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# CREATION IN QOHELET

ECCLESIASTES 1.1-11 AS COSMOLOGY, NATIONAL HISTORY,

AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a close reading of Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 in the BHS edition of the MT of Qohelet. Its main contention is that Ecclesiastes 1.3-11 is an exposition of the collocation that ends 1.2, of *hakkol hevel*, and that consequently, the best way to begin to understand *hevel* in Ecclesiastes is to understand 1.3-11. Chapter 1 presents the scholarly conversation this project enters while presenting some of the unresolved problems the primary text creates. Answers to these problems are suggested, anticipated contributions enumerated. It has not been shown to satisfaction how the first eleven verses of this book cohere or how its various strands—involving Davidic Israel, Qohelet himself, and all creation—tie together. This thesis aims to help remedy that situation. It shows Ecclesiastes not to be the black sheep of the Hebrew Bible but in line with its whole corpus. Chapter 2 reads Ecclesiastes 1.1 as forming an allusive-inclusio with verse 11 which echoes the regnal history of Israel from David to exile, thereby initiating the process of folding the story of Qohelet and Israel into the creation account which follows. It is thus a primer for the two-word judgment *hakkol hevel* which is summarised in verse 2 and unpacked in verses 3-11 and which folds all things (*hakkol*) into one thing (*hevel*). Chapter 3 is a reading of Ecclesiastes 1.2 that discerns its final two words, *hakkol hevel*, as encapsulating the verse and determining the verses that directly follow, namely Ecclesiastes 1.3-11. These two words carry the verbal freight of *hevel* into the creation of 1.3-11 and suggest that if we want to understand *hevel* we must understand the words that immediately follow and first explain it, verses 3-11. Lastly, the way in which *hevel* appears in verse 2 suggests what verse 1 did, that Qohelet is drawing on the sordid history of Israel to explain the state of all things in what follows. Chapters 3-6 are a close reading of Ecclesiastes 1.3-11 that traces the dynamic of *hakkol hevel* as it unfolds within creation, speaking both to the corrupt condition of creation and of Israel, thus tying the two together. Chapter 4 reads Ecclesiastes 1.3-4 as showing man and nature as distinct, connected by man's painful toil, and thus characterised in their relationship by a subtle animosity. Chapter 5 reads Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 as showcasing nature as something characterised by man's profitless toil but in its own way, through its endurance as opposed to man's transience. Chapter 6 reads Ecclesiastes 1.8 as the convergence-point of the prologue, as the place where all creation becomes one, wearying thing and thus succinctly reflects *hakkol hevel*, whose highly antithetical meaning is something like *everything is nothing*. Verse 8 also hints at the reason for this cosmic fusion and dissolution: it is man's idolatry, something *hevel* often speaks to in the Hebrew Bible. Chapter 7 reads Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 as the consummation of this cosmic fusion and dissolution: in these verses all time and space converge into one, wearying, forgettable and forgotten thing. The process mimics the process of death and tells us about what *hevel* means, for creation, and through Qohelet, for his people, Israel. This homogenisation of time and space polemicises the Latter Prophets through allusion and counters the hope for Israel and creation they proclaim. This is what *hakkol hevel* means for Qohelet. It means the end of all things, including Israel, in death, and owing to idolatry. Even so, through echo of the Hebrew Bible and in line with it, this prologue may hold out a glimmer of hope for Israel and all things.



I, Taylor Haden Ince, declare that I have written this thesis, that it is entirely my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: Taylor Ince

Date: 30 November 2014

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Finally to my God, who trains my hands for battle. By you I can leap over a wall and bend a bow of bronze (Ps 18.29, 34). You are ever-Faithful (2 Tim 2.13).

## ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are taken, where possible, from Patrick H. Alexander and others, eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.

AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANE	Ancient Near East/Ancient Near Eastern
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christians Literature</i> . 3rd edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.
BDB	Brown, F. S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1907.
BHQ	Schenker, A., Y. A. P. Goldman, A. Van der Kooij, G. J. Norton, S. Pisano, J. de Waard, R. D. Weis, eds. <i>Biblia Hebraica Quinta, Fascicle 18: General Introduction and Megilloth</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004.
BHS	Kittel, Rudolf, Karl Elliger, Wilhelm Rudolph, and Hans Peter Rüger, eds. <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . 5th emend. edn. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BiLiSe	Bible and Literature Series
BWL	Biblical Wisdom Literature
BZAW	Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CDCH	Clines, David J. A., ed. <i>The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009.
CSHB	Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible
CTQ	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
DBI	Ryken, Leland, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, <i>Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: Wisdom, Poetry &amp; Writings</i> . Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
<i>DBSJ</i>	<i>Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal</i>

DCH	Clines, David J. A., and John Elwode, eds., <i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-2008.
ESV	English Standard Version
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FO	<i>Folia orientalia</i>
G	Old Greek (as referred to in <i>BHQ</i> )
GBHS	Arnold, Bill T., and John H. Choi. <i>A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
GBST	Gorgias Dissertations in Biblical Studies
GKC	Gesenius, H. F. W., <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , ed. by E. Kautzsch, trans. by A. E. Cowley. 2nd Eng. edn. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
HALOT	Köhler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994-1999.
HB	The Hebrew Bible
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBHS	Waltke, Bruce K., and M. O'Connor, <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
Joüon	Joüon, Paul, and T. Muraoka, <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . SubBi 14, vols. 1 and 2, Reprint of 1st edn. with corrections. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993.
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KJV	King James Version
LBS	The Library of Biblical Studies
LXX	The Greek translation as found in Rahlfs-Hanhart, eds. <i>Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes</i> . Revised edn. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006.
MBPS	Mellen Biblical Press Series
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary

NAS	New American Standard
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NET	New English Translation
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	VanGemeren, Willem A., ed., <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology &amp; Exegesis</i> , 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPS	<i>JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation</i> , 2nd edn. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999.
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NSKAT	Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar Altes Testament
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
<i>OLZ</i>	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Series
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
<i>RIBLA</i>	<i>Revista de interpretación bíblica latino-americana</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
S	Syriac (as referred to in <i>BHQ</i> )
SBL	Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et esprit</i>
<i>SCJ</i>	<i>Stone-Campbell Journal</i>
<i>Sef</i>	<i>Sefarad</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SOTS	The Society for Old Testament Studies
SS	Supplement Series
SSU	Studia Semitica Upsaliensia
<i>SubBi</i>	<i>Subsidia biblica</i>
T	Targum (as referred to in <i>BHQ</i> )
<i>TDOT</i>	Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , 15 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974-2006.
<i>TLOT</i>	E. Jenni and C. Westermann, eds., <i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
THOTC	The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
<i>TimesLitSupp</i>	<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i>

TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit Forschungen</i>
V	Vulgate (as referred to in <i>BHQ</i> )
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## FRONT MATTER

*Hevel* untranslated: My contention in this thesis is that Qohelet gives us much of what we need to discern the meaning of *hevel* in verse 2 and in the prologue proper (vv. 3-11), which is an exposition of the phrase הַבֵּל הַכֵּל in verse 2. The word's first (v. 2) and immediate context (vv. 3-11) is therefore primarily informative and largely determinative in my reading of what *hevel* means in verse 2 and thus throughout the book.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, insights gleaned from the way *hevel* is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible only serve to confirm suggestions its immediate context in the prologue makes about what it means in Ecclesiastes 1.2.

Furthermore, I will not translate the word *hevel* in this thesis for the same reason I refused to translate it as I worked my way through the prologue over the course of months and years. Since, as I argue, the prologue is an exposition of verse 2, which essentially reduces to the meaning of the word *hevel*, to have translated that word at any point in or directly after my reading of verse 2 and before my reading of verses 3-11 would have been to decide the meaning of those verses before I had read them (carefully anyway). The absurdity (!)<sup>2</sup> of such an approach is self-evident. The meaning of the word is multi-form—it is truly protean (and this is another, if secondary, reason I chose not to translate it)—but if there is meaning, it is to be found first in the words that follow it, words that end with לְאַחֲרָנָה in verse 11. Thus, it is only once we have read verses 3-11 (and the body of the book that follows) many times, and that with care, that we should consider assigning *hevel* an English equivalent. Even then, for at least one of the reasons mentioned above (*hevel*'s protean quality), hazarding a translation would likely prove unhelpful at best and misleading at worst. In translation therefore, it is best to leave *hevel* untouched.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>It is the ways in which diachronic word studies semantically intersect with Qohelet's use of those words, especially within his use of those words in Eccl 1.1-11, that interests me and may help prove the usefulness of such studies. I take the historic, orthodox position, that these books have something to do with one another because they are included in, and thus compose, one book—the Hebrew Bible. The books speak one to another. Thus, so do their words.

<sup>2</sup>'Absurdity' is Michael Fox's favoured translation of the word הַבֵּל (Michael V. Fox. Ecclesiastes קהלת. JPS, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), xix; Michael V. Fox, "The Meaning of hebel for Qohelet," JBL 105 (1986). Also Antoon Schoors. The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth, Part 2 Vocabulary. OLA, 143 (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 129.).

<sup>3</sup>When under analysis, the word must at times be referred to in various ways, as 'breath' or

Note: On the translation of choice. All English Scripture citations are from the RSV unless otherwise indicated, and all verse references are from the Hebrew Bible unless otherwise indicated or otherwise paired with a rendering in another language.

Note (2): Unless otherwise noted, translations of Ecclesiastes are mine, and all else that of the RSV.

Note (3): On the man 'Qohelet'. I will refer to 'Qohelet' as if he were the author, even if he was not. I will do so for the sake of ease and easy reading and not as an argument against the idea of 'Qohelet' as a persona.<sup>4</sup> This said, I do believe these are his words, whoever 'he' is, even if he did not write them down. The text claims as much (1.1-2, 7.27, 12.8-10), and I have no good reason to doubt it.

Note (4): Excepting the title, which is a play on words and speaks to the book and the man, and without making claims as to where in the book Qohelet began writing or dictating, I almost always refer to Qohelet-the-person as 'Qohelet' and to Qohelet-the-book as 'Ecclesiastes'.

Definition of terms: By 'creation' I mean the natural or material creation, including invisible things like light and wind but not spirits. Just as my 'creation' does not refer to spirits, neither does it refer to any act of creation: my 'creation' is a noun, not a verb (unless otherwise noted). By 'man' I mean a human—a man, a woman, or a child. If I mean 'man' and not 'woman' or any other like thing, I will say so. By 'nature' I mean 'creation' minus 'man'. And by 'elements' I mean the natural elements and bodies, inanimate items in nature exemplified by but not limited to the sun, earth, wind, and water found in Ecclesiastes 1.5-7.

Definition of terms (2): By 'prologue' I mean Eccl 1.1-11, by 'prologue proper' 1.3-11, by 'closing' 12.1-8, and by 'epilogue' 12.9-14.

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'transience' or 'futility', etc. So William H. U. Anderson, "The Semantic Implications of *הבל* and *רעות רווח* in the Hebrew Bible and for Qoheleth," JNSL 25 (1999), 71.

<sup>4</sup>On 'Qohelet' as possibly a persona, see, among many others, Jennie Barbour. *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*. Oxford Theological Monographs, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10ff.

Definition of terms (3):

- Terms normally used for lineation (in order of length, from shortest to longest): hemistich (half-line), line, bicolon. I use 'line' and 'colon' and 'stich' interchangeably.
- Strophe: verse
- Stanza: verse-group

PREFACE. TEXT, TRANSLATION, AND TEXT-DIVISION

1a The words of the Assembler,	דְּבַרֵי קהלת 1a
b Son of David,	בֶּן־דָּוִד b
c King in Jerusalem	מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם: c
2a Utter <i>hevel</i>	הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים 2a
b says the Assembler	אָמַר קהלת b
c utter <i>hevel</i>	הִבֵּל הַבָּלִים c
d everything is <i>hevel</i>	הַכֹּל הֵבֵל: d
3a What profit to man	מִה־יִתְרוֹן לָאָדָם 3a
b in all his toil	בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ b
c in which he toils under the sun?	שִׁיעֵמֶל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: c
4a A generation goes	דֹּר הַלֵּךְ 4a
b and a generation comes,	וְדֹר בָּא b
c and the earth forever stands.	וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת c
5a And the sun rises,	וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ 5a
b and the sun sets,	וּבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ b
c and to its place, panting,	וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף c
d it is rising there.	זֹרַח הוּא שָׁם: d
6a Going to the south,	הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דְּרוֹם 6a
b and turning around to the north,	וְסוּבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן b
c turning, turning,	סוּבֵב   סוּבֵב c
d goes the wind.	הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ d
e And upon its turning	וְעַל־סִבִּיבֹתָיו e
f returns the wind.	שָׁב הָרוּחַ: f
7a All the streams	כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים a
b are going to the sea,	הַלְּכִים אֶל־הַיָּם b
c but the sea,	וְהַיָּם c
d it is not full;	אֵינָנוּ מְלֵא d
e to the place to which	אֶל־מְקוֹם שֵׁ e
f the streams are going,	הַנְּחָלִים הַלְּכִים f
g there they	שָׁם הֵם g
h are returning to go.	שָׁבִים לָלֶכֶת: h
8a Everything is wearying:	כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים 8a
b man is not able to speak,	לֹא־יֹכֵל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר b
c the eye is not satisfied to see,	לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֵין לְרֹאוֹת c
d and the ear is not filled from hearing.	וְלֹא־תִמְלֵא אָזֶן מִשְׁמָע: d

ga What was, it will be;	מה־שֶׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁיְהִי־הָיָה ga
b and what has been done, it will be done.	וּמַה־שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה הוּא שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה b
c And there is nothing at all new under the sun.	וְאֵין כָּל־חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַשׁ: c
10a There is a word which says,	יֵשׁ דְּבָר שֶׁיֹּאמֵר 10a
b ‘See this: it <i>is</i> new’.	רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא b
c <i>It</i> already was from ages	כִּבְרַר הָיָה לְעֵלְמִים c
d which were before us.	אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ: d
11a There is not remembrance of former things,	אֵין זְכוֹרֹן לְרֵאשִׁינִים 11a
b and also of after-things which will be,	וְגַם לְאַחֲרָיִם שֶׁיְהִיוּ b
c there will not be of them remembrance	לֹא־יְהִיָּה לָהֶם זְכוֹרֹן c
d by those who will be after.	עַם שֶׁיְהִיוּ לְאַחֲרָנָה: <sup>5</sup> d

The entire text of Ecclesiastes 1.1-11<sup>6</sup> is tightly connected, the verses interlaced in myriad ways.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is marked off by verses 1 and 12, similar statements which suggest Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 as the book’s first discrete section.<sup>8</sup> Verses 1 and 11 as a possible inclusio

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. John F. Hobbs, “The Poetry of Qohelet,” in *The Words of the Wise Are Like Goats: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 184-85 for a slightly different lineation.

<sup>6</sup>I use the term ‘prologue’ here and elsewhere for the sake of convenience, to designate and comment on what is widely accepted as the first pericope in the book. As we will discover, neither the beginning nor the end of this pericope is certain: does it start with verse 2 or 3 or 4? Commentators vary (see esp. Krüger’s informative note in Thomas Krüger. *Qoheleth: A Commentary. Hermeneia*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 45 n. 1.; also Franz Josef Backhaus. *Denn Zeit und Zufall trifft sie alle: Studien zur Komposition und zum Gottesbild im Buch Qohelet. Athenäums Monografien*, 83 (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1993), 3 n. 2.). The end-point, verse 11, is more widely agreed upon, as verse 12 introduces a new, first-person voice and launches into new material. Even here, however, the case may not be so clear-cut (on which see below).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. A. S. Kamenetzky, “Das Koheleth-Rätsel,” *ZAW* 29 (1909), 67. This aspect of the text is one which my reading elicits, unsurprisingly, since my main contention is that 1.3-11 is an exposition of הַבֵּל הַבֵּל, the two words that end 1.2. And these two words are perhaps as closely connected as any two words could be (cf. ch. 3).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Roland E. Murphy. *Ecclesiastes. WBC*, 23A (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992),

reinforce this suggestion.<sup>9</sup> This paper is therefore a close reading of the book's first eleven verses, a text-block delineated by two similar, titular verses (Eccl 1.1, 1.12).

Despite the perceived cohesiveness of these eleven verses, I have chosen to treat them in sections. This for a two main reasons, the first pragmatic. This paper requires chapters, and after the introduction, each chapter reads one verse or more rather than reading all eleven at once. Also, the reader needs rest stops along the way. The chapter divisions provide them. Secondly, certain shifts in the text are obvious enough.<sup>10</sup> This analysis does not disregard those shifts. Notwithstanding numerous connection between verses that compose the prologue, a close reading suggested the grouping of certain verses.

Within the prologue, verse one is *sui generis*. It titles the work and thereby introduces the reader to its author, whether actual or fictive.<sup>11</sup> Verse 2 follows from verse 1 both lexically<sup>12</sup> and, therefore, semantically<sup>13</sup> but is also, together with Ecclesiastes 12.8,

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xxxix., following Addison G. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx: the Structure of the Book of Qoheleth," CBQ 30 (1968).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. chs. 1-2.

<sup>10</sup>Verse 1 is clearly a title, a superscription; though I contend it is more, obviously connected to 1.2 via shared lexicon and possibly connected to 1.11 through inner-biblical allusion. Verse 2 is a summary of the book. When read in connection with 12.8, nothing could be clearer. Verses 3 turns from the broad, abstract tenor of 1.2 to the narrow and concrete world of creation. This universe of time and space extends through 1.11 and ends, briefly, with 1.12, a twin to 1.1.

<sup>11</sup>As a possible persona created for purposes literary and theological. See chs. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup>The *דברי קהלת* of verse 2 follows from the *דברי קהלת* of verse 1.

<sup>13</sup>Verse 2 is the essence of Qohelet's message, his *דברי* of verse 1.

unique. The verses belong together but stand alone in their own ways and so deserve, perhaps, separate treatment. For these and other reasons,<sup>14</sup> I have chosen to read verse 1 in chapter 2 and verse 2 in chapter 3.

Verse 3 starts something new.<sup>15</sup> Qohelet's summary statement gives way to man and sun and toil, to concrete nouns and action verbs. Verse 4 follows man's toil under the sun with his life cycles on the unmoving (and unmoved) earth. This parallel subject matter of man-then-celestial body in each verse<sup>16</sup> combined with similar verse length and same metre<sup>17</sup> to warrant their treatment in the same chapter.<sup>18</sup> Verse 3 speaks to all verses that follow but in a special way to verse 4.<sup>19</sup> I thus read verses 3-4 in chapter 4.

Verse 5 is noticeably longer, a fact that speaks to its subject's endurance. This mimetic feature continues into verses 6 and 7, after which point verse-length still bests the prologue's first four (vv. 1-4) but tapers. But subject-matter makes a more obvious distinction with this section (vv. 5-7). These three verses leave off humanity and speak of the elements alone, of sun and wind and water. They thus belong together in a special way. So I read them in chapter 5.

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<sup>14</sup>Two more reasons are 1. verse one's possible intertextual connection to verse 11 and 2. the length of my analysis of verse 2.

<sup>15</sup>Qohelet would possibly protest (1.9).

<sup>16</sup>V. 3: man-then-sun; v. 4: generations-then-earth.

<sup>17</sup>4:3

<sup>18</sup>Pace Oswald Loretz, "Anfänge jüdischer Philosophie nach Qohelet 1,1-11 und 3,1-15," UF 23 (1991), 230.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. ch. 4.

Verse 8 returns to man and thus recalls verses 3-4, but its first three words function as a repository for the creational swirl that has come before. All the words and things that verse 2 breathes out (הכל הבל) and which materialise in verses 3-7 dump and reduce into this short line: כל־הדברים יגעים. The triplicate syntax and lexicon which follow this first line and fill out verse 8 speak back to the three elements of sun, wind, and water which directly precede. So verse 8 is connected to what comes before. It follows. But its last three lines focus on man rather than the elements. And though all things are included in the verses that follow and finish the prologue, man is the most obvious subject. Verse 8 thus encapsulates all that comes before it while setting the subject (man) which is the main concern of the verses that follow (vv. 9-11). It is a pivotal verse, one that calls back to verse 2 perhaps more than any other in the prologue. I thus treat it alone,<sup>20</sup> as a prologue hinge, in chapter 6.

Verses 9-11 follow from verse 8 and take on a much more abstract, less concrete character than their predecessors (vv. 3-8).<sup>21</sup> In their abstraction, they broaden from space to include time within their ambit. In so doing they show how total is the reach of הבל

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<sup>20</sup>Cf. Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 33.

<sup>21</sup>An easily missed feature which groups these three verses is their equal number of words. Each (vv. 9-11) has thirteen. The only other verses in these first eleven that share word-number (vv. 2-3) are also contiguous. Owing in part to scribal fees and corresponding manuscript prices, word and syllable counting was not uncommon and was, on the contrary, 'regularly done' in the ANE (Richard Bauckham. *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 274-84 and 274 n.12.) It is therefore not a stretch to suppose that such counts may have played a part in the composition of this text. In fact, evidence within Eccl 1.1-11 suggests these things were considered, as I indicate below.

and, indeed, of הכל הבל. It envelopes all space and time. In their finish, they (particularly v. 11) seem to look back, to link back, to the start, to verse 1. I thus treat verses 9-11 in my final chapter, chapter 7.



## CHAPTER 1. THE STORY OF EVERYTHING, ISRAEL INCLUDED, IN TWO WORDS: HAKKOL HEVEL

*it is generally acknowledged that the book gets underway in 1,12<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

In his monograph *A Time to Tell*, Eric Christianson asserts that Ecclesiastes 1.1-2 and 1.3-11 are ‘mainly independent narratives.’<sup>2</sup> I could not disagree more, and much of my thesis is a detailed exegetical argument to the contrary. In it, I argue that 1.3-11 are vitally linked to 1.2 and to its last two words in particular, **הכל הבל**. These nine verses flow out of the headwaters of those two words and are therefore its first and fundamental exposition. The initial key to understanding *hevel*, therefore, lay in our understanding 1.3-11, the primary and seminal unfolding of that *leitwort* in its relation to **הכל**, to everything, to all creation. This insight, and the close reading of 1.2-11 which yields it, is one of the two contributions to scholarship this thesis offers.

While connections between these texts, especially between Ecclesiastes 1.2 and 1.3, have been demonstrated,<sup>3</sup> to my knowledge, the sustained case for the last two words

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, “Riddle,” 320.

