמָיו מְכָאָבִים וְכָעַס עֲנִיָּנוֹ גַּם־  
בַּלַּיְלָה לֹא־שָׁכַב לָבוֹ גַּם־זֶה הֵבֵל הוּא:

כד אֵין־טוֹב בָּאָדָם שִׁיאֲכַל וְשָׁתָה וְהִרְאָה אֶת־  
נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בְּעֲמָלוֹ גַּם־זֶה רָאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִיָּד

<sup>18</sup> All that I have toiled for under the sun, and now bequeath to my successor, I have come to hate; <sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> I have come to despair of all the efforts I have expended under the sun. <sup>21</sup> 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; <sup>22</sup> for, what does he gain for all the toil and strain that he has undergone under the sun – <sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> 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; <sup>25</sup> for who could

<sup>18</sup> 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).

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

<sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> 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.

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

<sup>23</sup> 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 עֲנִיָּנוֹ ('his work') is the subject of a 2<sup>nd</sup> clause (also lacking a verb): "All his days are sorrow and his work is stress." **2** עֲנִיָּנוֹ ('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'.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> '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 (παρὲξ αὐτοῦ), Peshitta and Tg; the MT has 'apart from me' (מִמֶּנִּי).

הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא: כִּי מִי יֵאבֹל וּמִי יִחוּשׁ חוּץ מִמֶּנִּי:  
כִּי לָאָדָם שְׂטוּב לִפְנֵי נָתַן חֲכָמָה וְדַעַת וְשִׂמְחָה  
וְלִחוּטָא נָתַן עֲנִין לְאַסֵּף וּלְכַנּוֹס לְתֵת לְטוֹב לִפְנֵי  
הָאֱלֹהִים גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ:

get anything to eat or drink, unless all this came from him? <sup>26</sup> 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.

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<sup>26</sup> 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} <sup>א</sup> 1 For everything, there is a season, a time for every task under heaven:

- |   |                         |   |   |
|---|-------------------------|---|---|
| ב | עֵת לֵלֶדֶת             | 2 | A time for giving birth,                        |
|   | וְעֵת לָמוּת            |   | and a time for dying;                           |
|   | עֵת לִטְעוֹת            |   | a time for planting,                            |
|   | וְעֵת לַעֲקוֹר נִטְוֶה: |   | and a time for uprooting what has been planted. |
| ג | עֵת לְהַרְגוֹ           | 3 | A time for killing,                             |
|   | וְעֵת לְרַפֹּא          |   | and a time for healing;                         |
|   | עֵת לִפְרוֹץ            |   | a time for hacking down,                        |
|   | וְעֵת לִבְנוֹת:         |   | and a time for building.                        |
| ד | עֵת לִבְכוֹת            | 4 | A time for tears,                               |
|   | וְעֵת לְשִׂחוֹק         |   | and a time for laughter;                        |
|   | עֵת סִפּוּד             |   | a time for mourning,                            |
|   | וְעֵת רִקּוּד:          |   | and a time for dancing.                         |

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### QOHELETH 3

- <sup>1</sup> 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.
- <sup>2</sup> 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).
- <sup>3</sup> 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).
- <sup>4</sup> 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.

ה עַת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים  
וְעַת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים  
עַת לַחְבּוֹק  
וְעַת לְרַחֵק מִחֻבֵּק:

ו עַת לְבַקֵּשׁ  
וְעַת לְאַבֵּד  
עַת לְשָׁמֹר  
וְעַת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ:

ז עַת לְקַרֹּעַ  
וְעַת לְתַפּוֹר  
עַת לְחֹשׁוֹת  
וְעַת לְדַבֵּר:

ח עַת לְאַהֲבָה  
וְעַת לְשִׂנְאָה  
עַת מִלְחָמָה  
וְעַת שְׁלוֹמִים:

{פ}

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.

<sup>5</sup> The NRSV repeats 'stones' in place of the pronoun 'them', here following the NJB.

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

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

<sup>8</sup> 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 כל־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 שי־ראו 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.

<sup>9</sup> The term העושה (article + Qal active participle from עָשָׂה – ‘to do’) functions substantively (*‘the workers’*): a figurative description of man (metonymy of association), playing on the repetition of עָשָׂה (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.

<sup>10</sup> In place of ‘sons of man’, here following the MT and NJB, the NRSV has ‘everyone’.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> In place of ‘for them’ (בָּם), here following the MT and NRSV, the NJB has the conjectural ‘for a human being’ (בֶּן־אָדָם).

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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־שֶׁהָיָה כְּבָר הוּא  
וְאֲשֶׁר לִהְיוֹת כְּבָר הָיָה  
וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת־נִרְדָּף:

טז וְעוֹד רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ  
מְקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע  
וּמְקוֹם הַצֶּדֶק שָׁמָּה הָרָשָׁע:

יז אֲמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי אֶת־הַצֹּדִיק וְאֶת־הָרָשָׁע יִשְׁפֹּט  
הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־עַתָּה לְכָל־חַפֵּץ וְעַל כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה שֵׁם:  
יח אֲמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בִלְבִי עַל־דְּבַרְתָּ בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְבָרֵם  
הָאֱלֹהִים וְלִרְאוֹת שֶׁהֵם־בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם: יט כִּי  
מְקַרָּה בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם וּמְקַרָּה הַבְּהֵמָה וּמְקַרָּה אֶחָד  
לָהֶם כָּמוֹת זֶה בֶּן מוֹת זֶה וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לִכְלָם וּמוֹתָר  
הָאָדָם מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה אֵין כִּי הֵכָל הַבָּל:

כ הֵכָל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד  
הֵכָל הָיָה מִן־הָעֹפָר  
וְהֵכָל שָׁב אֶל־הָעֹפָר:

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 (δεῖξει ὅτι) and Peshitta; the MT has 'and that they see clearly' (וְלִרְאוֹת ... לְבָרֵם). 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:
- כב וראיתי כי אין טוב מאשר ישמח האדם במעשיו  
כיהוא חלקו כי מי יביאנו לראות במה שיהיה  
אחריו:
- <sup>21</sup> Who knows if the human spirit mounts upward or if the animal  
spirit goes downward to the earth?
- <sup>22</sup> 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.

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<sup>21</sup> 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).

<sup>22</sup> 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 וְשִׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשָׁקִים אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשִׂים  
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה דִמְעַת הָעֲשָׁקִים וְאֵין לָהֶם  
מְנַחֵם וּמִיד עֲשָׁקִיהֶם כָּח וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם: ב וְשִׁבְחִי  
אֲנִי אֶת־הַמֵּתִים שֶׁכָּבֵר מָתוּ מִן־הַחַיִּים אֲשֶׁר הֵמָּה  
חַיִּים עֲדָנָה: ג וְטוֹב מִשְׁנֵיהֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עֵדֶן לֹא הָיָה  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאָה אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה הַרָּע אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת  
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: ד וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי אֶת־כָּל־עֲמָל וְאֶת כָּל־בְּשָׂרוֹן  
הַמַּעֲשֵׂה כִּי הִיא קִנְאֶת־אִישׁ מִרְעָהוּ גִסְזָה הַבֶּל  
וְיָרְעוֹת רוּחַ:

ה הַבָּסִיל חֲבֵק אֶת־יָדָיו  
וְאָכַל אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ:

<sup>1</sup> 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! <sup>2</sup> Therefore, rather than the living, who still have lives to live, I praised the dead, those long dead; <sup>3</sup> happier than both of these is he who is yet unborn and has not seen the evil things that are done under the sun. <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> The fool folds his arms  
and eats his own flesh away.