<sup>2</sup>Eric S. Christianson. *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes*. JSOTSup, 280 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 78., as against, e.g., Elisabeth Birnbaum, and Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger. *Das Buch Kohelet*. NSKAT, 14/2 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 2012), 47; Vittoria D’ Alario, “Struttura e teologia del libro del Qohelet,” in *Il libro del Qohelet: Tradizione, redazione, teologia*, ed. Guiseppe Bellia, and Angelo Passaro (Milano: Paoline, 2001), 258.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 326, 330., citing C. Ginsburg, Lohfink, Braun, among others.

of 1.2 as determinative of 1.3-11 have not. Establishing this case would have a number of effects. Firstly and obviously, it would secure the connection between 1.2 and 1.3-11, showing the links between these verses to be integral to the constitution of both texts. This would suggest single authorship, not only of 1.2-11 but also, perhaps, of 1.2-11 through 12.8 at least,<sup>4</sup> considering the fact that most understand 1.2 and 12.8 to speak to the verses they frame.<sup>5</sup> As exegesis, my reading also shows 1.2-11 to be a lexical and thematic seedbed for what follows. This strengthens the argument for single authorship of 1.2-12.8. Secondly, it would help us understand what the author means by *hevel* in the book by securing its first exposition to the concrete movements of creation laid out in 1.3-11. What does **הכל הבל** mean? The author tells us right away in the verses that immediately follow (1.3-11) by showing the way in which creation (**הכל**) manifests or is **הבל**.

The other contribution this thesis offers is an insight to which my close reading of the primary text (Ecclesiastes 1.1-11) led me. It is an insight that followed lexical echoes seemingly embedded in Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 to their respective sources, whether the Former Prophets (Kings), the Latter Prophets (Ezekiel, *deutero* and *trito*-Isaiah),<sup>6</sup> or texts sourced

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<sup>4</sup>Allowing for the possibility of 12.9-14 as from a different pen. This is the majority view currently. But see Michael V. Fox, "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet," HUCA 48 (1977), who decades ago proposed single authorship with multiple voices in his insightful, now classic, article.

<sup>5</sup>But cf. Tremper Longman III. *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. NICOT, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 57-9, 205, 274-84., who understands 1.1-11 and 12.8-14 as the work of a frame narrator, penned by someone other than the author (Qohelet) of 1.12-12.7 (excepting the frame-narrator intrusion in 7.27).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Richard L. Schultz, "Qoheleth and Isaiah in Dialogue," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell, and Will Kynes (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

by prophets (Chronicles).<sup>7</sup> Some of these insights enjoy a degree of scholarly consensus. Various commentators have noted Qohelet's possible polemicising in 1.9-11 against those prophesying a 'new thing' from the LORD.<sup>8</sup> And recently, Jennie Barbour has argued convincingly against the long-held line that as a work of biblical wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes had little if anything to say about Israel's salvation-history.<sup>9</sup> Ecclesiastes is full of echoes from elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Still, other of my insights involving intertextuality are unique. This would prove extremely disconcerting were it not for the fact that the unique insights seem to agree with those enjoying a level of consensus, coalescing with them into a theme that complements and enriches Qohelet's more obvious themes which arise from his creation matrix in 1.2-11 and helping make sense of texts within that matrix which lack satisfying answers.<sup>10</sup>

It is the primary text of Qohelet's prologue (Ecclesiastes 1.1-11), not insights from comments upon the text,<sup>11</sup> that led me to other places in the Hebrew Bible. When I began

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<sup>7</sup>Brevard S. Childs. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); also cf. Stephen G. Dempster, "The Prophets, the Canon, and a Canonical Approach: No Empty Word," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 299.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 54, esp. n. 32-34. See ch. 7.

<sup>9</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, iff. For seminal contributors to this long-held line, see, e.g., Gerhard von Rad. *Wisdom in Israel*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1972), 270, 294-95, esp. n. 9; Walther Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology," *SJT* 17 (1964).

<sup>10</sup>Cf. esp. my reading of 1.8 in ch. 6.

<sup>11</sup>I mean secondary literature.

putting the pieces together, trying to make sense of Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 in light of the texts it seemed to echo, I realized to my delight that I was not alone. Centuries before, the Targumist had said that Qohelet was a prophet owing to the way in which he forecast the exile of Israel (Judah).<sup>12</sup> I too had seen traces of exile woven into this creational tapestry but concluded that Qohelet was commenting on what had happened rather than foretelling what would. During this time of my reading and realizations, Jennie Barbour published her monograph tracing the impact of Israel's exile and larger history pressed into the pages of Ecclesiastes through inner-biblical echoes.<sup>13</sup> My insights agreed, but they also diverged.

Firstly, they charted the history of Israel from united to divided kingdom to exile, not throughout the entire book of Ecclesiastes but within its first eleven verses. The prologue seemed not only an introduction to a book but a miniature version of it, a sort of *microbiblos*. It is interesting to say the least that one of the two books the prologue seems to echo in its first and last verse (1.1 and 1.11)—the book of Chronicles—is widely acknowledged to be the same thing, that is, a synopsis of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, my insights involved a different spectrum of subjects, at once more broad and more narrow. Qohelet seemed not only to be conveying the demise of a nation in these pages but of cre-

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<sup>12</sup>See ch. 2 below.

<sup>13</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 5.

<sup>14</sup>Freedman writes that the organiser of the Writings portion of the HB could well have been a member of the Chronicler's 'entourage', if not the Chronicler himself in David Noel Freedman. *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible. Distinguished Senior Faculty Lecture Series*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 85-86.

ation, and of himself. Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 appeared to present itself as a chronicle of the thoroughly corrupted condition of one man, of the nation he ruled, and of all creation. His story was the story of Israel, and the story of Israel was the story of creation. His corruption meant Hers, and as the hope of the nations,<sup>15</sup> Her exile—and even, perhaps, Her return from exile to a much-diminished status—meant the corruption of all things.

That is the other insight my reading of the prologue lent. This is what **הכל הכל** means. And this is why it is the encapsulation of the words of Qohelet, a ‘composite’ or collection of the kings of Israel.<sup>16</sup> It means the corruption of everything, of creation, and it finds its source in the words and deeds of one man (**דברי קהלת** in 1.1) and the nation he represents. His story is Israel’s. This Barbour has helped establish. But his story is also creation’s. It is the autobiography of everything, and it is given not only in the whole book but also in its first eleven verses. This is an insight my reading offers and attempts to articulate, and it is the second contribution this thesis puts forward.

Gerhard von Rad famously called Qohelet ‘an outsider completely free of tradition . . .’<sup>17</sup> He went on: ‘Not often in ancient Israel has the question of salvation been

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<sup>15</sup>Dempster, “The Prophets, the Canon, and a Canonical Approach,” 308; G.K. Beale. *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 46ff., and 47 n. 55 where Beale cites N. T. Wright. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 21-26., et al., including Michael Fishbane. *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 112-13.

<sup>16</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 10. Qohelet as a Solomonic figure embodying in himself, in his title as ‘the Assembler’ (of the assembly of Israel?), the kings of Israel from rise to demise. See ch. 2 below for a fuller explanation.

<sup>17</sup>von Rad, *Wisdom*, 235.; also cf. Martin Hengel. *Judaism and Hellenism*. (Philadelphia:

posed so inescapably to a single individual as was the case with Koheleth. He has answered it (in the way which we know) mainly on the basis of the experiences which the world around him afforded.<sup>18</sup> It is my contention that as a single individual, Qohelet sees himself as embodying Israel so that revelations of his own condition are at once revelations of Her condition and, through Her condition, of creation's. This helps explain the presence of allusions to the demise of Israel embedded in Qohelet's creation-soaked prologue and provides rebuttal to von Rad's position.<sup>19</sup> Qohelet's 'salvation' is not solitary but indissolubly linked to Israel's position, and Israel's to that of all things. And while his insights are gathered from experience, they are also gathered from what Barbour calls the 'story of Israel' which helped shape the 'cultural memory' of Qohelet and his people.<sup>20</sup>

The prologue begins and ends (Eccl 1.1 and 1.11) with words and collocations which ring throughout the pages of Kings and Chronicles. These words and phrases frame the reigns of individual kings of Israel (then Judah) much like Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.11 frame the prologue. They begin with David and run through both Kings and Chronicles to the end of both books, to exile. Thus do they chart the regnal history of Israel (sans Saul) from rise to fall, thereby both signaling and summarizing Israel's corrupt con-

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Fortress Press, 1981), 117. But see Murphy, Ecclesiastes, xlii.

<sup>18</sup>von Rad, *Wisdom*, 235.; also Hengel, *Judaism*, 116-18. but with this ameliorative assertion: 'Nevertheless, the *critical point of application of his thought* remains the Old Testament' (118).

<sup>19</sup>For further rebuttal see, e.g., Schultz, "Qoheleth and Isaiah in Dialogue," 57.

<sup>20</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*.

dition. This lexicon is sewn into the start (1.1) and finish (1.11) of Qohelet's first word, his prologue.

From the first actual word, from דברי, Ecclesiastes strikes a prophetic tone, something that did not go unrecognized among ancient Jewish exegetes.<sup>21</sup> However, the דברי קהלת do not seem to be a forecasting but a casting back over the sordid history of his people. The summary of his words in 1.2 resonates with the somber tone 1.1 has set, as its *leitwort* (*hevel*) often speaks to idolatry in the Former and Latter Prophets.<sup>22</sup> This is always

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<sup>21</sup>The Targum, thinking Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, thought that it must be prophetic owing to content in the book that speaks to the demise and exile of Israel (see Koheles. Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologised from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources. (New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1976), 52-53.; Peter S. Knobel, "The Targum of Qohelet," in *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*, ed. Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 20.). Cf. Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 2ff.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Lissa M. Wray Beal. 1 & 2 Kings. AOTC, 9 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014), 450-51. Like Deuteronomy, the Former Prophets or Histories frame הבל in the context of idol worship. In 1 Kings 16.13 and 26, the kings of Israel sin and provoke Israel to sin by going after false idols (הבלי). In 2 Kings 17.15 the indictment is repeated, and to it is added the abhorrence of God's law and covenant. This verse is the final occurrence of הבל of only four occurrences in the former prophets. In it, the effect of such false worship is laid out clearly: it produced falseness in Israel. If not articulated as explicitly in the latter prophetic corpus, this arc is still evident, if tacit, from the context in which it often finds itself. The prophets (mainly Isaiah and Jeremiah) picture Israel as either relying on foreign nations (Isa 30.7) or their foreign gods (Jer 8.19) for help. Such help is worthless (Isa 30.7) because it is itself worthless (Jer 10.15). It is like a lie (שקר), both false (שוא) and empty (ריק). These words and others like them pepper passages containing הבל. Zechariah 10.2 has it directly follow תרפים (household gods), און (iniquity: this is the sole synonym Even-Shoshan offers for the noun הבל (not 'Abel'); conversely, הבל is the first of many synonyms he suggests for און (Abraham Even-Shoshan. לתורה: לחדשה: לכתובים וכתובים. (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sefer, 1981), 279.).), שקר (a lie), and שוא (falseness, emptiness, vanity). The verse reads, 'For the household gods (תרפים) utter nonsense (און), and the diviners see lies (שקר); they tell false (שוא) dreams and give empty (הבל) consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd'. This piling up of words of similar semantic domain is a round condemnation

the case when the word occurs back-to-back<sup>23</sup> or in the plural,<sup>24</sup> as it does in three of its four uses in Ecclesiastes 1.2.<sup>25</sup> Thus, while Ecclesiastes 1.1 may allude to passages in Kings which essentially chart Israel's path toward exile, Ecclesiastes 1.2 is composed almost solely of a word (*hevel*) used in a way (plural, back-to-back) which speaks in Kings directly to the reason for Israel's exile. Second Kings 17.15 reads, 'They went after false idols (הַהֲבֵלִים) and became false (וַיִּהְיוּ לְהֵבֵל)'. Kings is among the Former Prophets. The Latter Prophets, speaking God's word into the time recorded by the Former Prophets, often use *hevel* in the same way.<sup>26</sup>

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of Israel and her false lovers and of the prophets who were to shepherd her. In it we see again the arc of הַבֵּל quite clearly: if the word is to be translated as 'empty', it is within such a context and thus with the understanding that her emptiness is nothing less than a direct consequence of her immorality, that is, of her abandoning of God and his law (*DCH* offers these synonyms for הַבֵּל: for "vanity, worthlessness" רִיק (emptiness), תְּהוֹ (emptiness), בְּהִלָּה (terror), שֶׁקֶר (deceit), מִשְׁגָּה (error); for "image" אֵל (god); and for "breath" רוּחַ (wind), כִּזְבֹּ (lie) (הַבֵּל, *DCH* 2:486).). In this case, הַבֵּל gains its substance/meaning from the train of nouns it follows, and though the above instance in Zechariah is exceptional in its gathering of these words together, they and others like them accompany הַבֵּל individually or in pairs throughout its HB usage (Paired with רִיק in Isa 30.7; in parallel with רִיק in Isa 49.4 and coupled to תְּהוֹ; descriptive of קְבִיצָה (collection [of false dependencies]) in Isa 57.13; parallel to פְּסִלִים (idols) in Jer 8.19; with שֶׁקֶר (a lie) in Jer 16.19; and with שׁוֹא (vain, empty, deceptive) as its adjective in Jonah 2.9.).

<sup>23</sup>Kin 17.15, Jer 2.5, Job 27.12 are the 3 instances in the HB outside Eccl. The first two verses are twins. Each speaks of the unfaithfulness of Israel within the context of imminent exile, and each contains this clause: *they went after false idols and became false* (וַיִּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֲבֵלִים וַיִּהְיוּ לְהֵבֵל). Cf. ch. 3 below.

<sup>24</sup>Deut 32.21; 2 Kin 16.13, 26; Jer 8.19, 10.8, 14.22; Jon 2.9, Ps 31.7. Cf. ch. 3 below.

<sup>25</sup>Eccl 1.2 and 12.8. Eccl 5.6 is the exception, where plural *hevel* is not back-to-back.

<sup>26</sup>See above note. Also cf. Dempster, "The Prophets, the Canon, and a Canonical Approach," 299.

What follows in Ecclesiastes (1.3ff.) does not seem to follow. Over the years this has thrown countless commentators off, leading some to sever 1.1-2 from 1.3-11 and others to miss the connection woven between the prophetic, kingly, national fibres of 1.1-2 and the cosmological fabric unfolded over the next nine verses (1.3-11). This is unfortunate, because it misses the message the author is sending about the relationship between Israel's sordid history and the sordid state of all things (of creation, as portrayed in 1.3-11). As I have shown and aim to show further, this connection is not new to Qohelet but one which resonates profoundly in the Former and Latter Prophets to whom he seems to refer throughout these first eleven verses.

Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 speaks against the possibility of anything new occurring within creation. Again, some understand this as a polemic against prophecy in *deutero* and *trito*-Isaiah which promises that God will do a new thing.<sup>27</sup> What is this new thing? It is a national and creational restoration. In Isaiah, and in Ezekiel, another prophet Qohelet seems to echo at least twice in his prologue,<sup>28</sup> the condition of Israel and of creation are tied. Why is this needed? It is needed because of Israel's idolatry which led to her exile. 'They went after false idols (הַהִבֵּל) and became false (וַיִּהְיֶה בִלְוֵי).'<sup>29</sup> In these prophets, in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others, Israel's restoration means or is at least spoken of in terms of the restoration of creation.

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<sup>27</sup>See above comments on 1.9-11 and ch. 7 below.

<sup>28</sup>In 1.5-7 (Eze 42.15-20) and 1.8 (Eze 7.19). Cf. chs. 5-6 below.

<sup>29</sup>2 Kin 17.15

This is to say that in making the connection between Israel, idolatry, and the ruined condition of creation, Qohelet is not doing something unusual. Rather, he is echoing the relationship demonstrated by the Former and Latter Prophets, snatches of which he has woven throughout the opening section of his book. Like Isaiah, Ezekiel, even Kings, and in the passages in them to which he seems to point in his prologue, Qohelet is connecting the state of creation to Israel's lodestar. Her idolatry has ruined Her, and Her ruin means the ruin of all things. This is what a massive portion of the freight of הבל הבל means in 1.2, a phrase which, as it happens, lexicographically connects language in 1.1-2 describing Israel's estate to language describing the estate of creation in 1.3-11. That is, הבל הבל serves as a bridge in 1.2 connecting Qohelet and Israel in 1.1 to creation in 1.3ff. This lexicographical connection signals a semantic one as well. It is a connection most miss and a contribution this thesis hopes to make.

It may prove more beneficial to frame this abstruse thesis within the clearer subject matter of creation as portrayed in Ecclesiastes 1.3-11. There are two main views. One reads verse 3 as meaning that man cannot profit in life and understands what follows through verse 11 as a demonstration of that, nature (sun, earth, wind, water) included. Man gains nothing because of death. Despite her endurance and constant movement, neither does nature.<sup>30</sup> The other understands man as profitless and nature as a foil to

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<sup>30</sup>Fox nuances this view to say that 1.3-11 speaks to creation's inability to effect lasting change (Michael V. Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," JSOT 40 (1988).). Also see, among countless others, Ernest W. Hengstenberg. *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998); William P. Brown. *Ecclesiastes. Interpretation*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000); Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*.

man, whirring on in her enduring productivity and thereby reminding man of his profitlessness owing to his transience.<sup>31</sup> The third view is the minority view. It reads the prologue as a positive statement on the motions of man and nature.<sup>32</sup> Verse 8 is thus interpreted, 'All this activity is too much for man to take in. For the same reason he cannot express it adequately. Creation is too wonderful.' I read with the majority but see something else permeating the text which nuances the standard majority interpretation (nothing profits). My view pays special attention to the way in which creation's two players in the prologue—man and nature—interact and understands these interactions to tell us something not only about the way Qohelet sees the world but also about what **הכל הבל** means. These interactions seem to tell us one main thing: creation is profitless because death is the end of all, and death is the end of all because of man's disobedience, something the word *hevel* points to elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Qohelet sews all of this into the fabric of this creation-matrix in these first eleven verses. In them, he also ties man's disobedience and the consequent death of creation to himself, to his embodiment

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<sup>31</sup>Cf., e.g., James L. Crenshaw, "Nothing New Under the Sun: Ecclesiastes 1:4-11," in **Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes**, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 241. For a slightly grimmer version of the nature-as-foil view, cf. William H. U. Anderson, "The Poetic Inclusio of Qoheleth in Relation to 1,2 and 12,8," *SJOT* 12 (1998), 208.

<sup>32</sup>So R. N. Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 and the Wonders of Nature," *JSOT* 41 (1988). But his reading is largely based on a consideration of Ecclesiastes 1.2-3 as editorial addition and upon an eccentric understanding of **דור** in verse 4. Fox makes quick work of a similar interpretation of **דור** by Ogden in Fox, "Qohelet 1.4." Also cf. Norbert Lohfink. *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003); Daniel C. Fredericks, and Daniel Estes. *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*. AOTC, 16 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010).

of all the kings of Israel, and thus to Israel. In so doing he signals a fundamental connection between the corruption of Israel and the corruption of creation.

Stephen Dempster writes that the Former Prophets are 'largely a history of disobedience to the Torah and it eventually leads to the death of exile, confirming the Torah'.<sup>33</sup> In weaving apparent echoes of Kings, Chronicles and Latter Prophets into his opening account of creation, Qohelet appropriates this history and expands it on a cosmic scale. The most prominent of these lexical echoes is, of course, *hevel*. The word's first use in the Hebrew Bible (not as Abel) is at the end of the Torah, in a section where Moses foretells the disobedience and dissolution of Israel, a subject which drives the narrative of the Former (and Latter) Prophets.<sup>34</sup> This theme connects the Former Prophets to Torah by confirming the truth of its prediction (as Dempster says about Deut 32.47, the Former Prophets confirm that Moses' prophecy is no 'empty [רִיק] word'). Again, the Latter Prophets connect to the Former in being prophetic speeches about those prophetic stories (the Former Prophets).<sup>35</sup> The Torah and Prophets thus connect through this word *hevel*. It is therefore interesting that as part of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible, Ecclesiastes begins with that word (*hevel*) which occurs only once in the Torah (Deut 32.21) and which crystallises a thematic point which shoots through the Former and Latter Prophets, help-

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<sup>33</sup>Dempster, "The Prophets, the Canon, and a Canonical Approach," 299. Also cf. Michael Fishbane. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 380-81.

<sup>34</sup>Dempster, "The Prophets, the Canon, and a Canonical Approach," 298ff.

<sup>35</sup>Dempster, "The Prophets, the Canon, and a Canonical Approach," 299.

ing tie them together and drive the narrative of disobedient Israel forward through to exile. Qohelet chooses to frame his book with the same form of *hevel* used in that single time in the Torah, in Deuteronomy 32.21. It is the plural form, one that is fairly rare in the Hebrew Bible and which, again, outside of its four appearances in Ecclesiastes (1.2 [2], 5.6, 12.8), always speaks to idolatry.<sup>36</sup> Speaking canonically, this form ‘begins’ at the end of Torah and shoots thematically through the whole history of Israel to exile, stringing the Law and Prophets together. The word (*hevel*) also shoots through Ecclesiastes, holding it together too. The form referring to idolatry everywhere else in the Hebrew Bible begins and ends Ecclesiastes (1.2, 12.8) and features prominently in those frame verses.<sup>37</sup> Through his use of *hevel* alone, Qohelet seems to continue the theme that runs through the end of Torah and through the Prophets. Ecclesiastes is thus an endorsement of Torah in the same way the Prophets are. It confirms the truth of Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 32. This tacit endorsement is made explicit in Ecclesiastes 12.13. Contrary to many commentators, I am arguing that this (12.13) is simply what Qohelet has been saying all along.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. Beal, 1 & 2 Kings, 450-51. *Hevel* occurs 86x in the Hebrew Bible, 8x as Adam’s unfortunate son “Abel” (Gen 4.2 (2), 4(2), 8(2), 9, 35). The plural form occurs only 8x outside Eccl. See above note for refs.

<sup>37</sup>Although **הבל** occurs 38 times in the book, its plural form **הבלים** only occurs once (5.6) outside this frame in 1.2 and 12.8.

<sup>38</sup>Cf., e.g., Choon-Leong Seow. *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB, 18C (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 394-95. But see Stephen G. Dempster. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. NSBT, 15 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2003), 191.

*Hevel* does not just run through Ecclesiastes. It ends Proverbs, and of course it begins Ecclesiastes.<sup>39</sup> The word thus strings together two books which help compose the *Ketuvim*, the third section of the Hebrew Bible. *Hevel* and its associations with Israelite history, disobedience, and idolatry thus help all three sections of the Hebrew Bible cohere, from Torah to Prophets to Writings.<sup>40</sup> As Wisdom Literature, Ecclesiastes links to Prophets

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<sup>39</sup>It is in the second-to-last verse of Proverbs and the second verse of Ecclesiastes. The books are placed together in many orderings of the HB (e.g. *BHS*; cf. Dempster, *Dominion*, 51; Stephen G. Dempster, “Ecclesiastes and the Canon,” in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goats: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Christian G. Rata (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 396-99; Roger Beckwith. *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism*. (London: SPCK, 1985), 181-234. This connection is widely noted.

<sup>40</sup>This *leitwort* and corresponding *leitmotif* is not isolated to the end of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. It is at home in the Psalms too. Cf. Ps 115.3-6 (also 135.15-18) on which see von Rad, *Wisdom*, 178, 177-85. In the Writings outside Qohelet, mainly in the Psalms, הבל still finds itself in the company of words connoting idolatry (Cf. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 42. Also see ‘הבל’, *TLOT* 1:351-53 and ‘הבל’, *TDOT* 3:313-20.) and denoting sin, words like כזב (Ps 62.10: lie, falsehood), מעל (sacrilege, sin, deceit: Job 21.34), and שקר (Prov 21.6, 31.30), but it does seem to take a semantic turn into the realm of transience. It often means something like ‘breath’. Psalm 39.12 is a good example: ‘When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely all mankind is a mere breath (הבל)!’ The first instance in the Psalter speaks to idols (Ps 31.6(7)), and where הבל does connote ephemerality in the Psalms, as in Psalm 39.12, it is often in connexion with sin or in the context of judgment (or presumed judgment, as with Job 35.16. Ps 39.6, 7, 12; 62.10; 78.33; 94.11; even 144.4 (This final reference is the only Psalmic case where the situation of sin or discipline for sin is not clear-cut and contiguous [meaning in that verse or the previous or following]; still, the evil of the Psalmist’s enemies fills the song.); Jb 9.29; 21.34; 27.12; 35.16; Prov 21.6; 31.30, where הבל is in conjunctive parallel to שקר and in contrastive parallel to one who fears the LORD, implying that הבל involves a lack of Godly fear.). Take Psalm 78.33: ‘So he made their days vanish like a breath (הבל), and their years in terror’. The verse speaks to God’s judgments on his people as a response to their sin (Ps 78.32), to their rejection of his word, their disregard of his law (Ps 78.10). Even when הבל is best translated ‘breath’ it is often or always to picture man in his transience because of sin and judgment.

in the prologue (1.1-11) and to Law in the epilogue (12.13). It thus stands squarely in the stream of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>41</sup>

In sum, Ecclesiastes begins with Israel, using a title for its author and language which collects and thus summarises her history (1.1, also in combination with 1.11). This recalls the Former and Latter Prophets. The tone of verse 1 is prophetic. This also recalls the Prophets. The theme of verse 2 and the sum of the book and of Qohelet's message is a word which runs through the end of Torah and through the Prophets, summarising much of their message, which is the idolatry of Israel. Collocations which frame the prologue of Ecclesiastes (1.1, 1.11) frame passages in the Former Prophets and Chronicles which serve to summarize Israel's regnal history, from rise to fall. Echoes of Latter Prophets within the prologue (in 1.5-7, 1.8, 1.9-11) serve a similar purpose, eliciting the exile of Israel and fusing themes of Israel and creation. The message is unspoken but clear enough: as goes one, so goes the other. The fate of Israel and of all things is intertwined. The Prophetic texts alluded to in the prologue make the same connection.<sup>42</sup> In these echoes, Qohelet is simply echoing the Prophetic word, though not without variation.<sup>43</sup> From beginning to end, his message is singular and essentially in line—whether by tone (1.1), echo, allusion (1.1, 1.11, 1.5-7, 8, 9-11), or explicit endorsement (12.13)—with the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. It is, in a word, or two, **הכל הכל**. This thesis is a discovery of what those two words

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<sup>41</sup>Hengel, *Judaism*, 118.

<sup>42</sup>E.g., Eze 7.19, 42.15-20; Isa 43.18-19, 65.17 (also Jer 31.31, Eze 36.26). See ch. 7.

<sup>43</sup>As seems to be the case in 1.9-11, where he assures us, contrary to the Prophets he echoes, that there will be no new thing (for creation or for Israel, presumably).

mean as expressed in the first eleven verses of Ecclesiastes and in dialogue with the larger context in which it was eventually set.

### Methodology

This thesis is a close reading of Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 in the BHS edition of the MT of Qohelet<sup>44</sup> and a consideration of the way in which this text informs and is informed by its larger context.<sup>45</sup> The exegetical study I undertake involves a lexicographical analysis and consideration of other classical Hebrew literary devices.<sup>46</sup>

I use the terms intertextuality and allusion somewhat loosely in my reading,<sup>47</sup> although as I understand it, allusion involves intentional reference; intertextuality may or may not.<sup>48</sup> Based on the way other Hebrew Bible texts or similar echoes of them seem to appear in the prologue, based on the way Qohelet seems to use them, the idea that he is using these other texts intentionally to make his case is hard to avoid. It is also hard to establish. The evidence must simply be put forth, and it is. Even within these eleven verses, however, a range of intentions seem to be at play. In most cases (Eccl 1.1/1.11, 1.5-7, 1.8), Qo-

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<sup>44</sup>Which I call 'Ecclesiastes' in the dissertation. See note in Front Matter above.

<sup>45</sup>Greg W. Parsons, "Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Ecclesiastes, Part 2," *BSac* 160 (2003), 296ff. Childs writes of Ecclesiastes, 'Its authoritative role lies in its function within a larger context' (Brevard S. Childs. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. (London: SCM Press, 1979), 588.).

<sup>46</sup>I lean heavily on Wilfred Watson here in Wilfred G. E. Watson. *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*. *JSOTSup*, 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984).

<sup>47</sup>Cf. Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 3.

<sup>48</sup>Benjamin D. Sommer, "Exegesis, Allusion and Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Lyle Eslinger," *VT* 46 (1996), 487.

helet seems to utilize the trajectory of the regnal history of Israel as slide-toward-exile and into exile as a nearly imperceptible backdrop for his own first word (1.1-11). This provides an almost invisible, dark, and complex texture to his message which is consonant with the brooding, prophetic gravitas verses 1 and 2 initiate. In the last section of his prologue (vv. 9-11) however, Qohelet's purposes seem more polemical.<sup>49</sup>

Richard Hays' seven criteria for inner-biblical allusion serve as a helpful, intuitive grid.<sup>50</sup> They are: (1) availability. Was the earlier text likely available to the later author, in this case Qohelet, or the author of Ecclesiastes? Also, was this text (or these texts) available to his original audience? The probable late date of Qohelet increases the chance of an affirmative answer for this category (2) volume. How many words are shared between texts -- the more the better -- how rare are they, and where do they occur? That is, are they positioned prominently, at critical junctures, in either text or both texts? (3) recurrence. How often does the alluding author refer to the earlier text?<sup>51</sup> (4) thematic coherence. Does the theme of the earlier text mesh with this author's theme? (5) historical plausibility. Could Qohelet have woven these Hebrew Bible echoes into his prologue in-

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<sup>49</sup>Again, see Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 54.

<sup>50</sup>Richard B. Hays. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-32.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Sommer, "A Response," 484-85. The fact that contiguous passages in the prologue (1.5-7, 1.8) both seem to echo passages in Ezekiel (Eze 42.15-20, 7.19), both to do with temple -- one directly preceding God's departure from the temple and the other directly preceding his reentrance -- increase the possibility of actual intertextuality and even allusion. Sommer writes of the case for allusion being 'a cumulative one', the case strengthening as 'patterns emerge from those allusions' (Sommer, "A Response," 485.).

tentionally and with an expectation that his intended audience would perceive them? (6) history of interpretation. Have other readers discerned these echoes? (7) satisfaction. Does the proposed intertextual echo make sense of the text, in light of its themes and context? This is perhaps the most 'cloudy' or hard-to-pin-down test, but it is also the most important, which is something Hays notes. In the end, does the accumulated evidence of purported echoes throughout the prologue make sense of what Qohelet seems to be saying and how he is saying it? I also consider verbal variance between texts, perhaps a subset of (2). I might call this (8) affinity.

These categories are merely an aid to helping one discern the probability of an intertextual relationship or echo. All eight categories may be present with no echo. Or very few of the eight categories may be present with an echo.<sup>52</sup> Textual intangibles are in some cases germane, factors that resist articulation or verification but are nonetheless sensed. Such factors can be difficult to 'tie down' or define but arise in the reader from an intimate acquaintance with his text(s).<sup>53</sup> This is a reality Hays accounts for at the end of the seven tests he lays out.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>No one may have discerned the echo, and authorial intentionality may be nil. A real echo may nonetheless exist.

<sup>53</sup>See Sommer, "A Response," 486., who for these reasons calls this process 'an art, not a science'.

<sup>54</sup>Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 32-33.

Finally, I join with Barbour in favouring Kugel's preferred term to describe much of what he discerns biblical authors to be doing.<sup>55</sup> He calls it 'appropriation'.<sup>56</sup> In the prologue, whatever else Qohelet is doing with earlier or contemporary texts in the Hebrew corpus,<sup>57</sup> he does seem to appropriate them to construct his own arguments about the way he understands the world to work. As is often the case with intertextuality, these 'appropriations' may help explain why. It is easiest to call these possible intertextual resonances in Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 'echoes' or even, according to Sommer's definition, 'intertextuality'.<sup>58</sup> To do so is to avoid any comment on the author's intention.<sup>59</sup> The appeal is obvious. However, in my case, it would be disingenuous.<sup>60</sup> Ecclesiastes is by almost all accounts a very late text in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>61</sup> Language argues this direction, as does a perceived impress of thought, as do 'echoes' (Barbour) of late Hebrew Bible texts.<sup>62</sup> Chronologically, therefore, Qohelet's having access to later prophets and histories (e.g.

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<sup>55</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 5.

<sup>56</sup>James L. Kugel, "The Bible's Earliest Interpreters," *Prooftexts* 7 (1987).

<sup>57</sup>Cf. *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).

<sup>58</sup>Sommer, "A Response," 487.

<sup>59</sup>Sommer, "A Response," 488.

<sup>60</sup>Sommer recognizes this temptation as one many scholars succumb to, labeling it a 'flight to the synchronic' and going on to say that he thinks it sometimes 'masks an abdication of careful rigor' (Sommer, "A Response," 489.).

<sup>61</sup>For a helpful compendium see Antoon Schoors. *Ecclesiastes. Historical Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 2-7.

<sup>62</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 1-9.

Ezekiel, Kings, Chronicles) is not impossible.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, considering his claim to wealth and prominence and his warning against prodigious book-making (12.12), it is perhaps not improbable. What is more, the cumulative effect of these echoes in the prologue combines with its message, bend, and tone to suggest that the prologue's author is using these Hebrew Bible texts—whether polemically or otherwise—to make a case.<sup>64</sup> This bespeaks but does not necessitate authorial intention, in which case the textual echoes I point out in this paper would be most aptly and honestly called allusions. Perhaps, however, as Barbour argues, these textual appropriations are so deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of Israel (owing in large part, it would seem, to the impact of Her exile)<sup>65</sup> that the author of Ecclesiastes may have woven words and phrases from other biblical sources without intentionally commenting on them.<sup>66</sup> Still, the cumulative evidence seems to point the other way, toward intentionality, and therefore toward allusion.

By way of summary and to be clear, this thesis is a close reading of the MT as presented (primarily) within the BHS. It is also canonical reading, one which takes seriously

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<sup>63</sup>Cf. A. S. Kamenetzky, "Die ursprünglich beabsichtigte Aussprache des Pseudonyms Qohelet," *OLZ* 1/2 (1921), 11.

<sup>64</sup>The case is for a corrupted king, nation, and cosmos.

<sup>65</sup>Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible*, 6-7.

<sup>66</sup>Cf. David M. Carr. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4ff., where Carr talks about the intense familiarity most readers in this milieu would have had with texts. It is easy to see how the mastery in many cases of readers with what was written, often to the point of memorization, could have created situations very conducive to lexical 'echoes' of other texts finding their way into various writings without the same sort of intentionality an author would be likely to have today if he cited another written work.

both the final form of the received text of Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 and the larger context in which it has been placed, that of the book of Ecclesiastes and, more broadly, of the Hebrew Bible. As such, it is also a diachronic reading,<sup>67</sup> one whose author has become convinced through his time in the text of Ecclesiastes 1.1-11, both owing to seemingly late language and,<sup>68</sup> more, apparent allusion<sup>69</sup> to late Hebrew Bible books, that Ecclesiastes was written toward the end, if not at the end, of what came to be the Hebrew Bible.<sup>70</sup> Such a late date makes a diachronic approach realistic and responsible, especially considering the access to literature Qohelet seemed to enjoy.<sup>71</sup>

Qohelet seems to allude to exilic and even post-exilic books and to craft much of his message around the corruption of creation as linked to and seen through the lens of Israel's corruption through idolatry, leading to exile. If this is correct, he is either a prophet or a historian. I think he is the latter. Whether it is a 5th-4th century B.C.E.,<sup>72</sup> 3rd,

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<sup>67</sup>To steal a line from Barbour, it reads inner-biblical echoes in Qohelet's prologue as 'diachronic and one-directional' (Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 7.). Sommer would call this allusion (see note below), as Barbour essentially admits (Sommer, "A Response," 487.).

<sup>68</sup>But cf. D.C. Fredericks. *Qoheleth's Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date*. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies*, 3 (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1988).

<sup>69</sup>Sommer says that intertextuality is synchronic since it makes no claims as to authorial intention and is essentially receiving a text placed amidst other texts and tracing echoes between them. By contrast, he writes, allusion is 'diachronic or even historicist' (Sommer, "A Response," 487.).

<sup>70</sup>Cf. A. S. Kamenetzky, "Der Rätselname Koheleth," *ZAW* 34 (1914), 228.

<sup>71</sup>In light of 12.12, 'enjoy' may be the wrong way of putting it.

<sup>72</sup>Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 20; Choon-Leong Seow, "Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet," *JBL* 115 (1996).

or even 2nd century B.C.E. work<sup>73</sup> is no concern of this thesis.<sup>74</sup> It is enough to assert that it seems to be late, echoing even post-exilic works,<sup>75</sup> and that it seems to bear something of a Hellenistic impress.<sup>76</sup> However, Ecclesiastes is a thoroughly Hebraic book which stands squarely in the Hebrew Bible tradition.<sup>77</sup> As Barbour points out, this fact has often been passed over in a rush to identify the book's undoubtedly real but by no means central foreign influences.<sup>78</sup> Ecclesiastes 1.1-12.14 is the work of one author, speaking in multiple voices.<sup>79</sup> The lexical, literary, thematic, and even tonal ties are too numerous to assert otherwise. As to Qohelet, I agree with Barbour and others that this is a title,<sup>80</sup> a

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<sup>73</sup>So Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 5.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 8-9.

<sup>75</sup>Possibly 1-2 Chron. Cf. Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 5; Antoon Schoors. *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth, Part I Grammar*. OLA, 41 (Leuven: Peeters Publishers & Department of Oriental Studies, 1992), 221-22.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. Hengel, *Judaism*, 77, vol. 2, n.52, end of note.

<sup>77</sup>Murphy, Ecclesiastes, xliii. Also cf. Michael V. Fox. *Qohelet and His Contradictions*. BiLiSe, 18 (Decatur, GA: Almond Press, 1989), 16.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Hengel, *Judaism*, 115-28, esp. 115-16, 126-28 and vol. 2, 77 n.52, 53.; more recently, Leo G. Perdue. *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 161-216; Leo G. Perdue. *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires*. (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 200-02. But see the massive Louis H. Feldman. *Judaism and Hellenism Reconsidered*. JSJSup, 107 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1ff.. For a balanced treatment see Murphy, Ecclesiastes, xliii-xlv.

<sup>79</sup>Fox, "Frame-Narrative.;" cf. Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 24 n.55.; also cf. Harold Fisch, "Qohelet: A Hebrew Ironist," in *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), who argues the epilogue as from the same hand.

<sup>80</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 24.. As Fox points out, the fact that Qohelet also appears as 'the Qohelet' (הַקֹּהֶלֶת, Eccl 12.8; cf. 7.27, where as Fox argues [52, 86], הַקֹּהֶלֶת could also be read) is the best indicator of this name's titular nature. Fox, Ecclesiastes, 3. Eccl 1.1 and

Solomonic fiction<sup>81</sup> which serves to collect the kings of Israel into the persona of one man who represents Israel even more easily than a single Davidic king would.<sup>82</sup>

Finally, I agree with many that the work is autobiographical,<sup>83</sup> but contrary to most and consistent with my reading of the whole book as flowing from a single pen,<sup>84</sup> I understand the autobiography, or at least the biography, to begin with verse 1, not verse 12.<sup>85</sup> My take is in the title: *Creation in Qohelet*. The prologue is an account of the דברי קהלת, that is, of his words and deeds. In telling us the story of creation, Qohelet is telling his own story as well, and through his story the story of Israel, the nation over which he

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1.12 read together make clear that Qohelet is Solomon, is posing as Solomon, or is styling himself as a Solomonic king. See, e.g., Choon-Leong Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography," in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck, et al. (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995); Andreas Reinert. *Die Salomofiktion: Studien zu Struktur und Komposition des Kohelethbuches*. WMANT, 126 (Göttingen: Neukirchener Verlag, 2010); Katharine J. Dell, "The King in the Wisdom Literature," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 182-83.; Otto Kaiser, "Qoheleth," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 83.; Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 16.

<sup>81</sup>Fox, "Frame-Narrative," 105. More recently Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 10ff.

<sup>82</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 10ff.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography." But see Hengel's comment in Hengel, *Judaism*, 116, see n.64.

<sup>84</sup>Not excluding the possibility of later editorial work, of course. See Longman's comment in Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 57., though I disagree with his reasons for giving it.

<sup>85</sup>Contra, as one among many, Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 57.; more recently, Tremper Longman III, "Challenging the Idols of the Twenty-First Century: The Message of the Book of Ecclesiastes," *SCJ* 12 (2009).

(and the many kings of Israel/Judah in him) presides or has presided<sup>86</sup> as collective king.

What follows is a close reading of Ecclesiastes 1.1-11 and as such an account of creation in Qohelet.

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<sup>86</sup>Ecc1 1.12.

## CHAPTER 2. ECCLESIASTES 1.1: THE COLLECTIVE LIFE OF QOHELET

*Qohelet's name itself casts him as a royal archetype: not Everyman so much as Everyking.<sup>1</sup>*

*The first action of Qohelet's referred to is the narrative speech-act of 1.2. By means of this and the superscription it becomes clear that Qoheleth's character . . . is to be the principal concern of what follows.<sup>2</sup>*

1a The words of the Assembler,	דְּבַר־יָדָבֵר <sup>3</sup> קְהֵלֶת <sup>4</sup>
b Son of David,	בְּיָדָוִד
c King in Jerusalem	מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם:

### Introduction

In this chapter I argue that the biography of Qohelet begins here in verse 1 rather than in verse 12. By way of an apparent inclusio in 1.1 and 1.11 which frames the prologue and alludes to the span of kings from David onward in Kings and Chronicles, the author of Ecclesiastes portrays the prologue not only as the ‘words of Qohelet’ but as his words and deeds. As such, 1.2-11 is put forward both as the condition of creation and as a summary of the reign of one man who embodies the nation he rules. The word ‘Qohelet’ and the designation ‘son of David’ function in ways that dovetail with this collection of Israel and all creation under the auspices of this enigmatic king. Verse 1 thus prepares the attentive

<sup>1</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 26.

<sup>2</sup>Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 78.

<sup>3</sup>This inflected form occurs seven times in Eccl (1.1, 9.17, 10.12, 10.13, 12.10 [2], 12.11). The lexeme (דבר) occurs 29x.

<sup>4</sup>This word occurs only in Eccl: 1.1, 1.2, 1.12, 7.27 (possibly הַקְהֵלֶת; see Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 3.), 12.8 (הַקְהֵלֶת), 12.9, and 12.10. Its root, קהל, (‘assembly’; ‘to assemble’) is common, occurring 173x in the HB.

reader for Qohelet's account of the way in which his story integrates with the story of Israel and of all creation.

### Qohlet's Story as the Story of Israel's Kings

(1) *Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.11 as Inclusio*. Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.11 may serve as an inclusio. If they do, this would argue for the unity of verse 1 with what follows (since v. 11 is obviously integral to vv. 3-11). There are numerous pericopae in Kings and Chronicles that begin and end with phrases that begin and end Qohelet's prologue, words and collocations exactly like or very nearly like those in Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.11.

With regard to Ecclesiastes 1.1, we find numerous instances in Kings and Chronicles of the word, identically inflected, that begins this verse, Ecclesiastes 1.1. It is **דְּבַרִּי**.<sup>5</sup> Many of these instances in Kings and Chronicles occur in conjunction with the otherwise rare collocation **מלך בירושלם** to circumscribe the reign of a king of Israel or Judah.<sup>6</sup> This same collocation ends Ecclesiastes 1.1.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the verse that opens Ecclesiastes (1.1) begins

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<sup>5</sup>1 Kin 11.41, 14.19, 14.29, 15.7, 15.23, 15.31, 16.5, 16.14, 16.20, 16.27, 22.13, 22.39, 22.46; 2 Kin 1.18, 8.23, 10.34, 12.19, 13.8, 13.12, 14.15, 14.18, 14.28, 15.6, 15.11, 15.15, 15.21, 15.26, 15.31, 15.36, 16.19, 20.20, 21.17, 21.25, 23.28, 24.5; 1 Chron 29.29; 2 Chron 9.29, 12.15, 13.22, 16.11, 20.34, 25.26, 26.22, 27.2, 32.32, 33.18, 35.26, 36.8.

<sup>6</sup>With a few minor variations (noted where occurring), in Kings and Chronicles, this phrase occurs in 1 Kin 2.11 (words reversed), 10.26 (**מלך** is definite), 14.21, 15.2, 15.10, 22.42; 2 Kin 8.17, 8.26, 12.2, 14.2, 15.2, 15.33, 16.2, 18.2, 21.1, 21.19, 22.1, 23.31, 23.33 (bet or mem affixed to **מלך**; see too textual questions), 23.36, 24.8; 1 Chron 3.4, 29.27 (words reversed); 2 Chron 1.14, 9.25, 12.13 (2x, first time as **מלך בירושלם וימלך**) and 13.2, 20.31, 21.5, 21.20, 22.2, 24.1, 25.1, 26.3, 27.1, 27.8, 28.1, 29.1, 33.1, 33.21, 34.1, 36.2, 36.5, 36.9, and 36.11.

<sup>7</sup>Many commentators wonder why Eccl 1.1 ends this way rather than with the much more common **מלך על ישראל בירושלם** (as in 1.12). Eccl 1.1-as-allusion offers a satisfying explanation. Cf., e.g., Longman III, Ecclesiastes, 57.