### QOHELETH 4

- <sup>1</sup> The noun הָעֲשָׁקִים is plural and articulated (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*).
- <sup>2</sup> The verb שִׁבַּח has 2 possible meanings: **1** 'to praise' (as WEBBE) and **2** 'to congratulate' (as NJB). The LXX translates it as *ἐπῆνεσα* ('I praised').
- <sup>3</sup> The word 'unborn' does not appear in the MT and is here added, following the NJB, for clarity.
- <sup>4</sup> The noun קִנְאָת 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.
- <sup>5</sup> '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  
מִמְלֵא חֲפָנִים עֵמֶל  
וְרָעוֹת רוּחַ:

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

וְשִׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה הַבֵּל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: <sup>ח</sup> יֵשׁ אֶחָד  
וְאֵין שְׁנֵי גַם בֶּן וְאָח אֵין-לּוֹ וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל-עֲמָלוֹ גַם-  
עֵינָיו עֵינָיו לֹא-תִשְׂבַּע עֲשֶׂר וְלָמִי | אֲנִי עֹמֵל וּמַחְסֵר  
אֶת-נַפְשִׁי מִטוֹבָה גַם-זֶה הַבֵּל וְעֵנִין רָע הוּא:

7 Again, something else futile I observe under the sun; <sup>8</sup> 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.

טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנַיִם מִן-הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלְּהֶם שָׂכָר טוֹב  
בְּעֵמָלָם: <sup>י</sup> כִּי אִם-יִפְּלוּ הָאֶחָד יִקֵּם אֶת-חֲבֵרֹו וְאֵילוֹ  
הָאֶחָד שִׁיפּוֹל וְאֵין שְׁנֵי לְהִקְיָמוֹ: <sup>יא</sup> גַּם אִם-יִשְׁכְּבוּ  
שְׁנַיִם וְחָם לָהֶם וְלֹאֶחָד אֵידָ יָחַם: <sup>יב</sup> וְאִם-יִתְקַפּוּ  
הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנַיִם יַעֲמְדוּ נִגְדָו וְהַחוּט הַמְשֻׁלָּשׁ לֹא  
בְּמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק:

9 Better two than one alone, since thus their work is really rewarding.  
<sup>10</sup> If one should fall, the other helps him up, but woe to the person with no one to help him up when he falls! <sup>11</sup> Again: if two sleep together, they keep warm, but how can anyone keep warm alone?  
<sup>12</sup> Where one alone would be overcome, two will put up resistance; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

טוֹב יֶלֶד מִסְכֵּן וְחָכָם  
מִמֶּלֶךְ זָקֵן וּכְסִיל

<sup>13</sup> Better a youngster poor and wise  
than a monarch old and silly

<sup>6</sup> The last line follows the MT (and NRSV); the NJB has the conjectural 'to chase after the wind'.

<sup>7</sup> 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'.

<sup>8</sup> The adjective רָע ('evil') here means 'misfortune' or 'injustice', 'wrong'. The phrase וְעֵנִין רָע ('sorry business') is used only in Qoheleth (1:13, 2:23, 26, 3:10, 4:8, 5:2, 13, 8:16). The noun עֵנִין ('business'), following the *Qere*, refers to something that keeps a person occupied or busy; it is from the Aramaic loanword עֵינָא ('concern', 'care'); the *Kethib* has עֵינָיו.

<sup>9</sup> An alternative reading of this verse is, "Two people are better than one because they can reap more benefit from their labour."

<sup>10</sup> 'Woe to' follows the NRSV; the NJB has 'what of'.

<sup>11</sup> 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?"

<sup>12</sup> The verbal root הִקָּה means 'to overpower', 'to prevail over' (cf. Job 4:20, 15:24; Qo 6:10).

<sup>13</sup> 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 לְהִזָּהֵר עוֹד:  
 יד כִּי־מִבֵּית הַסּוּרִים יֵצֵא לְמֶלֶךְ  
 כִּי גַם בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ נוֹלֵד רֶשַׁ:  
 טו רְאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַחַיִּים הַמְהֻלְכִים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ עִם  
 הַיָּלֵד הַשֵּׁנִי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמִיד תַּחְתּוֹ: טז אֵין־קֶץ לְכָל־הָעַם  
 לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לִפְנֵיהֶם גַּם הָאַחֲרוֹנִים לֹא יִשְׁמַחוּ־בּו  
 כִּי־גַם־זֶה הִבֵּל וְרַעְיוֹן רוּחַ:  
 ז שְׁמַר רַגְלֶיךָ רַגְלֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ אֶל־בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים  
 וְקָרֹב לִשְׁמֹעַ 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 1<sup>st</sup> line follows the NRSV, the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 NRSV 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' (רַגְלֶיךָ) according to the Ketiv or 'guard your foot' (רַגְלֶיךָ) according to the Qere, which is preserved in the LXX (πόδα σου), Tg & Peshitta. An alternative translation for 'listen' is 'obey': the term לִשְׁמֹעַ (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־תִּבְהִל עַל־פִּיךָ וּלְבָבְךָ אֶל־יִמְהָר לְהוֹצִיא דְבָר  
לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה עַל־  
הָאָרֶץ עַל־כֵּן יִהְיוּ דְבָרֶיךָ מְעֻטִּים: 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:
- ב כִּי בָא הַחֲלוּם בְּרַב עֲנִין  
וְקוֹל כְּסִיל בְּרַב דְּבָרִים: 2 From too much worrying comes illusion;  
from too much talking, the rash vow of a fool.
- ג בְּאִשֶּׁר תִּדְּר נִדָּר לְאֱלֹהִים אֶל־תֵּאָחֵר לְשִׁלְמוֹ כִּי  
אֵין חֶפֶץ בַּכְּסִילִים אֶת אִשֶּׁר־תִּדְּר שְׁלֹם: 3 If you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it, for God has no  
love for fools. Discharge your vow.
- ד טוֹב אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִדְּר מִשִּׁתְּדוֹר וְלֹא תִשְׁלֹם: ה אֶל־  
תִּתֵּן אֶת־פִּיךָ לַחֲטִיָּא אֶת־בִּשְׁרְךָ וְאֶל־תֵּאֲמַר לִפְנֵי 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

- <sup>1</sup> This verse is numbered 5:2 in the NRSV; all verse numbers therein are accordingly incremented (see #4:17).
- <sup>2</sup> 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.
- <sup>3</sup> The literal translation of 'make a vow' (תִּדְּר נִדָּר) is 'vow a vow'; the phrase is a Hebrew idiom in which the root is repeated for emphasis. The verb נִדָּר ('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, Ml 1:14, Ps 76:12,132:2). The noun נִדָּר ('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).
- <sup>4</sup> The pronoun 'it' at the end of this verse is not present in the MT; it is here added for clarity, following the NJB.
- <sup>5</sup> The literal translation of 'make a sinner of you' (the NRSV has 'lead you into sin') is 'bring your flesh into guilt'. The 'messenger' (הַמְלָאֲךָ) 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 Ml 2:7). The LXX replaces the word with θεοῦ (*God*), probably reflecting orthographic confusion with הָאֱלֹהִים.

הַמִּלְאָד כִּי שִׁגְגָה הִיא לָמָּה יִקְצֹף הָאֱלֹהִים עַל-  
קוֹלְדּוֹ וְחָבַל אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו׃ 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?