(דְּבָרַי) and ends (מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם) with a word and phrase that combine to circumscribe the reign of many of the kings of Israel-then-Judah from David and Solomon through to Babylonian exile.<sup>8</sup>

In these passages in Kings and Chronicles, דְּבָרַי speaks not only to the words but also to the deeds/acts of the featured king. If it is an allusion to these connected uses that circumscribe kings' reigns in Kings and Chronicles, Ecclesiastes 1.1 may ready the reader not only for the words of Qohelet but for his deeds as well.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, if it is an allusion to these kingships in Kings and Chronicles, Ecclesiastes 1.1 may be a one-verse reduction of not only the words and deeds (דְּבָרַי) of one king of Israel (Qohelet) but of all those reigns to which it alludes. Ecclesiastes 1.1 may be an encapsulation of the monarchic history of Israel from David to Babylonian exile.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>The collocation מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם occurs only once outside Kings, Chronicles, and Ecclesiastes 1.1 (and 1.12, with עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל intervening). It is in Jeremiah 52.1. This verse is duplicated in 2 Kin 24.18, the collocation's last occurrence in that book. In both accounts (that of Jeremiah and Kings), God's anger, his casting his people out of his presence (עַד־הִשְׁלִיכוֹ אוֹתָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי), the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah immediately follow.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Kamenetzky, "Das Koheleth-Rätsel," 66., dismissed as excessive by E. Podechard. *L'Éclésiaste*. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1912), 231.

<sup>10</sup>Using different data within Ecclesiastes, this is the case Barbour makes, not for Ecclesiastes 1.1 but for the book as a whole, in Barbour, *The Story of Israel*. I came to my conclusions independently (summer 2012), directly before reading Barbour's book in the autumn, and was thrilled to find my insights possibly complemented, buttressed, and validated by her own. I owe Dr. David Reimer for bringing her work to my attention. See also the similar conclusions made by Vinel through his reading of the Greek text of Ecclesiastes in F. Vinel, "Le texte grec de l'Éclésiaste et ses caractéristiques: une relecture critique de l'histoire de la royauté," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 296-301. He makes the same connection I make above (between Eccl 1.1 and the words and acts/deeds of King Solomon [in 1 Kin

There is a stock phrase in Chronicles that also helps summarise the reigns of Israel's and then Judah's kings. It is the phrase **הראשנים והאחרנים** and means something like 'from first to last'. It is used to this effect: 'the rest of the deeds of this king, from first to last, are written down elsewhere'.<sup>11</sup> This phrase occurs (in slightly modified form: **לראשנים וגם לאחרנים**) in the closing verse of the prologue, in Ecclesiastes 1.11. Not only does it serve a summary purpose similar to the word and phrase just discussed (**דברי** and **מלך בירושלם** in Kings and Chronicles); it also shares close context with one of them (**דברי**) in its every occurrence in Chronicles ('Now the word/deeds [**דברי**] of King *x*, from first to last [**הראשנים והאחרנים**], are they not written down elsewhere?').

If these words and collocations are used in connection in Kings and Chronicles, they may also be used in connection in Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.11. In Chronicles, for instance, all three phrases (**מלך בירושלם** and **דברי** and **הראשנים והאחרנים**) are used in close connection to sum up the reign of a king (e.g. David in 1 Chron 29.27-9, Solomon in 2 Chron 9.25-9, Rehoboam in 2 Chron 12.13-15, et al.). Could they not also be used for similar purposes in Ecclesiastes 1.1-11?<sup>12</sup> The fact that the reign of 'King Qohelet' is explicitly

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11.41])(Vinel, "Le texte grec," 298.).

<sup>11</sup> 1 Chron 29.29; 2 Chron 9.29, 12.15, 16.11, 20.34, 25.26, 26.22, 28.26, 35.27; in some cases the *cholem-waw* appears in place of the *cholem*: **ואחרונים**.

<sup>12</sup> In her introduction Barbour offers this insight: 'Considering the partly parallel case of Roman poetry, the classicist Don Fowler asked what it could possibly mean for a Western *not* to be intertextual with *High Noon*; we might ask what it could mean for a third-century work about a king in Jerusalem *not* to be intertextual with the whole sweep of the book of Chronicles or the Deuteronomistic History' (Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 8.). She goes on to assert that '[Qohelet] deliberately makes use of specific typologies from other late biblical portraits of kings, and he uses motifs that are not just standards of kingship, but that writers like the Chronicler use to model particular later kings on the

stated in and only in Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.12 joins with evidence just put forward to heighten this possibility.

If these are allusions, the author of Ecclesiastes is telling us that what follows is an account of the words and deeds of Qohelet, a king whose reign seems to encapsulate or represent the reign of kings alluded to, those from David and Solomon to Babylonian exile. Barbour has already argued a convincing case for the fact that Qohelet is a composite king who embodies all the kings of Israel and as such, Israel itself, from its zenith to its exile.<sup>13</sup> The allusion to Kings and Chronicles which frames this prologue agrees with Barbour's research and conclusion about Qohelet as a collective king.

(2) *Qohelet Speaks to All Israel as Springing from One Man.* The word Qohelet also dovetails with Barbour's contention by showing that the assembly (קהל) stems from one man, Israel, out of whom grew one nation, the nation of Israel. As a verb, קהל is always used to assemble people, not inanimate things.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, as a noun it always refers to an assembly (or horde, e.g. Jer 50.9) of people.<sup>15</sup> Its first three occurrences in Genesis (Gen 28.3, 35.11, 48.4) are essentially the same. In each, God speaks of the blessing he will bring

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pattern of particular earlier ones' (Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 28.).

<sup>13</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 10-36.

<sup>14</sup>So James L. Crenshaw. *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary. OTL*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 32.

<sup>15</sup>קהלתה is mentioned twice in Num 33.22-3 as an Israelite campsite in the wilderness. The point stands that in the Hebrew Bible it never used to assemble inanimate things or as an assembly/amassing of inanimate things. See Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 25 n.59.

from Jacob's loins: a host of people, nations, and kings, a קהל. Each verse is laden with creation-language from Genesis 1.28.<sup>16</sup> The fourth and final occurrence of קהל in Genesis is in Genesis 49.6, embedded in Jacob's 'blessing' over his sons. Jacob refers here to 'the assembly' of his sons Simeon and Levi. This קהל has come from Jacob as well and is closely connected to him in this text.

The concept of קהל comes from Jacob. Quite literally, it comes out of him and becomes the sons and then the tribes, and then the nation, of Israel.<sup>17</sup> Israel comes from Israel.<sup>18</sup> This leads to a curious and singular instance of the word.

The lexeme קהלה occurs in two places in the Hebrew Bible, Nehemiah 5.7 and Deuteronomy 33.4. Although listed in some dictionaries and concordances as קהלה, the inflected form in Deuteronomy 33.4 is actually קהלת. This is the only occurrence of the lexeme קהלת outside Ecclesiastes.<sup>19</sup> I note it here because of its unique lexical link to קהלת in Ecclesiastes but also because of its connection to every instance of קהל in Gene-

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 46ff.

<sup>17</sup>קהל is first explicitly referred to as 'Israel' in Ex 12.6, its first use in the book.

<sup>18</sup>The ancient Egyptians normally referred to cities and people groups with feminine forms. By contrast, 'Israel' was referred to in the masculine (by Pharaoh Mernepta), which suggests that the Egyptians understood that behind the name of the people group 'Israel' was a man (James Hoffmeier, 'The Exodus from Egypt', a lecture [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2vhrK6Wczs>]). This is the last thing he says).

<sup>19</sup>קהלת occurs in 1QH 10.12 as well (קהלת), where the teacher thanks God that he has been appointed as an object of shame to the unfaithful, to the 'assembly of (the) wicked' (קהלת רשעים) ('קהלה', *DCH* 7:208). קהלתה is mentioned twice in Num 33.22-3 as an Israelite campsite in the wilderness. See Kamenetzky, "Die ursprünglich beabsichtigte Aussprache des Pseudonyms Qohelet," 12.

sis (Gen 28.3, 35.11, 48.4, 49.6), a connection which inheres in the person of Jacob or 'Israel'.

Its usage in Deuteronomy 33.4-5 directly follows the song of Moses and stands at the start his song of blessing. The word (קהלת) speaks of the 'congregation' of Jacob which Moses is about to bless, tribe by tribe. Those verses read: 'when Moses commanded us a law, as a possession for the assembly [קהלת] of Jacob. <sup>5</sup>Thus the LORD became king in Jesh'urun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together'. This is the only time in the Hebrew Bible קהל is used in conjunction with יעקב (Jacob). It is a unique collocation. Verse 5 emphasises the priority of the text on the gathering together of the sons-become-tribes of Jacob into one group, congregation, or assembly. The parallel between 'assembly of Jacob' at the end of verse 4 and 'tribes of Israel together' at the end of verse 5 underscores this fact. These many tribes came from twelve men who came from one man, Jacob. This obvious fact points up the four occurrences of קהל in Genesis. The first canonical occurrences of the word have Jacob as their source, and the final instance in Genesis (49.6) is in Jacob's blessing over his twelve sons. The blessing of Moses over the twelve tribes recalls Jacob's blessing in many ways,<sup>20</sup> one of which seems to be through the usage of the קהלת in Deuteronomy 33.4.

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<sup>20</sup>See De Hoop, citing Gunkel, in Raymond De Hoop. *Genesis 49 in its Literary and Historical Context*. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 30-31.; cf. Gordon Wenham. *Genesis 16-50*. WBC 2, (Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 209, 469.; see esp. Kerry D. Lee, "The Death of Jacob: Narrative Conventions in Genesis 47.28-50.26," diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2013). and Kerry D. Lee. *The Death of Jacob: Narrative Conventions in Genesis 47.28-50.26*. *Biblical Interpretation Series*, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), see esp. ch. 2.

The last, unique usage (קהלת) of קהל in the Torah speaks to its occurrences in Genesis (28.3, 35.11, 48.4, 49.6). These five occurrences frame the assembly of Israel in the Torah and highlight its origins in the person of Jacob, which also highlights the faithfulness of the LORD in keeping his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in making of them a great nation, Israel.

So the concept of קהל comes from Jacob. Israel comes from Israel. The point with relevance to the use of קהלת in Ecclesiastes is that embedded in the meaning of the word is the idea that a nation, a whole assembly of peoples, came from and are represented in one man. And this process of Israel coming from Israel ties into the creation mandate in Genesis 1.28.<sup>21</sup> It relates to creation. קהל, and קהלת with it, relates to creation. The transition from Ecclesiastes 1.1 to 1.2 may be more than the transition from a title affixed after the fact (v.1) to the book's central thesis (v.2). The connection may be integral to the message of the book. What better name than קהלת (Qohelet) to embody the קהל (assembly) of Israel while connecting to creation in a fundamental way?

(3) *Like 'Qohelet', 'Son of David' Also Collects*

The other terms in

Ecclesiastes 1.1 chosen to describe Qohelet serve similar purposes of collection. 'Son of David' or the same association differently phrased<sup>22</sup> rolls through Kings and Chronicles as

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<sup>21</sup>The theological point of this common language may be that Israel, a corporate Adam, is to do what Adam failed to do by obeying God's law in the garden (the Promised Land) so it might bring blessing and not curse to creation. Cf. Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 46ff.

<sup>22</sup>E.g., 'his father David' (e.g., 2 Kin 14.3, 15.38, 18.3, 20.5, 22.2).

a way of describing the faithful kings of Israel and Judah.<sup>23</sup> Various expressions attached to the name David, even the word 'David' itself,<sup>24</sup> are often another way in Kings and Chronicles of saying 'Israel', of expressing solidarity as a people and, in looking back, looking ahead with hope of reformation. And the Chronicler refers to Judah as ישראל before and after the exile of the ten Northern tribes, in an effort, it seems to express and thus recover a national strength and continuity, a continuity which is, again, somewhat if not completely tied to King David and the divine promises given Israel through him.<sup>25</sup> Although the word Israel does not appear in 1.1, it does in 1.12, a verse which is related from a final form perspective, and which I argue below is related in other ways that help make sense of what Qohelet seems to be saying. Thus does every word in Ecclesiastes 1.1<sup>26</sup> help gather a people under the auspices of a person, the collective king Qohelet. His title serves the same purpose, as does the echo of Kings and Chronicles that seems to frame these first eleven verses. The story of Qohelet speaks to the life of Israel, which speaks to the life (and death) of all things.

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<sup>23</sup>1 Kin 13.2; 2 Chron 13.8, 23.3, 32.33. Sometimes evil kings are so labeled (2 Kin 16.2). In all cases, whether with good or evil kings, the term collects. It thus serves a function similar to Qohelet. Cf. Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 26-27.

<sup>24</sup>1 Kin 12.16, where Israel is simply called 'David'.

<sup>25</sup>E.g., 2 Chron 12.1, 6; 19.8; 21.2, 4; 23.2; 24.5, 16; 28.19, 23, 27, listed in H. G. M. Williamson. *Israel in the Book of Chronicles*. SOTS, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 102. Also cf. Williamson, *Israel in the Book of Chronicles*, 87-88, 102-10, 126-30.; Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 27-28; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 39 n.5. Cf. esp. 2 Chron 11.3.

<sup>26</sup>And of 1.1 in connection with 1.12; see below.

(4) *Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 12 as Inclusio: Qohelet, King Over Creation.* Ecclesiastes 1.1

and 12 may also serve as an *inclusio*. This would argue not only for the connection between verse 1 and the rest of the prologue but also for the connectedness of the prologue (vv. 1-11) with what directly follows (vv. 12ff.) and thus for its integration with the book as a whole. Verses 1 and 12 clearly begin different sections. This is universally acknowledged, and the differences between the verses is often emphasised (v. 12 is first-person and includes 'על-ישראל'). But they are also similar, the only two such verses in the book, and their similarities far outweigh their differences. What is to say they should not speak to one another rather than acting independently and in so doing function as a second frame for the book's first section? If they do, verse 12 would act as both end and beginning, looking back over the creation-soaked prologue and forward to Qohelet's search for wisdom and meaning. In this way, it would act as a sort of porous border. Qohelet's fondness for ambiguity<sup>27</sup> ought to urge consideration of this possibility.

If Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 12 do frame the prologue, they must relate to it integrally. But how do titular verses about a King Qohelet reigning (over Israel) in Jerusalem relate to verses 2-11, verses that speak of the state of creation? The possible connection between the three word/phrases in Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.11 (דברי, מלך בירושלם, לראשנים וגם) (לאהרנים) may help answer the question. As we have seen, in Chronicles these collocations always combine to summarise the reign of a king, beginning with David, then

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<sup>27</sup>Doug Ingram. *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 431 (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

moving to Solomon and beyond. Again, could they not serve the same purpose here in Ecclesiastes? If they do, Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.12 as *inclusio* makes perfect sense. But the question remains, 'How does a frame featuring King Qohelet and his reign over Israel relate to the creation matrix laid out in the prologue?' If the frame exists, it speaks to verses 2-11 and is telling us that Qohelet's kingship has much to do with the condition of creation. The two are integrally related.

In using this language in Eccl 1.1 (and 1.11, and 1.12) to tell us who he is, Qohelet is preparing us, though perhaps in a veiled way (I make no claim as to whether Qohelet expected his original audience to recognize these inner-biblical echoes), to read in what follows, what falls between the frame of 1.1 and 1.11, a history of Israel from David to exile, that is, a history of Israel told in the stretches of Kings and Chronicles which include these words and collocations in correspondence with each other.<sup>28</sup> What follows Ecclesiastes 1.1 is a statement summing up Qohelet's view of the condition of creation (1.2), followed by an outlay of creation which expresses that condition (1.3-11). The condition of creation articulated in 1.2-11 is also an articulation of the condition of Israel. The two are integrally related, inextricably linked. This is part of what *הכל הכל* means. We will argue and unpack this assertion in the following chapter.

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<sup>28</sup>The fact that 1.11 is about time and remembrance makes it the perfect place to echo the history of Israel. Cf. ch. 7 below and Frank E. Gæbelein, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 1153-54., where Wright labels 1.4-11 'The Frustration in Nature and *History*' (emphasis mine).

## Prologue as Autobiography, National History, and Cosmology

This allusion suggests the author of Ecclesiastes is putting forward these first eleven verses as the words and deeds of Qohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem, from beginning to end. This prologue is the sum of his words and exploits, that is, of his life. What do these verses tell us? They tell us about the state of creation. So the sum of King Qohelet's words and deeds, of his life, is the state of creation. This summary is itself summed up in verse 2 and put more succinctly still in that verse's final phrase, **הכל הבל**. These two words convey, collect, and condense into one thing the life of a Collective King, the nation he rules, and all things. Perhaps one affects the other, Qohelet's life affecting that of Israel, and Israel's affecting that of all things. If so, echoes of the life-span of Israel, of its history, should permeate the verses that follow.

If these connections, these layers of textual meaning, exist, and if they tell us anything, they tell us to accept the fact that the life of Qohelet is integrally woven into the condition of creation described in the verses between this inclusio. This must be a key to learning what verse 2 and its key term *hevel* mean.

Christianson approaches this insight when he writes, 'The first action of Qohelet's referred to is the narrative speech-act of 1.2. By means of this and the superscription it becomes clear that Qoheleth's character . . . is to be the principal concern of what follows'. However, he continues, 'The expectancy created here is not immediately fulfilled, and is certainly not fulfilled . . . in 1.3-11.'<sup>29</sup> But why not? My reading in 1.1 and 1.11 of allusion to a

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<sup>29</sup>Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 78. My disagreement with Christianson here is not without irony, since he describes his own project much like I might describe my own, as

litany of earlier kings of Israel that fill the pages of Kings and Chronicles suggests Qohelet is pointing to his character in 1.3-11 by way of creation, returning to his personal pursuits more obviously in 1.12.<sup>30</sup>

Qohelet's story is Israel's story. His words and deeds are Hers. His rise to demise encapsulates, portrays, Hers. Barbour shows how Qohelet conveys this in the book. This thesis shows how Qohelet conveys this in the first eleven verses. It also takes the question seriously, 'what is Qohelet telling us, then, about how his words and deeds, his life, and therein the life of the nation he rules and represents, namely Israel, relate to the state of creation'? Put more briefly, how does Qohelet's and by extension Israel's condition relate to that of creation?

## Conclusion to Chapter 2

The account of creation that Ecclesiastes 1.2-11 clearly is may also somehow be the account of one man's words and deeds (דבריו)<sup>31</sup> and as such that of a nation as well. If this is

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'based on a hunch, really, that what lends the book its cohesion is the main character who narrates his story in the first person . . .' (Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 9.). As is surely true of Christianson, in my case it was the data that grew and drove the hunch, not vice versa.

<sup>30</sup>Brown writes, 'Qoheleth's words are testimonial' (though he is undoubtedly excluding 1.3-11 in this comment, allowing for an autobiographical lacuna which puzzles him) in William P. Brown. *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature*. (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2014), 143-45.

<sup>31</sup>In this thesis I take issue with Longman's argument that Qohelet's words begin in Eccl 1.12 (Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 75.), an argument based chiefly on comparative reading rather than on a close reading of the primary text (Eccl) itself. In the end, however, Longman and I agree on the book's 'what' if not its 'where'. He argues that the book is a 'framed wisdom autobiography' (Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 17.). It is. But the autobiography begins where the book does, in verse 1 (Eccl 1.1). I try and bring all this together at the end of ch. 6.

true it suggests a fundamental coherence or overlap between the condition of one man (Qohelet), the nation he rules and represents (Israel), and all creation. The story of Qohelet is the story of Israel and of creation writ small. And it is related in eleven verses. This is the story of creation in Qohelet.

### CHAPTER 3. ECCLESIASTES 1.2: A TWO-WORD STATE OF THE UNION

*In Koheleth, form and substance are so closely interwoven that any restatement becomes a distortion.*<sup>1</sup>

הבל הבלים<sup>2</sup> אמר קהלת הבל הבלים הכל הבל<sup>3</sup>

2. 'Utter *hevel*,'<sup>4</sup> says the Assembler, 'utter *hevel*; everything is<sup>5</sup> *hevel*'.

2a Utter <i>hevel</i>	הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים 2a
b says the Assembler	אָמַר קְהֵלֶת b
c utter <i>hevel</i>	הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים c
d everything is <i>hevel</i>	הַכֹּל הַבֵּלִ: d

#### Introduction

In this chapter I argue that the best way to understand the meaning of *hevel* in Ecclesiastes is to understand it as it is first presented, here in verse 2, within its first and seminal context. Qohelet tells us what *hevel* means here: it means *hakkol*. הַכֹּל הַבֵּל, the short sentence that ends this verse, says that everything is *hevel*. This 'everything' or 'all' is superla-

<sup>1</sup>Robert Gordis, "The World View of Kohelet," in *Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 177.

<sup>2</sup>הַבָּלִים: Eccl. 1.2 (2), 5.6, 12.8. The collocation הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים occurs only in 1.2 (2) and 12.8.

<sup>3</sup>הַכֹּל הַבֵּל occurs in 1.2, 1.14, 2.11, 2.17, 3.19, 12.8. הַכֹּל occurs in 1.2, 1.14, 2.11, 2.16, 2.17, 3.11, 3.19, 3.20 (2), 6.6, 7.15, 9.1, 9.2, 10.19, 11.5, 12.8, 12.13. See Norbert Von Lohfink, "Koh 1,2 „alles ist Windhauch" - universale oder anthropologische Aussage?," in *Der Weg zum Menschen; zur philosophischen und theologischen Anthropologie*, für Alfons Deissler, ed. Rudolf Mosis, and Lothar Ruppert (Freiburg: Herder, 1989), 207-11. The lexeme (כָּל) occurs ninety-one times.

<sup>4</sup>I essentially leave the word untranslated here owing to the nature of my argument in this chapter, namely that verses 3-11 tell us what *hevel* is. To translate here would thus be presumptive and self-defeating.

<sup>5</sup>The word is italicised because added for readability.

tive since the phrase הכל הבל is equated with and even additive of the superlative הבל הבלים. ‘The all’ of הכל thus speaks to all creation and not simply to man and his affairs. I go on to argue an equation: if הכל הבל means that everything is *hevel*, then it must also mean that *hevel* is everything. Ecclesiastes 1.3-11 shows us what this looks like and what it means.<sup>6</sup> These nine verses help us understand what Qohelet’s *hevel* means by mirroring its original habitat in this book, by mirroring the two-word sentence הכל הבל at the end of Ecclesiastes 1.2. If we want to understand *hevel* in its most determinative instance in Ecclesiastes, we need to read the verses that immediately follow, verses 3-11, closely and carefully. They shed light on what Qohelet means by *hevel* in a way that illumines his larger message in the book. Finally, I look at the ways *hevel* first appears, here in verse 2—in the plural, back-to-back, and concretely (as breath or vapour)—to see whether similar uses in the Hebrew Bible are used in a certain way and if so, what that means for their use in this seminal frame verse at book’s beginning.

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<sup>6</sup>Anderson comes close to saying the same thing: ‘The literary purpose of the poem in 1,4-11 would then be to provide the first example or test case for the thesis: everything is *hevel* (1,2)’ (Anderson, ‘The Poetic Inclusio of Qoheleth in Relation to 1,2 and 12,8,’ 208.). See too Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 68.