כִּי בְרַב חִלְמוֹת וְהַבָּלִים <sup>6</sup> From too many illusions  
וּדְבָרִים הַרְבֵּה come futility and too much talk.  
כִּי אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא׃ Therefore, fear God.

אִם־עֲשֶׂק רָשׁ וְגִזְל מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדֵּק תִּרְאֶה בַּמְּדִינָה <sup>7</sup> If in a province you see the oppression of the poor and violation of fair  
אַל־תִּתְמָה עַל־הַחֶפֶץ כִּי גִבָּה מַעַל גִּבָּה שֹׁמֵר judgement and justice, do not be surprised, for over every official there  
וְגִבְהִים עֲלֵיהֶם׃ <sup>8</sup> וַיִּתְּרוֹן אֶרֶץ בְּכָל הִיא הוּא מִלֹּד watches a higher one, and over these, higher officials still. <sup>8</sup> But, what  
לְשָׂדֶה נֶעֱבַד׃ the land yields is for the benefit of all; a king is served by the fields.

אִהָב כֶּסֶף לֹא־יִשְׂבַּע כֶּסֶף <sup>9</sup> No one who loves money ever has enough;  
וּמִי־אִהָב בְּהֶמְזוֹן לֹא תִבּוֹאָה no one who loves luxury has any income;  
גִּם־זֶה הַבֵּל׃ this, too, is futile.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

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

<sup>8</sup> 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, “βασιλεὺς 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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  
וּמִה־כֶּשֶׁרֹן לִבְעָלֶיהָ כִּי  
אִסְדָּאוֹת רֹאית עֵינָיו:

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

י"א מִתּוֹקָה שְׁנַת הָעֵבֶד אִסְמַעַט וְאִסְהֲרָבָה יֹאכֵל  
וְהַשֹּׁבֵעַ לַעֲשִׂיר אֵינָנו מְנִיחַ לוֹ לִישׁוֹן: <sup>11</sup> 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 עֹשֶׂר שָׁמֹר  
לִבְעָלָיו לְרַעְתּוֹ: <sup>12</sup> Something grossly unjust I observe under the sun: riches stored and turning to loss for their owner.

י"ג וְאֶבֶד הָעֹשֶׂר הֵהוּא בְּעִנְיָן רָע וְהוֹלִיד בֵּן וְאִין  
בִּידּוֹ מְאוֹמָה: י"ד כְּאִשֶּׁר יֵצֵא מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ עָרוֹם יָשׁוּב  
לָלֶכֶת כְּשֶׁבָא וּמְאוֹמָה לֹא־יֵשָׁא בְּעַמְלּוֹ שְׂיִלְדָּ  
בִּידּוֹ: טוֹ וְגַם־זֶה רָעָה חוֹלָה כָּל־עֲמַת שָׁבָא כֵּן יֵלֶךְ <sup>13</sup> An unlucky venture, and the riches are lost; a son is born to him and he has nothing to leave him. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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).

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

<sup>11</sup> Since desires are insatiable, riches are dangerous.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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'.

<sup>14</sup> 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."

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

וְמִה־יִתְרוֹן לוֹ שִׁיעֵמַל לְרוּחַ: <sup>טז</sup> גַּם כָּל־יָמָיו בַּחֹשֶׁךְ  
יֹאכַל וְכַעַס הָרֶבֶה וְחִלּוֹ וְקִצְף:

<sup>יז</sup> הִנֵּה אֲשֶׁר־רָאִיתִי אֲנִי טוֹב אֲשֶׁר־יָפָה לֶאֱכֹל־  
וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִרְאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ | שִׁיעֵמַל תַּחַת־  
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מִסֵּפֶר יָמֵי־חַיָּו אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־  
הוּא חֶלְקוֹ: <sup>יח</sup> גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים  
עֹשֶׂר וְנִכְסִים וְהִשְׁלִיטוֹ לֶאֱכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ וְלִשְׂאֹת אֶת־  
חֶלְקוֹ וְלִשְׂמַח בַּעֲמָלוֹ זֶה מַתַּת אֱלֹהִים הִיא: <sup>יט</sup> כִּי  
לֹא הָרֶבֶה יִזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמָיו חַיָּו כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים מַעֲנֶה  
בַּשְּׂמִינָה לָבוֹ:

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

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For, such a person will hardly notice the passing of time, so long as God keeps his heart occupied with joy.

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

<sup>17</sup> The term לֶקֶח ('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).

<sup>18</sup> The syntax of this verse is difficult. The best approach is to view וְהִשְׁלִיטוֹ ('he has given him the ability') as governing the three following infinitives: לֶאֱכֹל ('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.

<sup>19</sup> 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

א יֵשׁ רָעָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְרָבָה הִיא  
עַל־הָאָדָם: ב אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִתְּנֶלֶוּ הָאֱלֹהִים עֲשָׂרָה  
וְנִכְסִים וְכְבוֹד וְאִיגָנוּ חָסֵר לְנַפְשׁוֹ | מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר־  
יִתְּנָהּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁלִיטֶנּוּ הָאֱלֹהִים לְאָכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי אִישׁ  
נִכְרִי יֵאָכְלֶנּוּ זֶה הַבֶּל וְחֲלִי רָע הוּא: ג אִם־יֹולִיד  
אִישׁ מֵאָה וְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת יִחְיֶה וְרַב | שִׁיְהִיו יְמֵי־  
שָׁנָיו וְנַפְשׁוֹ לֹא־תִשָּׁבַע מִן־הַטּוֹבָה וְגַם־קְבוּרָה  
לֹא־הִיְתָה לוֹ אִמְרָתִי טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ הַנָּפֹל:

ד כִּי־בִהְבֵּל בָּא וּבַחֲשֶׁךְ יֵלֵךְ  
וּבַחֲשֶׁךְ שְׁמוֹ יִכָּסֶה:

ה גַּם־שֶׁמֶשׁ לֹא־רָאָה וְלֹא יָדַע גִּנְחַת לְזֶה מִזֶּה:  
ו וְאֵלּוּ חִיָּה אֶלֶף שָׁנִים פַּעַמִּים וְטוֹבָה לֹא רָאָה

## QOHELETH 6

<sup>1</sup> I see another evil under the sun, which goes hard upon people;  
<sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> In futility, it came, into darkness, it departs,  
and in darkness will its name be buried.

<sup>5</sup> It has never seen or known the sun, so it will rest more easily than a  
person, <sup>6</sup> who would never have known the good things of life, even by

### QOHELETH 6

- <sup>1</sup> The phrase **היא רבה** has been interpreted in two basic ways: **1** commonality, 'it is common among men', as in the LXX – *καὶ πολλή ἐστ* ('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').
- <sup>2</sup> 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.
- <sup>3</sup> 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).
- <sup>4</sup> 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.
- <sup>5</sup> The term translated 'rest' refers to freedom from toil, anxiety, and misery – part of the misfortune that the miserly man of wealth must endure.
- <sup>6</sup> The rich man who lives two thousand years and the stillborn who never lived one day go to the same place – the grave.

הֲלֹא אֶל־מָקוֹם אֶחָד הָפֵל הוֹלֵךְ:	living a thousand years twice over. Do we not all end in the same place?
ז כל־עֵמֶל הָאָדָם לִפְיָהוּ	7 All toil is for the mouth,
וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלֵא:	yet the appetite is never satisfied.
ח כִּי מִה־יֹתֵר לַחֲכָם מִן־הַבְּסִיל	8 What advantage has the wise over the fool?
מִה־לְעַנִּי יוֹדֵעַ לַהֲלֹךְ נֶגֶד הַחַיִּים:	And what of the pauper who knows how to behave in society?
ט טוֹב מֵרְאֹה עֵינַיִם מִהֲלֹךְ־נֶפֶשׁ	9 Better the object seen than the sting of desire:
גַּם־זֶה הֶבֶל וְרֵעוֹת רוּחַ:	for the latter, too, is futile and chasing after the wind.
י מִה־שֶּׁהָיָה כָּבֵד נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ	10 What has been is already defined:
וְנוֹדַע אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אָדָם	we know what people are:
וְלֹא־יֻכַּל לְדִין עִם שֶׁהִתְקִיף שֶׁתְּקִיף מִמֶּנּוּ:	they cannot contend with who is stronger than they are.
יא כִּי יִשְׁדַּבְּרִים הִרְבֵּה מִרְבִּים הֶבֶל מִה־יֹתֵר	11 The more we say, the more futile it is: what good can we derive from
לָאָדָם: יב כִּי מִי־יֹדַע מִה־טוֹב לָאָדָם בַּחַיִּים מִסֶּפֶר	it? 12 For, who knows what is best for someone during life, during the
יִמֵּי־חַיֵּי הַבָּלוּ וַיַּעֲשֵׂם כָּצֵל אֲשֶׁר מִי־יֹגִיד לָאָדָם	days of futile life that are spent like a shadow? Who can tell anyone what
מִה־יִּהְיֶה אַחֲרָיו תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:	will happen after him under the sun?

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- 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 requires 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 יִמֵּי־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 מִשָּׁמֶן טוֹב א  
וַיּוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הַוָּלָדוֹ:  
טוֹב לָלֶכֶת אֶל-בֵּית-אֲבִל ב  
מִלָּכֶת אֶל-בֵּית מִשְׁתֶּה  
בְּאֲשֶׁר הוּא סוֹף כָּל-הָאָדָם  
וְהַחַי יִתֵּן אֶל-לִבּוֹ:  
טוֹב כְּעַס מִשְׂחֹק ג  
כִּי-בְרַע פָּנִים יֵיטֵב לֵב:  
לֵב חֲכָמִים בְּבֵית אֲבִל ד  
וְלֵב כְּסִילִים בְּבֵית 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.

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### QOHELETH 7

- <sup>1</sup> The term שָׁמֶן ('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 extra large letter, as it appears in almost all *Hebrew MSS*.
- <sup>2</sup> 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.
- <sup>3</sup> Alternative translations for 'sadness' are 'sorrow', 'grief' (NEB) and 'vexation' (JPS).
- <sup>4</sup> The expression 'house of mirth' refers to a banquet where those who attend engage in self-indulgent feasting and riotous drinking.
- <sup>5</sup> 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 merry-making: 'song of fools'.

וּכְקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר  
 בֶּן שְׁחַק הַבְּסִיל  
 וְגַם־זֶה הַבֵּל:  
 ז' כִּי הָעֵשֶׁק יְהוֹלִל חָכָם  
 וַיֹּאבֵד אֶת־לֵב מַתְנָה:  
 ח טוֹב אַחֲרִית דְּבַר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ  
 טוֹב אַרְד־רוּחַ מִגְּבַה־רוּחַ:

ט אַל־תִּבְהַל בְּרוּחְךָ לִכְעוֹס בִּי כַעַס בַּחֵיק בְּסִילִים  
 ינֹחַ: 'אַל־תֹּאמַר מָה הָיָה שֶׁהַיָּמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים הָיוּ  
 טוֹבִים מֵאֵלָּה בִּי לֹא מִחֲכָמָה שֶׁאַתָּה עֹלֶזָה:  
 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 הַבֵּל 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<sup>a</sup>) 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' (μακροθυμος).  
 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' (צֵל) 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  
וַיִּתְּרוֹן דָּעַת הַחֲכָמָה תַּחֲיָה בַעֲלֶיהָ:

ג רֹאֵה אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים  
כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָוְתָו:  
יד בַּיּוֹם טוֹבָה הִיָּה בְטוֹב וּבַיּוֹם רָעָה רֹאֵה  
גַּם אֶת־זֶה לַעֲמֹת־זֶה  
עֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים עַל־דְּבָרָת  
שׁוּלָא יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אַחֲרָיו מְאוֹמָה:  
טו אֶת־הַכֹּל רָאִיתִי בִימֵי הַבָּלִי  
יֵשׁ צַדִּיק אֲבָד בְּצַדִּיקוֹ  
וַיֵּשׁ רָשָׁע מֵאַרְיָךְ בְּרַעְתּוֹ:  
טז אֶל־תְּהִי צַדִּיק הַרְבֵּה  
וְאַל־תִּתְּחַכֵּם יוֹתֵר  
לְמָה תִּשׁוּמָם:  
יז אֶל־תִּרְשָׁע הַרְבֵּה וְאַל־תְּהִי סָבֵל  
לְמָה תִּמּוֹת בְּלֹא עֵתָד:

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?

<sup>13</sup> An alternative reading for 'God's Creation' is 'the work of God'.

<sup>14</sup> 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).

<sup>15</sup> 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).

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

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

יח טוב אשר תאחז בזה  
 וגם-מזה אל-תנח את-ידך  
 כי-ירא אלהים יצא את-כלם:  
 יט החכמה תעז לחכם מעשרה שליטים אשר היו  
 בעיר: כ כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה-טוב  
 ולא יחטא: כא גם לכל-הדברים אשר ידברו אל-  
 תתן לבך אשר לא-תשמע את-עבדך מקללך:  
 כב כי גם-פעמים רבות ידע לבך אשר גם-אתה  
 את קללת אחרים: כג כל-זה נסיתי בחכמה  
 אמרתי אחכמה והיא רחוקה ממני:  
 כד רחוק מה-שהיה ועמק |  
 עמק מי ימצאנו:

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 requires explanation. The LXX expands this verse, slightly altering its impact:

ὅτι πλειστάκις πονηρεύσεται σε καὶ καθόδους πολλὰς κακώσει καρδίαν σου, ὅπως καὶ γε σὺ κατηράσω ἐτέρους.  
 For often, he will wickedly inflict your heart, as also you have abused others.

23 The cohortative אֶחְכֶּמָה (from חָכַם '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?"

- כה סְבוֹתִי אָנִי וּלְבִי לִדְעַת וּלְתוֹר וּבִקֵּשׁ חֲכָמָה  
וְחִשְׁבוֹן וּלְדַעַת רָשָׁע פֶּסֶל וְהַסְכָּלוֹת הוֹלָלוֹת:  
כו וּמוֹצֵא אָנִי מֵרַמּוֹת אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה  
אֲשֶׁר־הִיא מְצוּדִים וְחֲרָמִים לִבָּהּ  
אֲסוּרִים יְדִיהָ טוֹב לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים  
יִמְלֹט מִמָּוֶה וְחוֹטֵא יִלְכָּד בָּהּ:  
כז רָאָה זֶה מַצְאֹתִי אִמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת  
אֶחָת לֹא־חָתַל לְמַצֵּא חִשְׁבוֹן:  
כח אֲשֶׁר עוֹד־בִּקְשָׁה נַפְשִׁי וְלֹא מַצְאֹתִי  
אָדָם אֶחָד מֵאֵלֶּף מַצְאֹתִי  
וְאִשָּׁה בְּכָל־אֵלֶּה לֹא מַצְאֹתִי:  
כט לְבַד רָאָה־זֶה מַצְאֹתִי  
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם יֹשֵׁר  
וְהֵמָּה בִקְשׁוּ חֲשִׁבֹנוֹת רַבִּים:
- 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.
- 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.
- 27 This is what I think, says Qoheleth, adding one thing to another to draw some conclusion,
- 28 which I am still looking for, although unsuccessfully: one man in a thousand, I may find, but a woman better than other women – never.
- 29 This alone is my conclusion: God has created man straightforward, and human artifices are human inventions.