## Hevel Hevelim

To understand the book we must understand this verse,<sup>7</sup> and to understand this verse we must understand *hevel*,<sup>8</sup> not in the abstract but as it is here presented, and *hevel* is first presented here within the construct phrase הבל הבליים. This phrase is universally acknowledged to be a superlative expression of the word used.<sup>9</sup> Here it thus expresses the idea of ‘the most possible *hevel*’ or, more elegantly, ‘utter *hevel*’.<sup>10</sup> This is what Qohelet says: הבל הבליים אמר קהלת. It is his message, not only in this verse but in this book.

## Hakkol Hevel

Since this verse and not only the construct phrase הבל הבליים frames the book, the entire verse is Qohelet’s message, ‘the words of Qohelet’ (Eccl 1.1), what ‘Qohelet says’ (אמר קהלת, Eccl 1.2). The only other phrase in the verse, and the one that finishes it, is הבל הבל. This too must be what Qohelet says; it must encompass his message, must mean what הבל הבליים does but something more as well. What does הבל הבל mean? Its situa-

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<sup>7</sup>For a history of interpretation, see Jean-Jacques Lavoie, “HABEL HABALIM HAKOL HABEL: Histoire de l’interprétation d’une formule célèbre et enjeux culturels,” ScEs 58 (2006).

<sup>8</sup>See ‘What is *hevel*?’ section below for further study of this word in its context here.

<sup>9</sup>Williams calls this construction a ‘superlative genitive’ (Ronald J. Williams. Williams’ Hebrew Syntax. (London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §80.); cf. Fox, Ecclesiastes, 3.; A. B. Davidson. Hebrew Grammar Syntax. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), §44.; W. Gesenius. Hebrew Grammar. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), §133i.; Paul Joüon. A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), §141l-m.; Bruce K. Waltke, and M. O’Connor. An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §9.5.3j.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Gen 9.27 where עבד עבדים means ‘utter servant’ or more literally ‘servant of servants’.

tion in the sentence and its resulting relationship to the phrases **הבל הבלים** and **אמר** **קהלת** mean that it is equivalent to **הבל הבלים** and thus means something like 'utter hevel'. Its situation and lexicon (namely, the addition of *hakkol*) also mean that it is an advance on **הבל הבלים** as well.

(1) *'Hakkol Hevel' Equals, Explains, and Adds to 'Hevel Hevelim'*

(a) *Syntax.* A glance at verse 2 shows that **הכל הבל** is an extension of **הבל הבלים**. The syntax suggests that it repeats what **הבל הבלים** conveys while advancing it. The first half of verse 2 reads **הבל הבלים אמר קהלת**. What does Qohelet say? **חבל הבלים**. There is plenty of vagueness but no ambiguity here; in case we missed it, there is repetition. **הבל הבלים**, says Qohelet, **הבל הבלים**. Syntactically, the author surrounds 'Qohelet says' with this phrase, **הבל הבלים**. It is obviously and emphatically the essence of what he is saying in this verse and in this book (cf. 12.8).

**אמר קהלת** corresponds to **הבל הבלים**, but it also corresponds to **הכל הבל**. *Hevel hevelim* at the beginning of both lines establishes the verse's A, B/A', B' pattern.

A: **הבל הבלים**

B: **אמר קהלת**

A': **הבל הבלים**

B': **הכל הבל**

This pairs **הבל הבלים** with itself (**הבל הבלים** again) and **אמר קהלת** with **הכל הבל**. Read in light of this parallelism, we see what it is that Qohelet says (**אמר קהלת**). It is **הכל הבל**.

This is the sum of his words. From this we may infer that **הכל הבל הבלים** corresponds to **הכל הבל**. If we put the information we have adduced above syllogistically, it will look something like this:

1. If what Qohelet says is **הכל הבל הבלים** (through a plain reading)
2. And if what Qohelet says is **הכל הבל** (through a parallelistic reading)
3. Then **הכל הבל הבלים** is **הכל הבל**

Expressed another way (where 'Qohelet says' is /a/, **הכל הבל הבלים** is /b/, and **הכל הבל** is /c/),

1. If /a/ is /b/
2. And if /a/ is /c/
3. Then /b/ is /c/

This is a dry and long-winded way of saying that syntactically verse 2 gathers its meaning into the two words at its end: **הכל הבל**. These two words summarise the verse, and because this verse is widely if not universally recognised as the essence of what Qohelet is saying in the book (again, cf. Eccl 12.8), these two words summarise the entire book (sans, perhaps, Eccl 12.9-14, which stands outside the 1.2/12.8 frame) as well.

(2) *'Hakkol Hevel' Accentuates and Adds to 'Hevel Hevelim'*

(a) *The Plain Sense.* Our reading has revealed that **הכל הבל** is in some ways equivalent to **הכל הבל הבלים** but that it expresses something more, as well, while helping to explain **הכל הבלים**. All our arguments aside, the fact remains that the emphatic role of **הכל הבל** here in verse 2 is apparent in the most cursory reading. Following a repeated **הכל הבל** as it does, the word *hakkol* stands out in its uniqueness as an obvious distinction.

The grammar of this *hevel*-train seems to support this contention, where verse 2a-c comes off as a series of utterances, both instances of **הבל הבלים** depending as they do on **אמר קהלת** to make a complete sentence. The first **הבל הבלים** looks ahead to **אמר קהלת** to complete its expression. So does the second **הבל הבלים** 'look back' as it were to the previous two words (to the **אמר קהלת**) to form a complete thought. Both emphatic utterances thus depend on the same phrase (**אמר קהלת**) to form sentences and in so doing ring **אמר קהלת** in way that underscores their sameness (and their source) rather nicely. But **הכל הבל** is different. These two, simple nouns manage to make a complete sentence (Subject [*hakkol*] + verb [implied] + predicate [*hevel*]), and thereby form a complete thought that is in some sense independent of what precedes while at the same time being a repetition, extension, and completion of it. In short, **הכל הבל** is the only independent colon in the verse. This grammatical feature sets it apart and suggests its additive function, but so do other features like parallelism.

(b) *Seconding and Staircase Parallelism*. Seconding<sup>1</sup> also emphasises not only **הכל הבל** in this verse but also *hevel* within the phrase **הכל הבל** in this verse. The verse is parallel but so are its last two words. We might expect this, since they seem to be

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<sup>1</sup>Where the second line is more than merely repetitive but also additive and/or explanatory and thus emphatic (James L. Kugel. *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*. (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 13, 61., relying on Barbara Hernstein Smith. *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968); also cf. David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards. *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*. OTS, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 21-35.). This artistry was recognised earlier by medieval Jews (cf. George Buchanan Gray. *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry: Considered with Special Reference to the Criticism and Interpretation of the Old Testament*. LBS, KTAV Publishing House, 1972), 17ff.). But see Kugel, *The Idea*, 96-134.

a summary of the verse. In each case (with the whole verse and also with its last two words), the second unit repeats and adds to the first. This suggests that the second unit is emphatic. Such is the case with *hevel* here in הַבֵּל הַבֵּל. The *hevel* receives the emphasis because it mirrors, or seconds, *hakkol*. Again, the lingering stress on the first syllable of *hevel* here (הַבֵּל) at the end of verse 2 supports this 'seconding' reading. So does the pause. After the run of double הַבֵּל הַבֵּל, the different הַבֵּל (*hakkol*) breaks up the verse through variety and slows the reader down a bit, though the accent follows from what has come before. Then the pause truly rests on הַבֵּל (*hevel*). The fact that it is on the first syllable means that the entire word is lingered over and lengthened. It began the sentence and ends it, bookending the verse and demanding prominence in the mental space of the mind of the reader or listener. The pause which follows is a double-stop, a full-stop, or as Kugel puts it symbolically, //.<sup>12</sup> If the text is laid out in verse lines, the text of these last two words spatially hangs out over what follows,<sup>13</sup> brooding over it as it were, and in so doing suggesting that הַבֵּל הַבֵּל will have implications for the verses that follow. Indeed, this short sentence will determine what follows, because as we will see, Qohelet seems to view creation as in a sense flowing from this verse (v. 2) and from these two, final words in particular.

The back-to-back stress on הַבֵּל הַבֵּל also distinguishes it from what precedes (principally, from הַבֵּל הַבֵּל) not only because it is unique in this verse but also because

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<sup>12</sup>Kugel, *The Idea*, 1.

<sup>13</sup>Unless of course v. 2 is on a page separate from vv. 3-11.

it emphasises not only *hevel* but both words, *hakkol* and *hevel*. This reminds us as readers that just as *hevel* is emphasised through seconding in the collocation **הכל הבל**, so is the entire collocation emphasised in the verse through the same principle, that is, through seconding. Seconding says what many other details in the verse do as well: **הכל הבל** tells us what **הבל הבלים** does, but it tells us something else too. It tells us not only that **הבל** is total in degree but that it is total in extent. It tells us clearly what **הבל הבלים** told us opaquely. ‘The all’ or ‘everything’ is *hevel*. But it is not just the final phrase that informs what precedes it. **הבל הבלים** informs **הכל הבל** as well. It tells us that the ‘all’ of this final phrase is utter, complete, or ‘the most possible’. It is a superlative ‘all’. We now know what we suspected before: *hevel* is utter in extent as well as in degree. ‘The all’ (**הכל**) that **הבל** affects and that, indeed, is **הבל** is all creation and not simply some part of it, as some have argued.<sup>14</sup> My reading of verses 3-11 supports this interpretation of **הכל**.

#### What is ‘Hevel’? ‘Hevel’ is ‘Hakkol’

**הבל** is the most important word in Ecclesiastes.<sup>15</sup> Its meaning determines the meaning of the book. It occurs first here in verse 2, five times, as almost the only word in the verse, occurring thirty-three times elsewhere for a total of thirty-eight instances.<sup>16</sup> In 12.8, the fi-

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<sup>14</sup>See note above.

<sup>15</sup>Schoors calls it ‘the key word par excellence, more than any of the more frequently occurring words, because it is found at strategic points of the exposition and embodies the thinking and mood that pervade the sapiential book’ (Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 119.). Schoors’ choice of the word ‘embodies’ as it relates to the influence of **הבל** is particularly apt, as the study below will show.

<sup>16</sup>Eccl 1.2 (5), 14; 2.1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3.19; 4.4, 7, 8, 16; 5.6, 9; 6.2, 4, 9, 11, 12; 7.6, 15;  
- 46 -

nal verse in the book before what is commonly called the epilogue (12.9-14), we find a near match of 1.2.<sup>17</sup> Both 1.2 and 12.8 thus frame the message of Qohelet and serve as its theme,<sup>18</sup> and both verses essentially reduce to *hevel*.<sup>19</sup> Although the word literally means 'breath' or 'vapour', it is often used metaphorically throughout the Hebrew Bible and in Ecclesiastes to speak to ephemerality, insubstantiality, futility, and worthlessness.<sup>20</sup> *Hevel* as Qohelet uses it is thus protean, by turns intractable then elusive, and consequently notoriously difficult to translate well. Numerous suggestions have been made.<sup>21</sup> One prob-

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8.10, 14 (2); 9.9 (2); 11.8, 10; 12.8 (3). Eccl 9.2 is thought to be another occurrence by some (with הבל in place of הבל: see Douglas B. Miller. Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: The Place of Hebel in Qohelet's Work. Academia Biblica, 2 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 1 n.1.); and Eccl 9.9 is disputed as dittography by others (see Goldman's helpful evaluation in Biblia Hebraica Quinta: General Introduction and Megilloth, 18 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004), 104\*.).

<sup>17</sup>12.8 has one הבל הבלים rather than two and הקהלת rather than תהלת.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Galling's interesting take, cited by Svend Holm-Nielsen, "On the interpretation of Qoheleth in early Christianity," VT 24 (1974), 169 n.1., that the author meant 1.2 to apply to 1.2-11 only but that the redactors misunderstood this and tacked it to the end (12.8) so as to speak to the entire book.

<sup>19</sup>Schoors, Pleasing Words, 119.

<sup>20</sup>*Hevel* as 'worthlessness' sometimes refers to idolatry in the HB (e.g. 2 Kin 17.15; cf. Dominic Rudman, "The Use of הבל as an Indicator of Chaos in Ecclesiastes," in The Language of Qohelet in its Context: Essays in Honour of Prof. A. Schoors on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, ed. A. Berlejung, and P. Van Hecke (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 130-31.; Charles F. Whitley. Koheleth: His Language and Thought. BZAW, 148 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 7.). See below where I conclude that the combination of ways *hevel* is first used here in Eccl (in 1.2) suggests idolatry from the start, not, perhaps, as a translation but as strongly connotative in informing the way we approach the world through Qohelet's pen, laced as *hevel* is throughout his description of everything.

<sup>21</sup>Translations range from evaluative ('vanity', 'absurd', 'meaningless', 'futile', 'fleeing') to objective ('breath', 'vapour', 'emptiness', 'nothing'). The word (הבל) has this range in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Miller, Symbol and Rhetoric), because it is often used metaphorically, much like the word 'windy' in the assertion, 'He speaks windy (full of gust but empty)

lem for the translator is that none of these suggestions suits all thirty-eight instances of the word.

Fortunately, Qohelet tells us what *hevel* means, or more precisely what it is, here at the end of verse 2: **הכל הבל**. With the present tense being verb (which is assumed) inserted, the clause reads, from left to right, **הכל** is **הבל**. *Hakkol* is *hevel*.<sup>22</sup> And if *hakkol* is *hevel*, then *hevel* is *hakkol*.<sup>23</sup> Here, at the beginning of the book, is the beginning of an answer to the all-important question for purposes of understanding the book—namely, ‘what is *hevel*?’ Qohelet has told us. *Hevel* is *hakkol*. This does not tell us, ostensibly anyway, what *hevel* means but what it is. It is *hakkol*. It is everything. *Hevel* is everything. To be precise, everything, *hakkol*, is *hevel*. **הכל הבל**.

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words’; e.g. Ps 62.10. See Fox, “The Meaning of hebel for Qohelet.”; Richard Alan Fuhr Jr. *An Analysis of the Inter-Dependency of the Prominent Motifs Within the Book of Qohelet*. SBL, 151 (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 29-63.

<sup>22</sup>A better, perhaps more phonetically accurate transliteration would have been *havel* (rather than *hevel*). This transliteration also offers the advantage of better showing the similarity (morphologically and perhaps aurally) of *hakkol* and *havel*: so *hakkol havel*. However, I have transliterated **הבל** as *hevel* consistently throughout because it was an early choice and one that changing in the editing process would have proven too cumbersome. The same goes for *havel havalim*, which I have transliterated *hevel hevelim* throughout. Transliterating *hevel* was also just much easier (because consistent).

<sup>23</sup>These two words form a complete sentence, a subject (*hakkol*) and predicate nominative (*hevel*) flanking a tacit verb which denotes equivalence. Davidson calls this type of construction a ‘nominal clause’, where two nouns take on characteristics of subject then predicate with an assumed ‘copula verb’ (Davidson, *Syntax*). **הכל הבל** thus functions the way this sentence would: Jim is the man. It is thus also true to say ‘the man is Jim’. Thus, just as ‘the all’ is *hevel*, so *hevel* is ‘the all’. Still, I am aware that ‘statements of identity are not necessarily identical: “a dog is an animal” does not imply “an animal is a dog”’ (D. A. Carson. *Exegetical Fallacies*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 59).

### What is 'Hakkol'? It is What Follows (vv. 3-11), Which is All Creation

Among other things, I have tried to establish that, according to verse 2, הבל הבלים means something like 'utter *hevel*' and that the two phrases הבל הבלים and הבל הכל are basically equivalent. Therefore, if הבל הבלים means 'utter *hevel*', 'utter' being superlative both in degree and distance, then the הבל הכל is superlative in the same ways. This being the

case, the *hakkol* of הכל הכל here in verse 2 is superlative in extent.<sup>24</sup> That is, ‘the all’ here refers to ‘all creation’ and not to something less extensive.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>But not necessarily elsewhere in the book. Cf. Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 3.; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 45. Schoors argues against the comprehensive or superlative scope of *hakkol* here in verse 2, but he does so by comparing the phrase here to its other uses in the book (since they are not comprehensive, neither is this instance in verse 2). However, I argue for the comprehensiveness of this *hakkol* based on its context. My argument is contextual, whereas Schoors’ is comparative. Among those who think this ‘everything’ less than everything, often instead ‘everything to do with humanity’, are Gregory Thaumaturgos (John Jarick. *Gregory Thaumaturgos’ Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes*. SBLSCS, (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990)); Philip Graham Ryken. *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*. *Preaching the Word*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); George Aaron Barton. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*. ICC, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912); H. C. Leupold. *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1952); Michael A. Eaton. *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*. TOTC, (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1983); Rashbam (R. Samuel Ben Meir. *The Commentary of R. Samuel Ben Meir Rashbam on Qoheleth*. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1985)). Among those who think *hakkol* in Eccl 1.2 to speak to all creation are Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*; R. N. Whybray. *Ecclesiastes*. NCBC, (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1989) (though ambivalent); Craig Bartholomew. *Ecclesiastes*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); James L. Crenshaw. *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*. OTL, (London: SCM Press, 1988); Brown, *Ecclesiastes*; Rashi (Kohes). Still others are unsure: Krüger, *Qoheleth*; Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*. A great many more, most of them ancient (there are exceptions, e.g. James Bollhagen. *Ecclesiastes*. *Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture*, (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2011); Derek Kidner. *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance*. OTS, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1976)), understand *hakkol* here to refer to the ‘world’ that is passing away, as spoken of by Paul (1 Cor 7.31) and John (1 Jn 2.17). In sum, there seem to be four positions on the scope of *hakkol* in Eccl 1.2: (1) terrestrial/anthropological (2) cosmic (3) eschatological (that which is passing away) (4) unsure.

<sup>25</sup>See Paolo Iovino, “»Omnia Vanitas«. Da Qohelet a Paolo,” in *Il libro del Qohelet: Tradizione, redazione, teologia*, ed. Guiseppe Bellia, and Angelo Passaro (Milano: Paoline, 2001).; also Lohfink, “alles ist Windhauch.” and Crenshaw’s comment in James L. Crenshaw, “Qoheleth’s Quantitative Language,” in *The Language of Qohelet in its Context: Essays in Honour of Prof. A. Schoors on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. A. Berlejung, and P. Van Hecke (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 4.; elsewhere, commenting on Eccl 1.8, Lohfink says the subject ‘must be understood as an encompassing signifier of everything in the cosmos’ (Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, 41.). On the

If *hakkol* is superlative and therefore refers to all creation, and if, as we noted above, *hakkol* is *hevel*, then *hevel* also refers to, or has to do with, all creation.<sup>26</sup> This does not mean that *hevel* here means ‘all creation’ but that ‘all creation’ is its scope of influence. This can be seen in the dynamics that play out between these two words within the phrase הכל הבל as it is here situated.

### The Purpose of ‘Hakkol Hevel’

הכל הבל means something more than הבל הבלים, but what ‘more’ does it mean? To answer this question we need to look at the ‘more’, the addition, itself. *Hakkol* is that addition. It puts handles on the less tractable הבל הבלים. What is ‘utter *hevel*’? It is the fact

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other hand, many, like Schoors, do not think this *hakkol* refers to all creation but instead to what follows. The question seems to be, ‘does this *hakkol* in Eccl 1.2 mean “all creation”, or to quote Krüger, “does the expression point [cataphorically] to what follows in the sense of ‘all that [about which we are going to talk]?’” Krüger, Qoheleth, 42. In fact, this question presents a false dichotomy and thus betrays a misunderstanding of both the context of *hakkol* here in verse 2 and the verses that directly follow (Eccl 1.3-11). *Hakkol hevel* summarises and adds to *hevel hevelim* which precedes it, and *hevel hevelim* is superlative in degree and extent. So must *hakkol* in Eccl 1.2 be. It refers to everything, to all creation, to everything expressed by Eccl 1.3-11. This argument aside, even if *hakkol hevel* were merely cataphoric, even if its ‘all’ only referred to the ‘all’ that follows in verses 3-11, verses 3-11 clearly show themselves to speak to all creation. So either way, whether as expression and extension of the superlative *hevel hevelim* or as a compact sentence which the verses that follow unfold, the *hakkol hevel* of Eccl 1.2 is total: it speaks to creation in its entirety. Miller thinks *hevel* speaks to all human experience (Douglas B. Miller, “Qohelet’s Symbolic Use of הבל,” JBL 117 (1998)). I am arguing that its seminal connection to *hakkol* here means that *hevel* speaks not only to all human experience but to all creation.

<sup>26</sup>*Pace*, among others, Fox, “The Meaning of hebel for Qohelet,” 423. The Midrash and Rashi agreed that הבל הבלים in Eccl 1.2 was Qohelet’s cry ‘that everything created during the seven days of creation is futile’ (Koheles, 52.).

that all is *hevel*.<sup>27</sup> This is how the sentence that is verse 2 reads.<sup>28</sup> This leads to the function of *hakkol* here. It is a pipeline: it carries the freight of *hevel* into creation.<sup>29</sup> It connects 'utter *hevel*' to what follows, to verses 3-11. It does this by expressing הבל הבלים in a way that creation mirrors or imitates.

(1) *Phrase as Pipeline.* To borrow again from Kugel, if הבל הבלים is '/a/', then הכל הבל is '/a/', and what is more, /b/.<sup>30</sup> What is the 'what is more'? In part, it is the superlative extent of הבל הבלים made more obvious. But it is not just that. It is a pipeline. The phrase הכל הבל in verse 2 serves as a conduit that carries הבל הבלים to creation.

Within the phrase הכל הבל, *hakkol* turns out to be another way of saying *hevel*. And within the verse, הכל הבל is an emphatic summary of what precedes, one of the words (*hevel*) being lexically identical to the words that precede (discounting אמר קהלת of course), and the other (*hakkol*) essentially meaning *hevel*. So the substance of what Qohelet says is *hevel*. If *hakkol* is *hevel*, we can substitute *hevel* for *hakkol* when reading for meaning, in which case Qohelet says, '*hevel hevelim, hevel hevelim, hevel hevel!*' Of course, this is not what Qohelet says, nor even what he means, though our reading has

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<sup>27</sup>In other words, הכל הבל is.

<sup>28</sup>See section 'phrase as punch-line' below.

<sup>29</sup>Contra Luther, who broke with tradition in insisting that *hevel* does not apply to all creation but to man alone (Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes, 32-33.).

<sup>30</sup>Kugel, *The Idea*, 1.

seemingly shown this to be the case. This highlights the important role of *hakkol* in this verse and, indeed, in this book by raising the question, 'If *hakkol* is *hevel*, why then bother writing *hakkol* at all? Why not rather end the verse *hevel hevel* (or *hevel hevelim*) if that is what Qohelet is telling us *hakkol hevel* means? Again, the answer is that *hakkol* links this emphatic, essential utterance of Qohelet to the creation that directly follows. It is a conduit, a bridge between the superlative הבל הבליים and the account of creation that follows in verses 3-11. As such, it carries the freight Qohelet's message, of a repeated הבל הבליים, to creation.