<sup>25</sup> 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’.

<sup>26</sup> 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’.

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

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

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

## קוהלת פרק ח

א מי כִּהְחֹכֵם  
וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דְּבָר  
חֲכָמַת אָדָם תֹּאִיר פָּנָיו  
וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנָא:  
ב אֲנִי פִי־מֶלֶךְ שֹׁמֵר  
וְעַל דְּבַרְתָּ שְׁבוּעַת אֱלֹהִים:  
ג אֶל־תִּבְהֹל מִפָּנָיו תֵּלֵךְ  
אֶל־תַּעֲמֹד בַּדָּבָר רָע  
ד כִּי כֹל־אֲשֶׁר יַחֲפֹץ יַעֲשֶׂה:  
בְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר־מֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹטֹן  
וּמִי יֹאמַר־לוֹ מִה־תַּעֲשֶׂה:  
ה שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יֵדַע דְּבַר רָע  
וְעַתָּה וּמִשְׁפָּט יֵדַע לֵב חָכָם:

## QOHELETH 8

- 1 Who compares with the sage?  
Who else knows how to explain things?  
Wisdom lights up the face,  
enlivening a grim expression.
- 2 Obey the king's command and,  
because of the divine promise,
- 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.
- 4 Since the word of a king is sovereign,  
what is the point of saying, "Why do that?"
- 5 One who obeys the command will come to no harm;  
the heart of the sage knows the right moment and verdict.

### QOHELETH 8

- <sup>1</sup> The MT vocalizes יִשְׁנָא as יִשְׁנָא ('enlivening', Pual imperfect 3MS from שָׁנָה 'to change'). However, the LXX (μισθωθήσεται) reflects an alternate vocalisation of יִשְׁנָא (Niphal imperfect from שָׁנָה 'to hate'), while the Vg has *commutabit*, reflecting שָׁנָה ('to repeat').
- <sup>2</sup> For the 1<sup>st</sup> line, the MT reads, "I obey the king's command," where אֲנִי is the first person independent personal pronoun (JPS conjecturally inserts 'counsel you'); other Hebrew MSS, the LXX (στούμα), 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.
- <sup>3</sup> For the 2<sup>nd</sup> line, here following the NJB and NJPS, the NRSV reads, "do not delay when the matter is unpleasant."
- <sup>4</sup> Alternative readings for 'sovereign' (here following the NJB) are 'powerful' (NRSV) and 'absolute'.
- <sup>5</sup> The term עֵת ('moment') connotes a proper, suitable time for an event.

ו כי לְכָל־חֶפֶץ יֵשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט  
 כִּי־רַעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו:  
 ז כִּי־אֵינָנו יֹדַע מַה־שִּׁיחִיָּה  
 כִּי בְּאִשֶּׁר יִהְיֶה מִי יֵגִיד לוֹ:  
 ח אֵין אָדָם שְׁלִיט בְּרוּחַ לְכָל־אֶת־הָרוּחַ  
 וְאֵין שְׁלִטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת  
 וְאֵין מִשְׁלַחַת בַּמִּלְחָמָה  
 וְלֹא־יִמְלֹט רָשָׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו:

ט אֶת־כָּל־זֶה רָאִיתִי וְנִתְּנוֹן אֶת־לִבִּי לְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה  
 אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ עֵת אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַט הָאָדָם  
 בָּאָדָם לְרַע לוֹ: ' וּבִכֵּן רָאִיתִי רָשָׁעִים קְבָרִים וּבָאוּ  
 וּמִמָּקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יִהְיוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בָּעִיר אֲשֶׁר כֵּן  
 עָשׂוּ גַם־זֶה הֵבִיל:  
 יא אֲשֶׁר אֵין־נַעֲשֶׂה פְתָגָם מַעֲשֵׂה הָרַעָה מִהֲרָה  
 עַל־כֵּן מָלֵא לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם בָּהֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע:

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.

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 2<sup>nd</sup> line, the NRSV reads, "although the troubles of mortals lie heavy upon them."

7 We take the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 correct '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 (εἰσάχθεντας) 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 פְּתָגָם ('sentence') is a loanword from Persian; it occurs twice in the OT (here and Est 1:20), twice in the Apocrypha (Si 5:11, 8:9), and five times in the Qumran MSS (11Q<sup>15</sup> Job 9:2, 29:4, 30:1, 34:3, 1Q<sup>ap</sup> 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 וּמֵאֲרִיךְ לֹא כִּי גַם־  
 יוֹדַע אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה־טוֹב לִירְאֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר  
 יִירָאוּ מִלִּפְנֵי: יט וְטוֹב לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְרָשָׁע וְלֹא־יֵאֲרִיךְ  
 יָמִים כַּצֶּל אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנו יֵרָא מִלִּפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים: יד יֵשׁ־  
 הֶבֶל אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר | יֵשׁ צַדִּיקִים  
 אֲשֶׁר מַגִּיעַ אֱלֹהִים בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַרְשָׁעִים וְיֵשׁ רָשָׁעִים  
 שְׂמָגִיעַ אֱלֹהִים בְּמַעֲשֵׂה הַצַּדִּיקִים אֲמַרְתִּי שְׂגִם־זֶה  
 הֶבֶל:

טו וְשִׁבַּחְתִּי אֲנִי אֶת־הַשְׂמֵחָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין־טוֹב לָאָדָם  
 תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי אִם־לֶאֱכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׂמֹחַ  
 וְהוּא יִלְוֶנוּ בְּעַמְלֹו יְמֵי חַיָּו אֲשֶׁר־נִתְּנָלֹו הָאֱלֹהִים  
 תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ:

טז בְּאֲשֶׁר נִתְּתִי אֶת־לִבִּי לַדַּעַת חֲכָמָה וְלִרְאוֹת  
 אֶת־הָעֲנָן אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה עַל־הָאָרֶץ כִּי גַם בַּיּוֹם  
 וּבַלַּיְלָה שָׁנָה בְּעֵינָיו אֵינָנו 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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 – <sup>17</sup> I have scrutinised God’s whole Creation:

<sup>13</sup> The phrase בַּצֶּל (*‘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.

<sup>14</sup> 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).

<sup>15</sup> 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).

<sup>16</sup> 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).

<sup>17</sup> 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 יוֹכֵל הָאָדָם לְמַצּוֹא אֶת־  
הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ בְּשׁוֹל אֲשֶׁר  
יַעֲמֹל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמָּצֵא וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר  
הַחֲכָם לְדַעַת לֹא יוֹכֵל 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 נָתַתִּי אֶל־לְבִי וּלְבוֹר אֶת־כָּל־זֶה  
אֲשֶׁר הַצְדִּיקִים וְהַחֲכָמִים וְעַבְדֵיהֶם בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים

גַּם־אֶהְבָּה גַּם־שִׂנְאָה  
אֵין יוֹדַע הָאָדָם הַכֹּל לִפְנֵיהֶם: ב הַכֹּל  
כַּאֲשֶׁר לְכָל מְקָרָה אֶחָד  
לַצְדִּיק וְלָרָשָׁע לְטוֹב  
וְלַטָּהוֹר וְלַטָּמֵא  
וְלִזְבֵּחַ וְלֹאֲשֶׁר  
אֵינוֹ זֹבֵחַ כְּטוֹב כְּטָמֵא  
הַנִּשְׁפָּע כַּאֲשֶׁר שְׂבוּעָה יֵרָא:

ג זֶה הָרָע בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ כִּי־  
מְקָרָה אֶחָד לְכָל וְגַם לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם מְלֹא־רָע  
וְהוֹלִלּוֹת בְּלִבָּבָם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם וְאַחֲרָיו אֶל־הַמָּתִים:  
ד כִּי־מִי אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יַחֲבֹר אֶל כָּל־הַחַיִּים יֵשׁ  
בְּטָחוֹן כִּי־לִכְלֹב חֵי הוּא טוֹב מִן־הָאֲרִיָּה הַמֵּת:

## QOHELETH 9

<sup>1</sup> 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 <sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> But there is hope still linked to the rest of the living:  
better to be a live dog than a dead lion.

### QOHELETH 9

<sup>1</sup> 'I have applied myself' is conjectural (cf. 1:13, 17); the MT has 'I have put towards my heart'. 'Their activities' is conjectural: וְעַבְדֵיהֶם 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.

<sup>2</sup> 'Folly' follows the LXX (ματαιότης) and Peshitta; the MT has 'all' (הַכֹּל – dittography). 'And for the bad' follows the LXX (καὶ τῷ κακῷ) and Peshitta; it is not present in the MT.

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

<sup>4</sup> 'Linked' (יַחֲבֹר) follows the marginal Qere; the Kethib has 'chosen' (יִבְחַר) – the difference involves transposition of the letters, ב & ח.

ה כי החיים יודעים שימתו והמתים אינם יודעים 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 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 לך אכל בשמחה לחמך 7 So, eat your bread in joy,  
 ושתה בלב-טוב יינך drink your wine with a glad heart,  
 כי כבר רצה האלהים את-מעשיך: since God has already approved your actions.  
 ח בכל-עַת יהיו בגדיך לבנים 8 At all times, dress in white  
 ושמן על-ראשך אל-יחסר: and keep your head well scented.  
 ט ראה חיים עם-אשה אשר-אהבת כל-ימי 9 Spend your life with the woman you love,  
 חיי הבלך אשר נתן-לך תחת all the days of futile life God gives you under the sun,  
 השמש כל ימי הבלך כי הוא חלקך throughout your futile days,  
 בחיים ובעמלך since this is your lot in life  
 אשר-אתה עמל תחת השמש: and in the effort you expend under the sun.

- 
- <sup>5</sup> The literal translation of 'their memory' is 'memory of them' (the pronominal suffix is an objective genitive).  
<sup>6</sup> 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.  
<sup>7</sup> In place of 'already' (following the NJB), the NRSV has 'long ago'.  
<sup>8</sup> For this verse, the NRSV reads, "Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head."  
<sup>9</sup> The phrase כל-ימי חיי הבלך ('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 (repetition: the scribe wrote twice what should have been written once) from כל-ימי חיי הבלך ('all the days of futile life') that appears in the preceding line. On the other hand, its omission in the alternate textual tradition may be due to haplography (accidental omission of repeated words) with the earlier line.

כָּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ  
לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכַחַךְ עֲשֵׂה  
כִּי אֵין מַעֲשֵׂה וְחִשְׁבֹּן וְדַעַת וְחִכְמָה  
בְּשֹׁאֵל אֲשֶׁר אֵתָּה הַלֵּךְ שָׁמָּה:  
{ס}

א' שָׁבֹתִי וְרָאָה תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ  
כִּי לֹא לַקְלִים הַמְרוֹץ וְלֹא לַגְּבוּרִים  
הַמְלַחֲמָה וְגַם לֹא  
לַחֲכָמִים לֶחֶם וְגַם  
לֹא לַנְּבֹנִים עֶשֶׂר  
וְגַם לֹא לַיֹּדְעִים חָן  
כִּי־עַתָּה וּפָגַע יִקְרָה אֶת־כָּל־ם:  
ב' כִּי גַם לֹא־יָדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עֵתוֹ  
כַּדָּגִים שֶׁנֶּאֱחָזִים בַּמְצוּדָה רָעָה  
וְכַצִּפֹּרִים הָאֲחֻזֹּת בַּפֶּח כֶּהֱם יוֹקְשִׁים בְּנִי  
הָאָדָם לַעֲתָ רָעָה  
כְּשֶׁתִּפּוֹל עָלֵיהֶם פֶּתְאֻם:

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

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.

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:

<sup>10</sup> Here, and elsewhere, the LXX translates 'Sheol' (שֹׁאֵל) as 'Hades' (ᾍδης) and JPS uses 'grave'.

<sup>11</sup> For the last line, here following the NJB, the NRSV reads, "but time and chance happen to them all."

<sup>12</sup> Some suggest that עֵת ('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).

<sup>13</sup> The literal translation of 'strikes me as important' is 'seems great to me'.

יד עִיר קְטַנָּה וְאֲנָשִׁים בָּהּ מְעַט וּבֵאֵלֶיהָ מֶלֶךְ  
 גָּדוֹל וְסָבַב אֹתָהּ וּבָנָה עָלֶיהָ מְצֻדִים גְּדֹלִים:  
 טו וּמָצָא בָּהּ אִישׁ מְסָכֵן חָכֵם וּמִלֹּט־הוּא אֶת־הָעִיר  
 טז בַּחֲכָמָתוֹ וְאָדָם לֹא זָכַר אֶת־הָאִישׁ הַמְּסָכֵן הַהוּא:  
 וְאָמַרְתִּי אָנֹכִי

טז טוֹבָה חֲכָמָה מִגְּבוּרָה  
 וְחֲכָמַת הַמְּסָכֵן בְּזוּיָהּ  
 וְדִבְרֵיו אֵינָם נִשְׁמָעִים:

יז דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים בְּנִחַת נְשִׁמָּעִים מִזַּעֲקַת מוֹשֵׁל  
 בַּכְּסִילִים:

יח טוֹבָה חֲכָמָה מִכָּלִי קֶרֶב  
 וְחוֹטֵא אֶחָד יֹאבֵד טוֹבָה הַרְבֵּה:

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, 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:

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.

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

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

14 'Siege-works' (or 'terracing') follows the LXX (χαράκας) and Peshitta; the MT has 'snares' (מְצֻדִים). 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 וּמִלֹּט ('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).

16 The participle form נִשְׁמָעִים (Niphal participle masculine plural from שָׁמַע, '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

א זְבוּבֵי מוֹת יִבְאִישׁ יִבְיַע שֶׁמֶן רוֹקַח

יִקַּר מַחְכְּמָה מִכְבוֹד סְכָלוֹת מַעֵט:

ב לֵב חָכֵם לְיְמִינוֹ

וְלֵב כָּסִיל לְשִׁמְאֹלוֹ:

ג וְגַם־בִּדְרֹךְ כְּשֶׁהִסְכֵּל כְּשֶׁסָּכַל הַלֵּךְ לְבוֹ חָסֵר

וְאָמַר לְכָל סָכַל הוּא:

ד אֶם־רוּחַ הַמוֹשֵׁל תִּעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ

מִקּוֹמְךָ אֶל־תִּנָּח

כִּי מִרְפָּא יִנִּיחַ חֲטָאִים גְּדוֹלִים:

ה יֵשׁ רָעָה רְאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כְּשֶׁגָּגָה שִׁיָּצָא

מִלְפָּנֵי הַשְּׁלִיט: וְנָתַן הַסֶּכֶל בַּמְרוֹמִים רַבִּים

וְעֹשִׂירִים בַּשָּׁפֶל יֵשְׁבוּ: וְרָאִיתִי עֲבָדִים עַל־סוּסִים

וְשָׂרִים הֹלְכִים כְּעֲבָדִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

## QOHELETH 10

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> The term מִקּוֹמְךָ ('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).