Lexical data from this two-word collocation support this claim. כל appears four times in the prologue proper,<sup>31</sup> whereas *hevel* never does. True, כל is not הבל, but it is close (being the same word but anarthrous), close enough to send resonances not only of *hevel* throughout the prologue but also of all the devices that bind and separate הבל הבל in verse 2.

Additionally, with major resonances of *hevel* attached to it, כל does something in the prologue which *hevel* could not. It conveys the notion of *hevel* while conveying the idea of totality. In other words, כל in the prologue iterates with greater clarity and illustration (yet, still subtly) what הבל הבל in verse 2 articulates so powerfully but so opaquely:

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<sup>31</sup>Eccl 1.3, 7, 8, 9. All these instances are key points in the prologue, on which see pertinent chs. The fact that כל is Qohelet's favourite word (particles, prepositions, and conjunctions aside), occurring 90-91x in the book—a far higher word-to-total word ratio than any other book in the Hebrew Bible—also supports the case I am making, namely that the *hakkol* of *hakkol hevel* in verse 2 helps spread the semantic freight of *hevel* throughout the book. It imbues *hevel* with a sense of totality mere repetition of the word *hevel* would not achieve. *Hakkol* (and *kol*) is the servant of *hevel* in Ecclesiastes.

in degree and extent, all is *hevel*. And whatever else verses 3-11 are, they are at least *hakkol*.<sup>32</sup>

Finally and before moving on, *hakkol* acts as a pipeline by providing the differentiation from *hevel* necessary to create many of the dynamics that reverberate throughout creation in the prologue and book that follow. Chiefly, it allows for distinction and union, the union being seen most powerfully through the distinction. What is most powerful about הכל being made to mean הכל through the semantics, syntax, sound, and scansion of verse two is that הכל is not הכל. But Qohelet says that it is. And he makes it so. In the phrase הכל הכל here at the end of verse 2, there is an antithesis-then-synthesis that shoots throughout the creation Qohelet lays out in the prologue. In these two words, somehow, antonyms are equated, made synonymous—‘everything’ (הכל) is or becomes ‘breath’, ‘worthlessness’, as ‘nothing’—and this through the force of *hevel*. And so it is in all creation, because this is what characterises creation. These are the words of Qohelet. This is what Qohelet says. My reading of verses 3-11 will trace this ‘opposition-in-connection’, this centripetal force that urges homogenisation and has a certain tension-as-resistance at its core. In the prologue proper, among elements of nature and mankind, there is a homogenising force at work. Different things are made to be the same thing, but they resist this force, this fusion. This is what הכל הכל seems to mean.

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<sup>32</sup>I argue this below.

## The Influence of Hevel on Hakkol

(1) *Sound, Shape, and Semantics.* הבל sounds and looks like הבל. Firstly, the words sound alike.<sup>33</sup> Assonance and alliteration are both here:<sup>34</sup> the former via *qamets* in the breathy first syllable of each word, and the latter in all three consonants, where even the different middle-consonants (*kaph* then *bet*) are sharp and therefore similar.<sup>35</sup> This similarity is even more apparent when the הבל הבל is read in context. The repetition of הבל הבל within a short space encourages the reader to see and hear this phrase a third time.

Standing alone, the two words look alike.<sup>36</sup> As with their similar phonology, their similar morphology is even more pronounced when the phrase is read in its context, within verse 2. Of course, the visual similarity of the two words is not slight; rather, they look almost identical.<sup>37</sup> In reference to this close correspondence, Jarick writes, ‘we might

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<sup>33</sup>See footnote above where I disclaim certain knowledge of ancient Hebrew pronunciation. Any claims as to sound therefore, here and henceforth, are made with caution and offered as possibilities at least and as probabilities at most.

<sup>34</sup>For the sake of clarity and ease, I follow Watson (on whom I rely heavily) here, who by ‘assonance’ means the repetition of vowels and vowel sounds among multiple adjacent or proximate words and by ‘alliteration’ means the repetition of consonants and consonant sounds among multiple adjacent or proximate words (Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 223-25.). Of course, this definition of alliteration includes ‘consonance’, a term Watson never uses but which I will.

<sup>35</sup>Both are fricatives. Buth calls the *dagesh*-less *bet* (ב) a ‘soft, scraping consonant . . . related to the stop’ (ב, the *kaph* with *dagesh*; Randall Buth. *Living Biblical Hebrew: Introduction Part Two*. (Jerusalem: Biblical Language Center, 2006), 20.). Gesenius also groups them, though classing them differently (Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, §6n, o.).

<sup>36</sup>John Jarick, “The Hebrew Book of Changes: Reflections on hakkol hebel and lakkol zeman in Ecclesiastes,” *JSOT* 90 (2000).

say that Koheleth has crafted the most compact form of parallelism to be found in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>38</sup> This is the point of much of this analysis. The parallelism tells us that הבל is an extension of the whole, of הכל. It is a seconding, but it is something more. הבל finds its habitat in הכל, even is הכל, and yet it emerges from הכל, shaping הכל to its image rather than the other way around.

The semantics of the short phrase support this reading. The two are very alike, in sight, sound, and meaning<sup>39</sup> (especially within the context of the verse), but whereas *hevel* retains its meaning (whatever that is in this verse and book), *hakkol* does not. It is made to serve *hevel*. In a strict sense, it, *hakkol*, is *hevel*; but *hevel* is not *hakkol*. *Hevel* is the predicate, and as such it acts on or characterises the subject *hakkol*. The reverse is not true. Furthermore, as a word that speaks to space and quantity, *hakkol* serves *hevel* by ex-

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<sup>37</sup>It is true that these two words look more alike in new Hebrew, with its square Aramaic script, than they do in older, or paleo, Hebrew. Although in paleo-Hebrew, they still look alike (where *bet* and *kaph* each resembles a lower-case 'y', each with a different mark at the top of the character. Gesenius, Hebrew Grammar, Table of Alphabets, unfolding chart.). However, Jarick makes the point that in the older Aramaic script these words bear an even closer visual resemblance. He says that in the older Aramaic, the flourish at the bottom, right corner of the square Aramaic *bet* (ב) is absent, leaving a *bet* that looks exactly like the *kaph* but for the slight break at bottom right of the character. Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 83. Gesenius' Table of Alphabets shows the 'Old Aramaic, Egyptian cursive' (5th-3rd cent. B.C.) as rendering a *bet* and *kaph* bearing closest resemblance. Each looks almost exactly like a lower-case 'y'. In any case, the *BHS/BHQ* give us our received text, and this text shows a square script in which הכל and הבל look nearly indistinguishable. In this matter, therefore, the text as we have it must be enough. The probability that the characters looked alike, and possibly even more alike than they do now, must satisfy us in our cautious morphological conjectures.

<sup>38</sup>Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 81.

<sup>39</sup>Meaning within this predicate-nominative arrangement, that is. Independent of said context, the words are essentially opposites, on which see below.

tending it everywhere, to everything. Again, the reverse is not true: *hevel* does not serve *hakkol* in this or any other way. *Hakkol* is made to do *hevel*'s bidding, not vice versa. **הכל** does not retain any meaning on its own within this phrase but takes on the meaning of its overawing companion, **הבל**. This is again to say that **הכל** is **הבל** here in verse 2. This is what the phrase means, and this is also what it does (to **הכל**). **הבל** bends **הכל** to its purposes.<sup>40</sup> To borrow Jarick's language and insight, one might even think of *hevel* as breaking *hakkol*, evacuating it of meaning, causing 'everything' to become 'a breath' or 'nothing'.<sup>41</sup> Such is its force. Such is its force upon creation, a force that reverberates throughout the nine verses that follow.

(2) *Stress*. The accent on the first syllable of *hevel* in the phrase **הכל הבל** makes the same point by stressing *hevel*, not *hakkol*. The *hakkol* is present but rushed over in the rhythm of the reading in order to 'get to' *hevel*, as it were. In fact, it (*hevel*) is stressed just like the two *hevels* that precede it and is thus made to sound even more like *hevel* than it

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<sup>40</sup>Jarick makes the point in a different way. In what he calls 'earlier manifestations of the earlier Aramaic script' where the *bet* and *kaph* look even more alike than they do in the Aramaic square (see above note), the *bet* (ב) looks like a broken *kaph* (כ). He makes the comment that seen in this light, the **הבל** of **הכל הבל** in Eccl 1.2d is 'everything' (**הכל**), broken. This is his morpho-semantic reading of **הכל הבל** here. What is **הבל**? The shape of this phrase tells us: it is just like **הכל** but broken in the middle; it is thus "everything, broken." Putting this in terms of the verses that follow **הכל הבל** (vv. 3-11) one might say that the message of these two words and of the verses that follow is, 'creation, broken'. Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 83.

<sup>41</sup>Jarick's insight (Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 82.). See below. Ravasi translates the phrase 'un immenso vuoto' (Gianfranco Ravasi. *Qohelet: Parola di Dio*. (Milano: Edizioni Paoline, 1988), 63.). Also see Crenshaw, "Quantitative Language," 1.

would outside its context here in verse 2. Sharp, second syllables in each case (v: *he-vel*, *he-vel*; k: *ha-kkol*) receive emphasis and tie *hakkol* to the preceding *hevels* in yet another, aural way. Finally, the change of stress on the last *hevel* in verse 2 bleeds *hakkol* and *hevel* together (through a back-to-back stress, again, unique in this verse) while stressing *hevel*; this eclipses *hakkol* even more, conforming it in still another way to *hevel*'s image. This is an active power, a power that makes what is not *hevel* (that is, *hakkol*) to be *hevel*. This assimilation (of הכול), however, is not without a sense of tension, of resistance to that assimilation.<sup>42</sup>

Once the final *hevel* in verse 2 is reached, it is lingered over through this first-syllable accentuation that is unique to *hevel* in this verse (both *hevels* and *hevelims* preceding have a final syllable stress). This unique stress distinguishes this *hevel* from the others in this verse and thereby separates it in another way from what comes before, even from the *hakkol* of second syllable stress that directly precedes it. In sum, the stresses on these final two words make *hakkol* sound like the *hevels* that precede it and make the final *hevel* sound distinct from the two *hevels* that precede it, spotlighting this final *hevel* in the process. Partial assimilation of הכול to הבל and accentuation of *hevel* are thus achieved, effects which serve to both distinguish this final phrase while equating it to the הבל הבלים that twice precedes it. Here are separation and summary, distinction and union, fusion

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<sup>42</sup>This word which is being made to sound like, look like, and mean like *hevel* is not הבל but הכול. It is as if the very fact that הכול is not הבל is a presentation of its silent resistance to assimilation.

and fission—dynamics that originate here and develop in the verses that immediately follow.

(3) *Parallelism*. The parallelism at work in the whole of verse 2, aligning 2/a/ with 2/c/ and 2/b/ with 2/d/, is also at work in 2/d/ (הכל הבל), which as we have seen is a condensation of the rest of the verse. Each letter parallels its placeholder in the other word: The *he* of הכל parallels the *he* of הבל; the *kaph* of הכל parallels the *bet* of הבל; and so with the *lamed* in each word. The precise parallelism, which is about as close to mirroring as one can get with two different words, can be more easily seen with the words laid out this way:<sup>43</sup>

הכל

הבל

Qohelet effects a parallel not just in morphology but also in meaning.<sup>44</sup> He achieves what seems an impossible task by making two words which essentially mean opposite things<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>The idea for this layout came from Jarick in Jarick, “hakkol hebel,” 81.

<sup>44</sup>Hrushovski writes about the ‘parallelism of semantic, syntactic, prosodic, morphological, or sound elements, or of a combination of such elements’ in Benjamin Hrushovski, “Prosody, Hebrew,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* 13 (1971), 1200. Qohelet achieves the combination of all such elements at once in these two words. All of these forms of parallelism will pass through these two words into creation which follows in 1.3-11. In so doing they will tell us what הכל הבל means by showing us the effect הבל has on הכל, that is on creation, on man and nature and on their relationship. Alonso-Schökel writes, ‘The perfect separation between form and content is, in fact, impossible’ (A. Alonso-Schökel, “Hermeneutical problems of a literary study of the Bible,” *VT Congress Volume*, Edinburgh 1974 (1975), 7.). If ever these words were true, they are true here.

<sup>45</sup>הבל often meaning something like ‘emptiness’ or ‘nothing’ in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kin

to mean the same thing, almost to be the same thing, as we have seen and as I will elaborate below. 'Nothing' (הבל) becomes 'everything' (הכל); it touches everything and is everywhere; and as a consequence 'everything' becomes as 'nothing'.<sup>46</sup> In this way, each takes on its opposite's meaning and threatens to annul itself in the process. The parallelism cancels meaning rather than advancing it.

So הכל and הבל mirror one another, inform one another, and seem thereby to threaten one another's existence. But as touched on above, it is really הבל that wins here. If by this pairing 'everything' becomes as 'nothing' and 'nothing' suffuses 'everything', it is 'nothing' with which we are left. 'Nothing' (הבל) wins. 'Everything' (הכל) loses. This is true conceptually, but it is also true linguistically in verse 2. Again, owing to its context here, it is הכל which has been made to look (and sound) like the ubiquitous הבל, not the other way around. In this verse, in this final hemistich, in this prologue, and in this book, הבל holds sway. Both in degree and extent, its influence over הכל is total.

Since these final two words of verse 2 speak so clearly to extent, and since numerous details within the verse point to their being a summary and extension, both an exposition and an intensification of the more slippery but clearly superlative הבל הבלים, we may therefore conclude with a reasonable amount of confidence that the collocation הכל הבל as used here is at least as superlative as the construct הבל הבלים. Just as the degree

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17.15; Jer 2.5, 23.16; Zech 10.12, et al.; it is thus often translated 'breath' and often likened to רוח), הכל meaning 'everything'.

<sup>46</sup>I have also taken the idea that these two words might be understood as antonyms from Jarick. Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 82.

and perhaps even the extent of הבל הבלים are 'utter' or unsurpassable, so is the extent of הכל הבל unsurpassable here in Ecclesiastes 1.2. The extent of הכל here could have no greater range. It is even more emphatic, if possible, than הבל הבלים. Everything is הבל; and 'everything' is more than man and his labours: it includes all creation. Verses 3-11 expound הכל הבל and confirm this conclusion, as I intend to demonstrate in the readings that follow.

(4) *Hevel is as Hevel Does.* What is *hevel* then? *Hevel* is as *hevel* does.<sup>47</sup> Its action, its force and effect upon *hakkol*, upon all creation, tells us what it means. *Hevel* is a force that has conformed creation to its image.<sup>48</sup> This is what the word (*hevel*) does (to *hakkol*). But what does the phrase (הכל הבל) do? What purpose does it serve in this seminal verse that precedes an outlay of creation as Qohelet sees it?

This reading shows in another way that the last two words of verse 2 seem to be its focus. And we have just discovered how these two words, הכל הבל, serve not only as the focus of verse 2 but as a conduit that carries 'utter *hevel*' to creation, to verses 3-11 and then beyond into the remainder of the book. This is what *hevel* does, and Qohelet seems to want his readers to understand what *hevel* is by understanding what *hevel* does to all things.<sup>49</sup> As we read verses 3-11, we would do well to keep this textual and metaphysical

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<sup>47</sup>To mimic a famous phrase from the film 'Forrest Gump'.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Rudman, "The Language of Qohelet," 121-41.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 88 n.39., where Christianson comments on a personal conversation he had with John Jarick. Jarick pointed out that הכל הבל always

fact in mind: *hevel* is as *hevel* does. Its effects on creation will tell us what it is like, and this may help us understand what it is and even, perhaps, *why* it is.

### Ecclesiastes 1.3-11 Unfolds 'Hakkol Hevel' in Ecclesiastes 1.2

Together with Ecclesiastes 12.8, Ecclesiastes 1.2 frames the book and delivers its message. It reduces to *hevel*. If we discover the meaning of this word, we discover the meaning of the book. The question is, 'what does *hevel* mean here?' We are told. הכל הבל. That is, *hakkol* is *hevel*. The question then becomes, 'what does *hakkol* mean here?' It means what הכל הבל tells us it means, which is expanded on in verses 3-11, the verses that immediately follow and reflect this phrase. These truths can be put syllogistically:

*Hakkol* (A) is *hevel* (B).

*Hakkol* (A) is verses 3-11 (C).

Therefore, *hevel* (B) is verses 3-11 (C).

Resonances of the syntactic and semantic dynamics of this sentence (הכל הבל) throughout verses 3-11 support this syllogism. This thesis thus reduces to a close reading of verses 3-11<sup>50</sup> in order to discover the meaning of *hevel*.

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occur together in the book, with one exception (7.15). And only Ecclesiastes places these two words together. Qohelet is creating a visual wordplay to make a statement, Jarick remarked. It is what this short sentence says, that all is, or is becoming, *hevel*. *Hevel* (הבל) conforming 'the all' (הכל) to its image is a huge part of what Qohelet means by *hevel*. It is an emptiness but with massive powers to conform, or consume, all things. We will trace this power, and this process of conformity and consumption, through the next nine verses.

<sup>50</sup>And verses in the HB to which these verses (Eccl 1.1-11) ineluctably led me.

Verses 3-11 are *hakkol*. They thus are, or explain, *hevel*. We can see this in at least two ways, one simple, the other more complex. Firstly, and simply, we can see this because verses 3-11 are clearly ‘the all’ to which *hakkol* in verse 2 refers.<sup>51</sup> Secondly, we can deduce that verses 3-11 are the *hakkol* to which the *hakkol* of verse 2 refers because verses 3-11 imitate many features of the sentence הכל הבל in verse 2 and in so doing suggest they are its content writ large. In הכל הבל in verse 2, *hevel* essentially characterises or dominates *hakkol*, conforming *hakkol* to its image in the process. As an imitation and explanation of הכל הבל, verses 3-11 show and thus tell us of the impact of *hevel* on *hakkol* in ways that are less abstruse because more concrete and much longer. Verses 3-11 unfold *hakkol hevel* and in so doing show us what *hevel* does to *hakkol*—to everything, to creation—in the process telling us what *hevel* means (since *hakkol* is *hevel* and since verses 3-11 are *hakkol*). Again, if *hakkol* is *hevel* and if verses 3-11 are *hakkol*, then verses 3-11 are *hevel*. If we want to know what *hevel* means in Ecclesiastes, we must know what verses 3-11 mean. To do that, we must read them closely. This thesis is thus predominantly a close reading of verses 3-11 in an effort to understand the meaning of *hevel* in Ecclesiastes.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ecclesiastes 1.3-11 includes multiple merisms, among them the sun and earth (vv. 3-4), the sun, earth and sea (vv. 3-4, 7), the earth, sun, wind, and water (vv. 4-7), east, west, south, north (vv. 5-6), alternatively east, south, north, west (ם', sea in v. 7, also means ‘west’; vv. 5-7), total man broken down in his composite parts (v. 8), humanity (vv. 3-4ab) and man (v. 8) flanking the elements (vv. 4c-7), and past and future with present tacit (vv. 9-11). Cf. Arian J. C. Verheij, “Words Speaking for Themselves: On the Poetics of Qohelet 1:4-7,” in *Give Ear to My Words: Psalms and other Poetry in and around the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Janet Dyk (Amsterdam: Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensis, 1996), 184.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Edwin M. Good, “The Unfilled Sea: Style and Meaning in Ecclesiastes 1:2-11,” in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, ed. John G. Gammie, Walter A. Humphreys Brueggemann, W. Lee, and James M. Ward (Missoula, MT:

## Hevel in Context and Translated Concretely

1. Understand hevel by understanding the explanation Qoh has given: 3-11. The main goal of this chapter has been to understand *hevel* here in verse 2 primarily within its first and foundational context. The verse tells us that all creation is being conformed to the image of *hevel*, whatever *hevel* means. Knowing that a creation-matrix follows in the next nine verses, we have understood the phrase הַכֵּל הַכֵּל to be a conduit which seems to somehow carry the verbal freight of superlative *hevel* into creation. If הַכֵּל הַבְּלִים is the drug, הַכֵּל הַבְּלִים is the syringe which injects 'utter *hevel*' into the corpus of creation. This it does by providing stark contrast to הַבְּלִים through the word הַכֵּל and at the same time an almost incredible similarity to הַבְּלִים. Massive contrast and connection are thus efficiently achieved all within an expression that conveys the meaning of the prologue and book. This contrast and connection play out within the creation portrayed in 1.3-11 and tell us what הַבְּלִים means by showing and telling us what it does to creation, to the all, to הַכֵּל.

But before the chapter closes we need to look briefly at two other ways in which *hevel* appears in this seminal context. It appears in two ways which are fairly uncommon in the Hebrew Bible, both in the plural and back-to-back. Looking at the way *hevel* is used elsewhere in these ways may shed light on Qohelet's message, that is, on what he means in 1.2 and beyond.

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Scholars Press, 1978), 72.

(1) *Plural Hevel in the Hebrew Bible.* *Hevel* is used in the plural twice in Ecclesiastes 1.2 (both times as *hevelim*). Outside Qohelet, הבל occurs only eight times in the plural.<sup>53</sup> Every case involves idolatry. This is significant with regard to Qohelet since of the four times Qohelet uses the plural, three of those occur in Ecclesiastes 1.2 and 12.8, verses that frame the book and give its theme. Ecclesiastes 1.2 in particular is determinative in its use of הבל since it is both part of the book's inclusio and the first time we encounter the word in the book. Furthermore, the fourth and only other time Qohelet uses the plural form of הבל in his book, in Ecclesiastes 5.6, he follows it with the contrastive phrase, 'but God is the one you must fear.' This implies that הבלים as used here involves the fear of something that is not-God, a meaning which recalls הבל in its single Pentateuchal instance, in Deuteronomy 32.21, where the plural הבל is parallel to "no-god." Here in Ecclesiastes 5.7 then, and perhaps also in Ecclesiastes 1.2 and 12.8, idolatry should be kept in mind when הבלים is used. This is not necessarily to argue for a translation of 'idols' in the four instances in Ecclesiastes where הבלים occurs. It is, however, to suggest that the penumbra of idolatry should be allowed to shadow our understanding of הבלים where used in Ecclesiastes, even if it is translated as something else (like 'vanity' or 'breath', 'futility' or 'absurdity'). When translated as something else, that something is easily connected to idolatry, both cognitively and according to Hebrew Bible usage (and cognitively because according to Hebrew Bible usage).

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<sup>53</sup>Deut 32.21; 2 Kin 16.13, 26; Jer 8.19, 10.8, 14.22; Jon 2.9, Ps 31.7.

Although each of the eight occurrences of the plural הבל outside Ecclesiastes refers to idolatry, only one of them agrees precisely in its construction with the four הבלים of Ecclesiastes.<sup>54</sup> It is Jeremiah 10.8. This verse is among the clearest in its use of הבל to mean idolatry, since it reads, ‘the instruction of הבלים is but wood’. Owing to ‘wood’, the word can mean little else but a physical figurine carved in order to be worshipped. The larger context (Jer 10.3ff.) reinforces this reading.