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> 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."

<sup>7</sup> In place of 'slaves', some translators prefer 'servants'.

ח	חפר גומץ בו יפול ופרך גדר ישכנו נחש:	8	He who digs a pit may fall into it; he who undermines a wall may be bitten by a snake.
ט	מסיע אבנים יעצב בהם בוקע עצים יסכן בם:	9	He who quarries stones may get hurt by them; he who chops wood may take a risk from it.
י	אם-קהה הברזל והוא לא-פנים קלקל וחילים יגבר ויתרון הכשיר חכמה:	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.
יא	אם-ישך הנחש בלוא-לחש ואין יתרון לבעל הלשון:	11	If, for want of charming, the snake bites, the snake-charmer gets nothing out of it.
יב	דברי פי-חכם חן ושפתות פסיל תבלענו:	12	The sayings of a sage give pleasure; what a fool says procures his own ruin:
יג	תחלת דברי-פיהו סכלות ואחרית פיהו הוללות רעה:	13	His words have their origin in stupidity and their ending in treacherous folly.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.*

<sup>10</sup> 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.*

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

<sup>12</sup> An alternative reading of ‘give pleasure’ (יח) is ‘are gracious’, as in the LXX (χάρις).

<sup>13</sup> 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.

וְהַסֵּכֵל יִרְבֶּה דְּבָרִים לֹא־יָדַע הָאָדָם מִה־שִּׁיחִיָּה וְאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מֵאַחֲרָיו מִי יֵגִיד לוֹ:	יד	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?
עֲמַל הַכְּסִילִים תִּיגַעֲנוּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע לָלֶכֶת אֶל־עִיר:	טו	15 A fool finds hard work very tiring, he cannot even find his own way into town.
אֵי־לָךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֹלֶכֶךָ נָעַר וְשָׂרִיךְ בִּבְקָר יֹאכְלוּ:	טז	16 Woe to you, country with a lad for a king, and where princes start feasting in the morning!
אֲשֶׁר־יֵךְ אֶרֶץ שְׂמֹלֶכֶךָ בְּנֵי־חוֹרִים וְשָׂרִיךְ בָּעֵת יֹאכְלוּ בְּגִבּוֹרָה וְלֹא בַשְּׂתִי:	יז	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!
בַּעֲצֻלָּתִים יִמָּד הַמִּקְרָה וּבִשְׁפָלוּת יָדַיִם יִדְלָף הַבַּיִת:	יח	18 Thanks to idleness, the roof gives way; thanks to carelessness, the house lets in the rain.

<sup>14</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> line is best taken as the 3<sup>rd</sup> line of a triplet including v. 13.

<sup>15</sup> 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 (תִּיגַעֲנוּ, 'wearies him' and לֹא־יָדַע 'he does (not) know') in this verse are both singular in form.

<sup>16</sup> 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' (בְּנֵי־חוֹרִים), suggesting one who was not well trained and prepared by noble birth to ascend to the throne.

<sup>17</sup> 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!"

<sup>18</sup> The literal translation of 'carelessness' (the NRSV has 'indolence') is 'lowering of hands' (the LXX has ἀργία χειρῶν – 'idleness of hands').

יט לְשִׁחוּק עֲשִׂים לָחֶם  
 וַיֵּין יִשְׂמַח חַיִּים  
 וְהַכֶּסֶף יַעֲנֶה אֶת־הַכֹּל:  
 כ גַּם בַּמַּדְעָה מֶלֶךְ אֶל־תִּקְלָל  
 וּבַחֲדָרֵי מִשְׁכְּבֶךָ אֶל־תִּקְלָל עֹשִׂיר  
 כִּי עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יוֹלִיד אֶת־הַקּוֹל  
 וּבַעַל הַכְּנָפִים כְּנָפָיו יִגִּיד דְּבָר:

- 19 We give parties to enjoy ourselves,  
 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.

19 The term לָחֶם (*'parties'*) is used literally of 'bread' and figuratively for a 'feast'. This obscure line has occasioned numerous proposals: '*a feast 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 הַכְּנָפִים (*'winged messenger'*) – following the *Kethib* (the *Qere* has כְּנָפָיו) – is an idiom for a winged creature or bird (Pr 1:17).

## קוהלת פרק יא

א שֶׁלַח לַחֲמֶךָ עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם  
כִּי־בִרְבֵּי הַיָּמִים תִּמְצָאֲנוּ:  
ב תִּן־חֶלֶק לְשִׁבְעָה וְגַם לְשִׁמוֹנָה  
ג כִּי לֹא תֵדַע מַה־יְהִיָּה רָעָה עַל־הָאָרֶץ:  
אִם־יִמְלְאוּ הָעָבִים  
ד גֶּשֶׁם עַל־הָאָרֶץ יִרְיָקוּ  
וְאִם־יִפֹּל עֵץ בְּדָרוֹם וְאִם בְּצָפוֹן  
מִקוֹם שִׁיפֹל הָעֵץ שָׁם יִהְיֶה:  
שֹׁמֵר רוּחַ לֹא יִזְרַע  
וְרֹאֶה בְּעָבִים לֹא יִקְצֹר:

## QOHELETH 11

- 1 Cast your bread on the water,  
eventually you will recover it.
- 2 Offer a share to seven or eight people,  
for, you can never tell what disaster may occur.
- 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.
- 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' (לַחֲמֶךָ) 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.

ה כַּאֲשֶׁר אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ מִה־דֶּרֶךְ הָרוּחַ  
 כַּעֲצָמִים בְּבֶטֶן הַמְּלָאָה  
 כָּכָה לֹא תִדַּע אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים  
 אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַכֹּל:  
 ו בִּבְקֹר זֶרַע אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ  
 וְלַעֲרֵב אֶל־תִּנַּח יָדְךָ  
 כִּי אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ אִי זֶה יִכָּשֵׁר הַזֶּה אוֹ־זֶה  
 וְאִם־שְׁנֵיהֶם כָּאֶחָד טוֹבִים:  
 ז וּמִתּוֹק הָאֹזֹר  
 וְטוֹב לַעֲיִנַּיִם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:  
 ח כִּי אִם־שָׁנִים הִרְבָּה יְחִיָּה הָאָדָם  
 בְּכֹלֹם יִשְׁמַח וַיִּזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ  
 כִּי־הִרְבָּה יְהִיו כָּל־שָׁבָא הַבֹּל:

- 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.
- 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.
- 7 How sweet light is,  
 how delightful it is to see the sun!
- 8 However many years you live, enjoy them all,  
 but remember, the days of darkness will be many:  
 futility awaits you at the end.

<sup>5</sup> There is debate whether מִה־דֶּרֶךְ הָרוּחַ 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.

<sup>6</sup> The terms בִּקְר ('*morning*') and עֶרֶב ('*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*).

<sup>7</sup> The term הָאֹזֹר ('*light*') is used figuratively (metonymy of association) 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 מִתּוֹק ('*sweet*') is often used elsewhere in reference to honey; the point is that life is sweet and should be savoured like honey.