(2) *Back-to-Back Hevel in the Hebrew Bible.* Just as Ecclesiastes 1.2 uses the rare, plural *hevel* (*hevelim*) twice, so it uses the back-to-back, or doubled, construction twice (both times as *hevel hevelim*). This usage is even rarer than the plural. Outside Ecclesiastes, הבל occurs back-to-back in three locations in the Hebrew Bible: they are 2 Kings 17.15, Jeremiah 2.5, and Job 27.12. The instances in Kings and Jeremiah are parallel, contextually and textually. Each episode speaks of the unfaithfulness of Israel within the context of imminent exile. 2 Kings 17.15 reads, ‘They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. *They went after false idols and became false* (וילכו אכרי ההבל ויהבלו), and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them’. And Jeremiah 2.5: ‘Thus says the LORD: “What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, *and went after worthlessness, and became worthless*” (וילכו אכרי ההבל ויהבלו)? The two passages are textually similar. Cantillation

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<sup>54</sup>The other seven renderings are constructs and thus rendered הבלִי, sometimes with prefix and/or suffix.

aside,<sup>55</sup> each italicised phrase is identical in the Hebrew.<sup>56</sup> In both cases, הבל-verb follows הבל-noun, the fathers of Israel going after some thing (הבל-noun) and becoming like that thing (הבל-verb). The two passages are also contextually similar, each describing the reason God is giving for bringing about the imminent exile of his people. That reason is conveyed in these verses and in this word, הבל. In its march throughout the Hebrew Bible, the word conveys a process, a trajectory whereby God's people move from worshipping false gods to becoming false and hollow to becoming transient, like breath. These two instances, and the third (below) in Job 27.12, where הבל occurs back-to-back, as noun-then-verb, are encapsulations of that trajectory. Job 27.12 reads, 'Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves; why then have you become altogether vain (הבל תהבלו)?' Job is speaking of his friends here and their windy words. They have become like whatever it is they have spoken. Although the context is different than that of 2 Kings 17.15 and Jeremiah 2.5, and thus the meaning of הבל here is perhaps slightly different, the process is the same. In all three cases—and in the only three cases in the Hebrew Bible outside Ecclesiastes—when הבל occurs back-to-back, it is as noun-then-verb describing a trajectory that moves from practicing worthlessness to becoming worthless,<sup>57</sup> and in two of these cases the action being described is idolatry.

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<sup>55</sup>Which of course is not part of the original text and came much later.

<sup>56</sup>וילכו אכרי ההבל ויהבלו

<sup>57</sup>The other two HB instances of הבל-as-verb encapsulate this process (Ps 62.11, Jer 23.16). Both texts are syntactically ambiguous but clear enough in their thrust. They speak to the peril of trusting in false or corrupt things, a concept expressed in each case by the verb הבל.

Every instance but one in the Hebrew Bible involving הבל as either a plural noun or in a back-to-back occurrence speaks of הבל as idolatry. In two of the three back-to-back cases, that idolatry leads to worthlessness, futility, or vanity. These uses in the Hebrew Bible resonate with the way *hevel* is often used in Ecclesiastes and with the way it is used first, in Ecclesiastes 1.2. Our contention has been that verses 3-11 give us a foundation for understanding what *hevel* means here and in the book over all. If so, these verses should resonate in some way with our study thus far, which means that we as advance into a close reading of Ecclesiastes 1.3-11, we should perhaps expect more than a mechanical description of the way the world works. Moral threads may be woven through. But as with *hevel* here, if these threads do exist, they may not be apparent. They might be difficult to detect.

Finally, it is worth asking the question, 'why is *hevel* so protean?' How can one word mean so many different things, ranging from 'breath' to 'worthlessness' to 'absurdity' to 'evil' to 'idolatry'? The answer, of course, is 'context'. *Hevel* takes the nature of the words around it. It becomes like what surrounds it. Perhaps this is why it is best left untranslated, at least in Ecclesiastes 1.2, unfolded as that verse seems to be by the creational matrix that follows in verses 3-11. If we want to understand *hevel* in verse 2 and in connection to הכל הבל there, we need to understand its context: we need to understand the creation laid out in the verses that follow. This is the way *hevel* 'works' and is, perhaps, the truest way of beginning to understand what it means here.

But at least one more observation may be extrapolated from the fact of *hevel's* chameleon-like character. Its linguistic impressionability mirrors one of its primary meanings in the Hebrew Bible, wherein Israel becomes like the nations and the gods that surround her. Fixating on worthless things (ההבל), Israel becomes worthless (ויהבלו).<sup>58</sup> The process *hevel* at times describes in the Hebrew Bible is the very way it often seems to function linguistically. Again, *hevel* is as *hevel* does. We have found this to be true in Ecclesiastes 1.2, wherein *hevel* seems to mean what it does, namely what it does to *hakkol*, to creation. These observations seem to support our reading of *hevel* in verse 2 as consistent with the way it normally operates linguistically rather than as eccentric or bizarre.

Finally, we need to look at the concrete meaning of *hevel* in the Hebrew Bible to see what it might tell us and whether it agrees at all with these rarer plural and back-to-back occurrences. This concrete meaning, *hevel* as breath or vapour, is the most honest because it is not interpretive. In addition, *hevel's* usage in 1.2 seems to suggest this concrete understanding at least, since every word but one (אמר) in the sentence is breathy.

### (3) Concrete Hevel: Hevel as Breath

Although perhaps only occurring in two places in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 62.10; Isa 57.13),<sup>59</sup> the concrete<sup>60</sup> meaning of *hevel* in classical Hebrew is 'breath' or 'air' or 'vapour' or some-

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<sup>58</sup>Jer 2.25.

<sup>59</sup>Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric*, 57-60. Schoors adds Ps 144.4 and Job 7.16 as possibilities (Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 120.). *DCH* adds Ps 39.6, 12; Prov 21.6; Si 41.11 ('הבל', *DCH* 2:485). I would also include Ps 78.33: see the following paragraph.

<sup>60</sup>Miller uses the designation 'material' (Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric*, 54-61.), Fox  
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thing akin.<sup>61</sup> This concrete meaning does not suffer from the interpretive baggage some other translations do (i.e. ‘meaningless’ or ‘absurd’) and thus in many of the thirty-eight instances of *hevel* in Ecclesiastes it seems to serve as a suitable rendering.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, some choose ‘breath’ as the translation here.<sup>63</sup> ‘Everything is breath.’ ‘Breath’ is organic, coming from a living, animal organism. The ‘everything’ of verse 2 (of *hakkol*) is the everything that follows in verses 3-11, including non-animal organisms like the sun and the earth, the wind and sea. And yet, according to verse 2, these things are ‘breath’, even if they do not ‘have’ breath. If this is not to personify all things, it is to get close. And perhaps this is the point (as we will see in our reading below). All things are not as man is, but they are affected by him and his estate. This truth is pregnant if oblique in verse 2, and as I have just implied, it is strongly suggested in the prologue in various ways, one of which is through the personification of the elements. This personification brings dis-

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‘literal’, which is probably best (Fox, Ecclesiastes, xix.).

<sup>61</sup>So ‘הבל’, *BDB* 210; ‘הבל’, *HALOT* 1:236; but *DCH* has ‘vanity’ first and ‘breath’ as the third listing (‘הבל’, *DCH* 2:485). Miller translates ‘vapor’: Miller, “Qohelet’s Symbolic Use of הבל.”

<sup>62</sup>This despite the protestations of some, like Schoors, who says that ‘breath, vapour . . . does not suffice to express Qoh’s thinking’ (Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 120.). Not all of it; this is true. See, e. g., Eccl 1.2 (5), 3.19, 6.4, 7.6, 9.9 (2), 11.10, 12.8 (3).

<sup>63</sup>So Robert Alter. *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: a Translation*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010), 346.; Daniel C. Fredericks. *Coping with Transience: Ecclesiastes on Brevity in Life*. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), et al. Lohfink casts the net wider with ‘Windhauch’ (Lohfink, “alles ist Windhauch.”; so too Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger. *Kohelet*. *HThKAT*, (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 142-48; Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 426.). In so doing he melds man and nature into one thing, on which see just below. The prologue is a development of this dynamic, on which see the chapters that follow.

parate elements of creation spoken of in verses 3-8 together into one breathing thing which toils (v. 3) and gasps (v. 5) then, wearying (v. 8), expires (v. 11).

Psalm 78.33 also presents *hevel* as ‘vapour’ or ‘breath’, something that passes away quickly.<sup>64</sup> It is used to describe the short life of sinful Israel under God’s judgment. Psalm 78.39 recalls and parallels Psalm 78.33, reading, ‘He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind (רוח) that passes and comes not again’. The Psalmist is paralleling הבל and רוח, placing them in the same semantic field. This is no surprise but it does help highlight the connection Qohelet may be making between הכל הבל in Ecclesiastes 1.2 and the emptiness that pervades the creation that follows in verses 3-11. We might almost expect to find a howling wind (רוח) blowing through this empty space. Of course, this is exactly what we do find (Eccl 1.6). Creation embodies the הכל הבל of verse 2. But it is an empty creation, vacuous and void, ever toiling but never fruitful and never filled,<sup>65</sup> ending in death.<sup>66</sup>

Death and idolatry thus seem to cling to these various uses of *hevel* in the Hebrew Bible, in its every plural and back-to-back occurrence, and in many of its concrete occurrences, of which Ps 78.33 is but one example.<sup>67</sup> And this is how *hevel* begins and ends Ec-

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<sup>64</sup>‘So he made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror’.

<sup>65</sup>As opposed to the created order of Genesis 1 (Gen 1.11-31), a creation to which this creation in the opening verses of Ecclesiastes seems to speak antithetically.

<sup>66</sup>It seems at least noteworthy that in Ps 78.39, a verse which connects הרוח to הבל in its description of the ephemeral Israelites, the Psalmist employs two verbs—הלך and שוב—one of which (הלך) pervades Eccl 1.4-7, and both of which begin and end the verse (Eccl 1.6) describing the wind’s course.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. the almost incredibly documented work of Giovanni Rizzi, “Tradizione e intertestualità nell’ermeneutica giudaica di lingua greca e aramaica di Qo 1,1-3. Una prospettiva di ricerca,” in *Il libro del Qohelet: Tradizione, redazione, teologia*, ed.

clesiastes, framing it and thereby determining its message: in 1.2 and 12.8, *hevel* is plural, back-to-back, and breathy (the piling up of *hevel* in 1.2 especially accentuates aspiration and exhalation), thus suggesting 'breath'—with its transient connotations—as a fine translation. As we read of an expiring creation in what follows (1.3-11), we ought perhaps to expect traces, or echoes, of idolatry woven into the fabric of that creation, of that text. This is exactly what we do find. These echoes may help explain the sad condition both of Israel and of creation which the text seems to articulate and connect.

### Conclusion of Chapter 3

Ecclesiastes 1.2 and 12.8 frame the book, convey its message, and are its key verses. *Hevel* is the key and almost exclusive word within these two verses. Discerning its meaning in them is thus paramount to understanding Qohelet's message. What does it mean here in Ecclesiastes 1.2? Qohelet tells us: הכל הבל. *Hakkol* or 'the all' or 'everything' is *hevel*. In context, this 'everything' must be superlative because it expresses and advances the superlative הבל הבלים or 'utter *hevel*'. Thus, *hakkol* here in verse 2 must refer to all creation. The fact that the verses that immediately follow (Eccl 1.3-11) speak to all creation supports this reading, since they (vv. 3-11) are the first exposition of הכל הבל in Ecclesiastes 1.2. These two words serve as a conduit or pipeline through which the freight of utter *hevel* (הבל הבלים) is conveyed to all creation. הכל הבל also encapsulates the content of Ecclesi-

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Guiseppe Bellia, and Angelo Passaro (Milano: Paoline, 2001), who concludes that LXX Qohelet suggests through his translation of *hevel* (as ματαιότης) that every use of *hevel* in the HB has to do with idolatry.

astes 1.3-11: again, they are its first and foundational unfolding. This is clear not only because these nine verses directly follow הכל הבל but also because they mirror it in numerous ways, semantic, syntactic, and otherwise. Like הכל הבל, verses 3-11 express totality and parallelism and a tendency toward homogenisation wherein distinct and separate things connect and eventually converge into thing. In summary, הכל is הבל. *Hakkol* is Ecclesiastes 1.3-11. These nine verses thus tell us what *hevel* is. And if the way *hevel* is first used here in verse 2 is any clue, verses 3-11 may well contain echoes of idolatry. If verse 1 is any clue, the idolatry echoed may have to do with Israel. The impact of this idolatry on creation and on Israel will prove to be part of what *hevel* and *hakkol hevel* mean for Qohelet.

## CHAPTER 4. ECCLESIASTES 1.3-4: MAN IN PAIN, NATURE IMPERVIOUS

*For Qoheleth anthropology and cosmology are inextricably related<sup>f</sup>*

מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו<sup>2</sup> שיעמל תחת השמש<sup>3</sup>

דור הלך ודור בא והארץ לעולם עמדת

3. What profit to man in all his toil in which he toils under the sun?
4. A generation goes and a generation comes, and the earth forever stands.

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<sup>1</sup>Naoto Kamano. *Cosmology and Character: Qoheleth's Pedagogy from a Rhetorical-Critical Perspective*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 54.

<sup>2</sup>*BHQ* (Goldman) prefers עמל or 'better, העמל' (*BHQ*, 65\*). Aquila is suffix-less, with which the Syriac agrees. Goldman is convinced by these minority readings, as against, obviously, the MT and also the G, V, and T, since the usual form in Eccl is עמלו (cf. 2.22, 2.24, 3.13, 4.8, 5.14, 5.17, 5.18, 8.15). The textual tendency would thus have been to assimilate עמל to עמלו. The former is thus likely the original reading. So Goldman's reasoning goes. Owing to factors within v. 3 (on which see my reading below), I remain unconvinced and hold to the MT reading. The 3ms suffix creates repetition (his toil in which he toils) and accentuates the fact that toil is man's lot in life (it is *his* lot), two things the very existence of this doubled lexeme (עמל) shows us Qohelet is here already wont to do, two things (repetition and accentuation of man's toil) that are characteristic of the verses that follow.

<sup>3</sup>Possibly השמים rather than השמש, based on the reading of Codex Ambrosianus. Goldman, in *BHQ*, prefers the reading תחת השמים ('under the sky/heavens') in Ecclesiastes 1.3 over תחת השמש ('under the sun') (*BHQ*, 65\*). I prefer the latter for two reasons. The first is textual. The MT (M) and Old Greek (G) attest to that reading. I do not think the testimony of Ambrosianus (A), which Goldman cites for support, strong enough to overturn their combined witness. G far predates A, and its reading of ἡλιον supports the שמש, presumably of proto-M, and of M. Goldman argues that the use of שמש in Ecclesiastes 1.5 and 1.9 (where G once again agrees) has urged assimilation, but it did not in 1.13, where both M and G have תחת השמים although תחת השמש is in the next verse. If M and G were prone to assimilation, why did they not assimilate in 1.13? In terms of this text (v. 3), why would תחת השמש six verses away (in 1.9; and, yes, שמש two verses away in 1.5) have tempted assimilation successfully in 1.3 when it failed to tempt assimilation of תחת השמים in 1.13 one verse away (via תחת השמש in 1.14)?

## Introduction

In this chapter I show how Ecclesiastes 1.3 stands apart from what follows but is also connected to it. In this way it is representative of the verses that follow (which speak to all creation). In it, man's life is characterised by painful toil from which nature seems exempt but in which nature seems to be an ingredient. Just as man alone seems affected by this pain, so does he seem to introduce it to creation. This painful toil distinguishes man from creation while at the same time binding him to it. In this way verse 3 imitates הכל הבל and tells us about what it means, suggesting that it involves man's painful toil and painful relationship to the world around him. Verse 4 advances both the contrast between man and nature and nature's apparent exemption from and contribution to the pain that characterises man's lot. Finally, through toil and man's painful relationship to the earth, namely his return there in death, verses 3-4 seem to echo Genesis 3.16-19, perhaps telling us something about the origins and meaning of *hevel* in the process.

### Ecclesiastes 1.3: Man's Pain and Nature's Part In It

<p>3a What profit to man b in all his toil c in which he toils under the sun?</p>	<p>3a מִהֵי־תִרְוֹן לְאָדָם b בְּכָל־עֲמָלָו c וְשִׁיעַמָּל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:</p>
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Ecclesiastes 1.3 is a headline for this opening creation passage.<sup>4</sup> Although it is woven into the fabric of the larger prologue (vv. 1-11) as well as playing a key part in various subsections in the prologue (vv. 3-4, vv. 3-9), in one sense it stands alone and thus stands out as the sole verse connecting the book's key verse to the rest of the prologue, and indeed to the rest of the book. Verse 3-as-headline means that this verse speaks for those that follow (through Eccl 12.8 at least).<sup>5</sup>

This verse is the only question in the prologue.<sup>6</sup> In this way it is distinguished from the verses that follow. Although verse 9 begins the same way, its wording clearly indicates that it is not a question but a statement. In fact, its identical beginning (מה), ending (תחת השמש), and similar middle (עשה//עמל) connect it to verse 3 through inclusion while still showing verse 3 to be distinct. The fact that verse 9 is not a question allows it to serve as a response to the question verse 3 raises and in this way to conclude the subsection verse 3 begins.<sup>7</sup> It also illustrates one of the most pervasive and crucial dynamics in this creation matrix, that of connection and contrast.

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<sup>4</sup>Bartholomew calls it 'programmatic' (Craig G. Bartholomew. *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory*. AnBib, 139 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1998), 241.; see Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 130 n.1. for a short list of others who have given the verse a similar designation.).

<sup>5</sup>[Eccl] i 3 appears to be a concise summary of Qoheleth's message . . . (Kaiser, "Qoheleth," 86.).

<sup>6</sup>Pace Tomás Frydrych. *Living under the Sun: Examination of Proverbs & Qoheleth*. VTSup, 90 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 116 n. 89., who insists that v. 10 begins as a question.

<sup>7</sup>Though it does not end that subsection (vv. 3-9) but is the beginning of the end, a porous or permeable border that connects the crucial verse 8 to its extrapolation in the verses that follow (vv. 9-11) to prologue-end.

## Specially Connected to What Precedes and Follows

(1) *To the Previous Verse (Ecclesiastes 1.2)*. Of the picture Qohelet paints in this prologue of creation, Ecclesiastes 1.3 is the first brushstroke and the first therefore to portray what **הכל הבל** looks like. The obvious must be stated: the proximity to Ecclesiastes 1.2 is unique in Qohelet's creational painting. This unique relationship between the two verses, and between verse 3 and *hevel* in particular, shows itself in a number of ways.

Verse 2 ends with the lexeme **כל** in the form of **הכל**. The word is prominent for a number of reasons discussed above, two of those being that firstly, it joins with **הבל** to end, summarise, and emphasise what precedes it (**הבל הבלים**); and secondly, as a unique word in the largely homogenous verse 2 it joins **הבל** in collocation to serve as a bridge over which the meaning of utter *hevel* (**הבל הבלים**) is carried into creation (vv. 3-11).

Verse 3 follows, carrying **כל** forward into creation as it does so.<sup>8</sup> It renders the lexeme **כל** in the form of **בכל**. The lexeme **כל** thus ties these two verses together uniquely, linking them not through a word and nothing more but through all **הכל** in verse 2 conveys, as it carries the freight of **הבל** with it. So does **כל** in verse 3. It shows the reader that we are seeing the beginnings of verse 2 laid out. **כל** does not appear again until verse 7. It appears again in verse 8. These two verses are the convergence-point of various elemen-

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 326, citing Lohfink and, before him, C. Ginsburg.

tal and human tributaries in the prologue.<sup>9</sup> The headwaters are the collocation **הכל הבל** in verse 2 and first begin flowing here in verse 3.

Echo-alliteration also connects this verse to verse 2. Echo-alliteration ‘describes the repetition of consonants of the last word of a line at the beginning of the next line, helping them cohere . . .’<sup>10</sup> In this case the *he* (ה) of the **הבל** that finishes verse 2 is picked up by the *he* in **מה**, the first word of verse 3.

The connection is aural as well.<sup>11</sup> The *he* that runs through the whole of verse 2 combines with /a/ vowels (whether as *qamets* or *qamets-chatuf*) in all five **הבל** and in the **הכל** to produce the ‘ha’ sound. The final **הבל**, stressed on the first syllable, accentuates this sound, especially as it is the verse’s final word. The first word of verse 3 (**מה**) reverses the consonant-vowel order, producing the sound ‘ah.’ The reversal seems receptive, the sonic message at verse-beginning being this: ‘What follows receives the impress of **הבל** and of **הכל הבל** in verse 2 and will thus begin to lay out what **הכל הבל** looks like in the world of men.’

Sound converges with meaning to further connect verses 2 and 3 and further suggest that the meaning of verse 2 first flows into, and is expressed by, verse 3. It is not simply the first word of verse 3 (**מה**) that receives the sounds flowing from verse 2. Again,

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<sup>9</sup>See ch. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 227 n.17., citing Lawrence Boadt, “Isaiah 41:8-13: Notes on Poetic Structure and Style,” *CBQ* 35 (1973), 32ff. I would call this ‘echo-consonance’, but I take here from Watson, who uses the term ‘alliteration’ to include ‘consonance’.

<sup>11</sup>In which case we might call this connection ‘echo-assonance’. As expressed above, our assertions surrounding aural matters are tentative.

whether through *qamets* or *patach*, the /a/ vowel dominates in verse 3 as well (sounded 12 times). The first word thus receives the dominant sounds of verse 2, while the rest of verse 3 carries them forward through its entirety. The semantic contents of each verse make sense of this phonetic parallel. Verse 2 is almost pure הבל, and הבל can mean 'breath', and the verse is breathy to speak, especially its end where the final הבל receives first-syllable stress and thus requires emphatic exhalation of the reader (if he is reading aloud). Verse 3 receives and carries forward the /a/ vowel that helps constitute the breathiness of verse 2, but the he (ה) is largely absent verse 3; so the exhalation is greatly diminished. Nevertheless, the content of verse 3 picks up where the *he* leaves off: here we have a man toiling under the sun.<sup>12</sup> Humanity is a picture of breath and sweat, of perspiration and exhalation.<sup>13</sup> The sound and semantics of verses 2 and 3 thus work together to weld them.<sup>14</sup> It seems that Qohelet is conveying subtly through sound what obvious meaning may convey more overtly: man in his painful toil in relation to nature is the first

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 326., citing Braun, Fox, Lohfink.

<sup>13</sup>See the implicit connection this forges with the sun via שואף in v. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Ginsberg reads the verse as an emphatic denial (rather than an interrogative), and translates thusly: 'Since man hath no advantage . . .' (Christian D. Ginsburg, *Cohleth, Commonly Called The Book of Ecclesiastes: Translated from the Original Hebrew, with a Commentary, Historical and Critical*. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 260.). This interpretation claims a more overt connection between verses 2 and 3 and a more direct derivation of the latter from the former. His reading supports the subtler links we have seen.