<sup>8</sup> 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).

ט שִׂמַח בַּחֹר בַּיְלָדוּתֶיךָ  
וַיְטִיבֶךָ לִבְךָ בַּיָּמִי בַּחֲוֹרוֹתֶיךָ  
וְהִלַּךְ בְּדַרְכֵי לִבְךָ וּבְמִרְאֵי עֵינֶיךָ  
וְדַע כִּי  
עַל-כָּל-אֲלֹהָ יִבְאֶךָ הָאֱלֹהִים בַּמִּשְׁפָּט:  
י וְהָסֵר כָּעַס מִלִּבְךָ  
וְהִעֲבֵר רָעָה מִבְּשָׁרְךָ  
כִּי-הַיְלָדוּת וְהַשְׁחָרוֹת הֶבֶל:

- <sup>9</sup> Young man, enjoy yourself while you are young,  
make the most of the days of your youth,  
follow the prompting of your heart and desire of your eye,  
but remember,  
God will call you to account for everything.
- <sup>10</sup> Rid your heart of indignation,  
keep your body clear of suffering,  
though youth and the age of black hair are both futile.

<sup>9</sup> This verse is perhaps a popular saying about youth, to which Qoheleth adds a prudent reminder of youth's futility.

<sup>10</sup> In place of 'the age of black hair' (וְהַשְׁחָרוֹת) - a metonym for youthfulness), the LXX has 'thoughtlessness' (ἄνοια).

## קוהלת פרק יב

זָכֹר אֶת־בּוֹרְאֶיךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּחַיֹּתֶיךָ א  
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָבֹאוּ יְמֵי הָרָעָה וְהִגִּיעוּ  
שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵין־לִי בָהֶם חֶפֶץ:  
עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִחַשֵּׁךְ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהָאֹר  
וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְהַכּוֹכָבִים ב  
וְשָׁבוּ הָעָנָנִים אַחֲרֵי הַגֶּשֶׁם:  
בַּיּוֹם שִׁיזְעוּ שִׁמְרֵי הַבַּיִת ג  
וְהִתְעוּתוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַחֵיל  
וּבִטְלוּ הַטְחָנוֹת כִּי מְעֻטּוֹ  
וַחֲשָׁכוּ הָרְאוֹת בָּאֲרָבוֹת:  
וְסָגְרוּ דְלָתַיִם בְּשׁוֹק ד  
בְּשֹׁפֶל קוֹל הַטְחָנָה  
וַיִּקּוּם לְקוֹל הַצִּפּוֹר  
וַיִּשְׁחוּ כָל־בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר:

## 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;

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### QOHELETH 12

- <sup>1</sup> 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).
- <sup>2</sup> 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).
- <sup>3</sup> The word translated as 'grinders' (הַטְחָנוֹת) is feminine; many translate as 'grinding women' or 'women who grind'; or, it could refer to molar teeth.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Singing has stopped' is a conjectural translation (וישחו); the MT has 'have been humiliated' (וישחו). The allusion to the light sleep of the aged (on the third line) seems out of place here: literally, "you get up at the cry of the bird;" for 'you get up' (ויקום), some propose the correction, 'you stop' (וידם).

- ה גם מַגְבֵּה יִרְאוּ  
 וְחִתְחַתִּים בְּדֶרֶךְ  
 וַיִּנְאֵץ הַשֶּׁקֶד  
 וַיִּסְתַּבֵּל הַחֲגֹב  
 וַתִּפְרַח הָאֲבִיוֹנָה  
 כִּי־הֵלֶךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בֵּית עוֹלָמוֹ  
 וְסִבְבוּ בַשּׁוּק הַסּוֹפְדִים:  
 ו עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִרְתַּל יֶרֶחַק חֲבֵל הַכֶּסֶף  
 וְתֵרוּץ גִּלְת־הַזָּהָב  
 וְתִשְׁבֵּר כָּד עַל־הַמְּבֹעַ  
 וְנִרְץ הַגִּלְגָּל אֶל־הַבּוֹר:  
 ז וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעֹפֶר עַל־הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהִיָּה  
 וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַנָּה:  
 ח הֵבֶל הַבָּלִים אָמַר הַקּוֹהֵלֶת הֵכֵל הַבֶּל:  
 ט וַיִּתֵּר שֶׁהִיָּה קֹהֵלֶת חֲכָם עוֹד לְמַד־דַּעַת אֶת־  
 הָעָם וְאִזָּן וְחָקַר תִּקֵּן מִשְׁלֵי הָרַבָּה: י בִּקְשׁ
- 5 when going uphill is an ordeal  
 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!  
 9 Besides being a sage, Qoheleth taught the people that he himself knew,  
 having weighed, studied, and emended many proverbs. 10 Qoheleth

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'; 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 (ירתק) 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 consonantal form וכתוב has been vocalised in three ways: 1 The MT reads וכתוב (conjunction + Qal passive participle masculine singular from כתב, 'to write') – "Qoheleth took pains to write," which is supported by the LXX (καὶ γεγραμμένον = conjunction + masculine accusative singular perfect passive participle from γράφω, 'to write'). 2 The BHS editors suggest וכתוב (conjunction + Qal infinitive absolute); the infinitive

קָהֳלֶת לְמַצָּא דְבָרֵי־חֶפֶץ וְכָתוּב יִשָּׁר דְּבָרֵי אֱמֶת:  
 י<sup>א</sup> דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים כַּדְרַבָּנוֹת וְכַמְשֻׁמְרוֹת נְטוּעִים  
 בְּעֵלֵי אֲסָפוֹת נִתְּנוּ מִרְעָה אֶחָד:  
 י<sup>ב</sup> וַיִּתֵּר מִהֶמָּה בְּנֵי הַזֶּהָר עֲשׂוֹת סִפְרִים הֶרְבֵּה אֵין  
 קֶץ וְלֹהֵג הֶרְבֵּה יִגְעַת בָּשָׂר:  
 י<sup>ג</sup> סוֹף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמַע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרְא וְאֶת־  
 מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמֹר כִּי־זֶה כָּל־הָאָדָם: <sup>ד</sup> כִּי אֶת־כָּל־  
 מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֹא בַּמִּשְׁפָּט עַל כָּל־נִעְלָם אִם־  
 טוֹב וְאִם־רָע:  
 {ש}

סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא ואת  
 מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם

took pains to write in an attractive style and, by it, to convey truths.

<sup>11</sup> The sayings of a sage are like goads, like pegs positioned by shepherds: the same shepherd finds a use for both.

<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, my child, you must realise that writing books involves endless hard work, and that much study wearies the body.

<sup>13</sup> To sum up the whole of the matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for that is the duty of every one of us. <sup>14</sup> Because God will call all our deeds to judgement: and all that is hidden, whether it good or bad.

§ At the end of the day, everything is obeyed. Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole man.

(‘and to write’) in the B-line would parallel the infinitive of purpose לְמַצָּא (‘to find’) in the A-line: “Qoheleth took pains to find pleasant words, and to write accurately words of truth.” <sup>3</sup> Several Medieval MSS preserve an alternate textual tradition of וְכָתַב, (conjunction + Qal perfect 3MS), which is reflected in *Aquila*, *Symm*, *Peshitta* and the *Vg*.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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<sup>b</sup>, namely, diligent study is wearisome.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Duty’ is conjectural; it is missing (elided) in the *MT*. Note that the opening ׀ is presented as an enlarged letter, as it appears in almost all MSS.

<sup>14</sup> 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.