(and foundational, it seems) expression of הבל הבל.<sup>15</sup> We will unpack and deliver aspects of this pregnant conclusion below.

Consonance also links both verses.<sup>16</sup> *Lamed* (ל) is prominent in each verse. Owing to הבל it is prominent throughout verse 2, but in verse 3 it begins with man (לאדם) and ends with his labours (שיעמל). In other words, the consonance that binds these verses binds הבל to אדם and his עמל, to man and his toil and not to nature. Man is the link between הבל and the sun. The position of אדם as between הבל and השמש reinforces this fact.

Although man leads the way, serving as the link in the chain that connects nature, and thus creation,<sup>17</sup> to הבל, man and nature (represented here by the sun<sup>18</sup>) connected through contrast also expound הבל הבל. More consonance, this time running through most of verses 2 and 3, bears this out subtly. The consonant thread consists in the *mem* (מ/ם) which runs through both verses,<sup>19</sup> threading both lines in each verse together, thus

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<sup>15</sup>Another subtle connection between these verses may be their shared number of words. In these first eleven verses, only vv. 9-11 also share word-number, and they are strongly joined, as I argue in ch. 7. Furthermore, both verse-sets are contiguous (vv. 2-3 and vv. 9-11), which joins them more obviously.

<sup>16</sup>The principal function of consonance is cohesion (Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 227.). Watson uses the term 'alliteration' here but by it includes both the repetition of a consonant or consonantal sound at the beginning of multiple, proximate words (alliteration) and the repetition of that sound within multiple, proximate words (consonance). I think using both terms is clearer.

<sup>17</sup>Since man and nature (the natural elements) together constitute all creation in Qohelet's prologue.

<sup>18</sup>I argue this assumption below.

<sup>19</sup>Verse 2: הבלים, אמר, הבלים; Verse 3: השמש, שיעמל, אמלו, לאדם, מה, לאדם.

threading the verses together as well. These phonetic connections reinforce what the proximity of verses 2 and 3 and the obvious semantic freight of verse 3 convey more overtly: man carries הַבָּל to the whole creation, but it is a man connected to and contrasted with nature who does so.

This verse provides unique connections not only to verse 2 but to verses that follow as well, both in and outside of the prologue.

(2) *To Verse 4 and What Follows.* Verses 3 and 4 are connected in particular. Verse 4 provides the first answer to the question verse 3 raises;<sup>20</sup> both verses share the same metre (4:3);<sup>21</sup> both verses begin with humanity and end with nature, a likeness that stands out in light of the elemental swirl that follows in verses 5-7; and both verses convey an antipathy, if slight, between man and nature.<sup>22</sup> These similarities might be superficial

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<sup>20</sup>But see Ginsburg, who translates the verse-beginning, 'Since man hath no advantage', thereby connecting verses 2 and 3 all the more strongly, showing how verse 3 flows from, and is indeed a direct consequence of, verse 2 (Ginsburg, *Cohemoth*, 260.). Verses 5-11 answer v. 3 in their own way as well. For instance, verse 11 paints a picture of the profitlessness of man and is thus an implicit answer to the question verse 3 poses. See Dell's comments on the probable connection between Eccl 1.3 and 11 in particular and her claim that v. 3 is likely a bridge connecting v. 2 with vv. 4-11 (Katharine J. Dell. *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New*. CSHB, 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 61 n. 12.).

<sup>21</sup>Robert Gordis. *Koheleth--The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 3. The lineation changes beginning in v. 5: the verses get longer.

<sup>22</sup>I am well aware of the debate surrounding Hebrew verse (Basically, as to whether or not any such thing as Hebrew metre exists [Cf. Hobbins, "Poetry of Qohelet," 191-92.]. For a reference to sources that chronicle 'the history of biblical metrics over the last two centuries' see Kugel, *The Idea*, 292 n.17.). Although it is not the concern of this thesis to determine whether or not portions of Ecclesiastes are 'poetic', since I do here claim

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metre for lines in the prologue, I am tacitly committing myself to a certain position in the discussion. Additionally, my reading thus far and farther along in this paper assigns numerous other devices to the prologue, devices often associated with poetry (among them synonymy, proximity, antithesis, ambiguity, personification, elision, hendiadys, alliteration, consonance, assonance, epiphora [epistrophe], anaphora, conjugational redundancy, lexical redundancy and parallelism). Again, whether or not the presence of such devices in Qohelet's prologue convinces certain persons that this piece is poetry is no concern of mine. My concern is to demonstrate that these devices are there and are saying something to us as readers about Qohelet's understanding of **הבּל** and its effects. Having commented on metre, however, it is only right for me to advocate the likelihood of its sometime existence in biblical Hebrew literature—and so possibly in this text. On one end of the debate stands Kugel, whose position is clear and whose words on the matter are memorable for their terse decision: 'There is indeed an answer to this age-old riddle: no metre has been found because none exists'. 'Parallelism', Kugel insists, 'is the only meter of biblical poetry' (Kugel, *The Idea*, 301.). That Kugel's work is clear, helpful, and full of insights few would deny. But as Barr points out, he overstates his case (James Barr, "The question of metre," *TimesLitSupp* (1981).). Watson offers this insight into the problem: 'Confusion arises because scholars fail to distinguish between metre as actually present in verse, and regular metre. There is metre, yes, but not regular metre, since metrical patterns are never maintained for more than a few verses at a stretch, if even that' (Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 92.). As Watson points out, the judgment 'no Hebrew metre' may mean 'no Hebrew metre for more than a few lines at a time' (See Lowth's comment to this effect in Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 51.). This is akin to an American asserting that the French do not eat breakfast for the simple reason that the Frenchman enjoys a croissant and cup of coffee in the morning and nothing more. What the American means is that the French do not eat American breakfasts, a fact that is not at all surprising. This is a form of the same problem just enunciated: it attempts to impose the metric qualities of one language onto another (cf. Hrushovski, "Prosody, Hebrew," 1201-02.). To say that biblical Hebrew has no metre because it is not regular is to punish Hebrew verse for not acting like a Shakespearan sonnet or a Virgilian epic. Ironically, this error is precisely what Kugel seeks to avoid (Kugel, *The Idea*, 71, 301.; so Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 50-51.). Kugel abhors the trend he notes among many metricists of biblical Hebrew to manipulate the text in order to fit a metrical scheme they have decided on (Kugel, *The Idea*, 297.). This is an admirable abhorrence, but its source can be excised by dealing with the text as is and scanning it accordingly. This is the approach I have chosen to take (while also weighing text-critical emendations suggested in *BHS* and *BHQ*). In short, my approach is generally to leave the text as it is and to scan it according to Masoretic accentuation. I follow Gordis here (and where he counts two words joined by *mappeq* as two beats rather than the normal one beat when the second word is polysyllabic) and am content to let those lead who know mountains more than I about how ancient Hebrew ought to be read (See also Luis Alonso-Schökel. *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*. SubBi, 11 (Roma: Editrice

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Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988), 45f.). An ancillary but by no means irrelevant factor in discerning metre is that of feel. Poetry and the rhythm that often accompanies it cannot be defined by mechanics and calculations alone (cf. Kugel, *The Idea*, 315-23.). There is something unquantifiable in the flow and ring of a poetic line. It is a quality that defies comprehensive measurement and should be at least acknowledged, considered, and enjoyed. In his monograph on Hebrew metre, Douglas Stuart espouses a form of syllable-counting (Douglas K. Stuart. *Studies in Early Hebrew Meter*. (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978).). Although the study has much to recommend it, it takes too many liberties with the text (MT) and is by way of method too mechanical (Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 106.; for a fuller critique of Stuart's study, see Tremper Longman III, "A Critique of Two Recent Metrical Systems," *Bib* 63 (1982).). Toward the end of his review of Stuart's book, Alonso-Schökel writes, 'el ritmo de la poesia es un realidad compleja, no solo matematica' (The rhythm of poetry is a complex reality, not only mathematical', Luis Alonso-Schökel, "Review of *Studies in Early Hebrew Meter* by Douglas K. Stuart," *Bib* 59 (1978), 423.). In the same review, Alonso-Schökel asks Stuart a simple but perceptive question that touches on the problem of an overly mechanistic approach to discerning Hebrew poetry: with your syllable-counting system, how do we account for the sound and rhythm that surge from verse to verse? He offers this example: 'barob ga'oneka tahros qameka/ tasallah haroneka yo'kilemu kaqas' (Alonso-Schökel, "Review," 422.). The same question could be asked of Kugel (who denies the existence of Hebrew metre). Again, to say it is irregular is not to say it is not there (Hrushovski writes of the 'basically free rhythm' of biblical Hebrew verse which is 'clearly confined within the limits of its poetics' in Hrushovski, "Prosody, Hebrew," 1201. Also cf. Nicholas P. Lunn. *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Differentiating Pragmatics and Poetics*. Paternoster Biblical Monographs, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 105-06.). As Alonso-Schökel writes a decade after his review of Stuart's book, 'Rhythm comes from hearing' (Alonso-Schökel, *A Manual*, 47.)! And anyone with an ear can hear that more is happening in certain verses in the Hebrew Bible than syllabic conformity and parallel syntax (Michael O'Connor espouses a form of 'syntactic parallelism' which seems a sort of halfway house between espousing metre and denying it (Michael O'Connor. *Hebrew Verse Structure*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980)); again, see Kugel's critique in Kugel, *The Idea*, 315-23.). Language cannot ultimately be tied down through analysis (One recalls Kierkegaard's 'systematic ransacker . . . the man who, in order to serve the science of punctuation, divided his discourse by counting out the words, fifty words to a period and thirty-five to a semi-colon' (Søren Kierkegaard. *Fear and Trembling: Repetition*. Kierkegaard's Writings, Vol. 6 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 8.)). Nor can the human soul be seen through a microscope. In both cases, dissection can prove fatal—to the language and to the man. The thing (whether poetic line or human soul) is greater than the sum of its parts. See the insightful section 'Some Principles of Biblical Hebrew Verse', which Hrushovski sections into 'Parallelism', 'Rhythm', and 'Sound' in Hrushovski, "Prosody, Hebrew," 1200-02. He compares biblical Hebrew poetry to the later, rabbinic, much more

were it not for the elements that end both verses, respectively. **הארץ** and **השמש** form something of a merism and in so doing couple these two verses and all their component parts.<sup>23</sup>

As one might expect, following verse 3 textually, verse 4 follows conceptually as well. In fact, aspects of the latter reside in the former. The phrase **תחת השמש** assumes **הארץ** and indeed all of verse 4: what is 'under the sun' but the earth (v. 4c), and what walks under the sun and upon the earth, coming from it and returning to it (Gen 2.7, 3.19; Eccl 3.20, 12.7) but each generation (**דור**) of men (v. 4ab)? And as we have said, what is verse 4 if not an answer to the question verse 3 poses?<sup>24</sup> What profit can there be to one who does not remain?<sup>25</sup>

At least one more detail of verse 3 recommends its generality and seminal relationship to what follows. The verse reads,

מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש

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structured and formal prosody, describing it incisively as 'fluid, though rich'.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Alter's comments on parallelism in meaning in biblical poetry often being joined by similar rhythm, subject matter, syntax in Robert Alter, "The Characteristics of Ancient Hebrew Poetry," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter, and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 612.

<sup>24</sup>Seow signals a key connection between v. 3c and v. 4ab as it relates to the ANE worldview.

<sup>25</sup>So Ginsberg: "The phrase **תחת השמש**, under the sun, which only occurs in this book (1:14; 2:11, 17, 20, 22; 3:6; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:12, 17; 6:1, 12; 8:9, 15, 17; 9:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 10:5), and in later Hebrew writings, is tantamount to **על־הָאָרֶץ**, which is used in 8:14, 16; 11:2, and refers to **יתרון**, i.e., **מֵה־יִתְרוֹן לְאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ**, i.e., **מֵה־יִתְרוֹן לְאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ**, i.e., **מֵה־יִתְרוֹן לְאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ** (Ginsburg, *Cohemoth*, 260.).

The two initial *mems* create an envelope around the first hemistich (מה־יתרון לְאָדָם) that subtly isolates and accentuates it. This has the effect of separating the question of man's profit in life from any one thing, in this case from his toil, making a comprehensive question (3a-c) even more comprehensive<sup>26</sup> (3a). 'What profit is there to man'? Its alliterative envelope here (via *mem*) causes that question to ring in our consciousness a little more clearly. Its resonance remains with us as we read, carrying through the pages of this book until the inclusio-cap in 12.8. Qohelet is not confining the ambit of this opening to man's work. Rather, it is do with the whole of man's life.<sup>27</sup> And what man touches touches all things, as the following verses reveal.

### Man and Sun Connected Within the Verse

The structure of verse 3 is chiasmic. 'What profit is it to a person (A) in all his toil (B) in which he toils (B') under the sun (A)'? Two players (A, A') and one activity (B, B') inhabit and fill-out this single-strophe world. Man and the sun stand at opposite ends of the verse,<sup>28</sup> and they are joined by one activity which is twice repeated—עָמַל. It is the key word bridging both lines in this verse and a key theme of the prologue and book.<sup>29</sup> In

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<sup>26</sup>Because more basic and thus more applicable.

<sup>27</sup>This is essentially what I take 'toil' (עָמַל) to mean in verse 3. Man's עָמַל is what he does in life; it characterises his life and is thus in some sense synonymous with it. See below for further comment.

<sup>28</sup>As if in a stand-off. This syntax seems purposeful and is one characteristic of the line that conveys the slight antagonism that Qohelet begins to build between man and nature.

<sup>29</sup>עָמַל. Thirty-five occurrences. 1.3 (2); 2.10 (2), 11 (2), 18 (2), 19 (2), 20 (2), 21 (2), 22 (2), 24; 3.9, 13; 4.4, 6, 8 (2), 9; 5.14, 15, 17 (2), 18; 6.7; 8.15, 17; 9.9 (2); 10.15.

fact, it may be (and has been)<sup>30</sup> fairly stated that the remainder of the verses in the prologue say what they do in large part to answer the question put so squarely here.<sup>31</sup>

A chiasm also often connects the components it aligns. This is certainly the case in verse 3, where a plethora of details confirms that man and the sun—and so all of creation—are riveted to one another through man's עמל. Since it is עמל that binds man and nature in this verse that speaks to all the verses that follow, not only in the prologue proper but in the remainder of the book through 12.8, its meaning here in Ecclesiastes 1.3 is crucial. It is the tie that binds Qohelet's creation. What does 'it'—that is, what does עמל—mean?

(1) עמל. עמל basically means toil or labour,<sup>32</sup> but it is often a toil or labour that is negatively tinged, tinged with pain, evil, or some sort of misfortune (The verb seems to be more neutral,<sup>33</sup> the noun more negative.<sup>34</sup>). Something more than 'work' or mere activity

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<sup>30</sup>Again, see Fox, Ecclesiastes, 4., among many others.

<sup>31</sup>Squarely but searchingly: 'it is a real question' (Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes, 107.). See also Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 7.

<sup>32</sup>עמל, DCH 6:481; HALOT 'to exert oneself' (עמל, HALOT 2:845).

<sup>33</sup>Though Thompson casts the verb more negatively, especially in most of its uses in Ecclesiastes (עמל, NIDOTTE 3:435-36).

<sup>34</sup>DCH and HALOT both list 'trouble' as the first definition of עמל (See עמל, DCH 6:481; עמל, HALOT 2:845). The LXX translation (μόχθος) reflects this understanding, as μόχθος means 'labor, exertion, hardship' (W. Bauer, et al. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christians Literature. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 660.)—the other two favoured LXX translations of עמל are πόνος and κόπος, both words which often speak to pain (עמל, TDOT 11:197); Otzen renders the noun 'affliction' (עמל, TDOT 11:197); Thompson translates 'distress, trouble, toil, effort,

is frequently occurring when עמל is used.<sup>35</sup> The word's instances throughout the Hebrew Bible gather in force to support this claim.<sup>36</sup> Otzen writes, 'When the Semites express a

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misfortune' ('עמל', *NIDOTTE* 3:435). See also Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 139. *HALOT* defines the noun in Eccl 1.3 as 'care, anxiety', the verb merely as 'to exert oneself' ('עמל', *HALOT* 3:845). *DCH* has 'trouble, hardship, misfortune' for the noun but 'toil, labour' for its use in Eccl 1.3; and so with the verb ('עמל', *DCH* 6:482, 481). Ingram writes, 'Perhaps the most startling fact about the occurrences of the noun 'toil' [עמל] in the Bible is its close association with extremely negative terms . . .' (quoting Seow in Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 153 n.14.). See Ingram's note for Seow's enumeration of these terms and for an accompanying covey of references, all of which convey many of the extremely negative uses, nuances, and associations of the noun עמל throughout the HB (also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 104.). *DCH* lists these synonyms (omitting vowel pointing): 'און misfortune, עני affliction, לחץ oppression, גון sorrow, בעס vexation, שוא vanity, און iniquity, רע evil, שקר falsehood, חמס violence, דד violence, און sorrow, and הון wealth' ('עמל', *DCH* 6:482).

<sup>35</sup>Schoors writes, 'The basic meaning of the root [in Ecclesiastes] seems to be "tired(ness)". The noun denotes "work" (the verb, "to work"), especially "painful work", and further "toil, trouble, misery" but it can also refer to the result of work, i.e., "gain, yield, property (outside Qoh only in Ps 105,44). . . . We may conclude that, in Qoh, the root עמל always has a meaning of "toil, strain". Even if in a few contexts the noun specifically refers to "income, wealth", the connotation of toil as a source of this wealth is always present. In virtually all of these contexts, the root has a negative connotation: the profit of toil is nil (1,3; 2,22), toil is a [hevel] (2,11)' . . . (Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 139, 144-45.).

<sup>36</sup>In the HB, the word basically means 'trouble' or 'evil' with the two exceptions of Judges 5.26 (where it used to describe a 'workman's' hammer) and Jonah 4.10, which seems to be the first place (other than Judges, and wisdom literature aside) it really means 'work' or 'labour' without a terribly negative connotation (i.e. 'trouble'). In the Psalter, 'mischief' or 'trouble' characterizes most uses. Notable exceptions include Ps 73.16 where, perhaps unsurprisingly owing to the sense the poem shares with Eccl, the word means what it often does in Eccl—'toilsome labour'—and Ps 127.1, a psalm attributed to Solomon which begins, 'Unless the Lord builds the house, they who build it labour (עמל) in vain'. In Biblical Wisdom Literature (BWL), we find the first Proverbial instance of עמל to mean both 'worker' and 'works' (in Prov 16.26). But this is an exception. The word in BWL normally means something like 'misery' (see Otzen, who writes that 'affliction, or rather the misery, that is part of the fundamental human condition' predominates as the meaning of עמל in the wisdom literature ['עמל', *TDOT* 11:198]). Although the word as used in Ecclesiastes can almost always be understood to mean work (or at times, that which work wins, namely wealth [See Gordis, *Koheleth*, 418-20.]), it is again almost always 'work' with a negative connotation. Thus 'toil or 'labour' or some combination of the two ('laborious toil' or 'toilsome labour') is most apt (Schoors points out that two-thirds of the

concept, all its aspects resonate, although in a given context one particular nuance will be in the foreground'.<sup>37</sup> Its seminal context here in verse 3 suggests that the aspect of עמל foregrounded here is pain, especially since the noun, which is used more negatively more often than is the verb, occurs first with the verb directly following: the pain and misery and evil frequently associated with it transfer to the verb. In Ecclesiastes 1.3, Qohelet gives a first glimpse of creation characterised by *hevel*: it is one in which man is toiling in pain.<sup>38</sup>

(a) עמל in Ecclesiastes 1.3

(i) A Plain Reading

It is now for us to consider more carefully what this word means within the context of verse 3. 'Toil' or 'labour' takes us closest to its usage both here in verse three and in the book as a whole.<sup>39</sup> Both words aptly convey the sense of hardship that accompanies work

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word's HB occurrences are found in the BWL, where according to him, the 'predominant nuance' is 'the strains of life' [Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 139 n. 719.]. In support of his contention, Schoors cites A.D. Power who characterizes עמל in BWL as conveying 'toil involving troublesome labour almost amounting to misery and suffering' [Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 139 n.720.]).

<sup>37</sup>עמל', *TDOT* 11:196.

<sup>38</sup>In his commentary on this verse Murphy writes that עמל 'comes to have, especially in later Hebrew, a nuance of pain and trouble, and this note is sounded throughout the work'. He adds that in the context of verse 3 (and 4) it 'suggests the troubled life of humanity in this world against the background of inevitable death' (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 6-7.).

<sup>39</sup>In his only word study in the back of his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Gordis assigns עמל the meaning 'toil, hard labor' (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 418.; or, in his commentary section, 'laborious toil, hard labor' [Gordis, *Koheleth*, 205.]).

in the way Qohelet uses it here. An adjective-noun combination of the two (toilsome labour, laborious toil) accentuates what either word connotes less obviously. The repetition of the word brings this suggestion of the hardship of toil into stark relief, acting like a verbal hammer that pounds man's occupation into the consciousness of the reader. To the hardship of this toil, monotony is added. Here we have a work that is both painful and boring, so doubly painful. This toil is not simply what man does. It is not only his occupation but the major task with which he finds himself occupied his whole life long. This toil is his occupation, which is his life (cf. 5.18).<sup>40</sup> This is what he does under the sun. It is the word that characterizes his existence. עַמַּל is the first word Qohelet uses to characterize man and his activity within this created order. It is also the second. The drawn-out syntax of this word-pairing (עַמַּלֹּ שִׁיעַמַּל) drives the conceptual point home. Isaksson calls this second use of עַמַּל a 'cursive' aspect of the verb and argues that it carries a progressive, participial sense.<sup>41</sup> Whether or not this is the case, the Imperfect aspect of the verb combines with the noun before it (and the pause between them) to make man's עַמַּל the focus of the sentence and thus to adequately convey the idea that toil is not simply

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<sup>40</sup>So Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 7.

<sup>41</sup>He calls it a 'gnomic present, but with the shade of ongoing reiteration' and cites the Targum, LXX, Peshitta, and Vulgate in support of his evaluation (Bo Isaksson. *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth: With Special Emphasis on the Verbal System*. SSU, 10 (Stockholm: Uppsala, 1987), 124.). Of course, the stem is Imperfect. Strictly, it is a stem conveying incomplete action but, as Isaksson points out, with an iterative sense: this is what man will do during the course of his life. The incomplete aspect of the Imperfect conveys a sense of inescapability as well, which combines with the ongoing aspect to underscore toil as man's present and future lot from which he may not escape. Cf. Bill T. Arnold, and John H. Choi. *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56-9 §3.2.2.

man's day-job; rather, toil is man's lot, something to which he is inextricably linked.<sup>42</sup> It is attached to him like a ball and chain is attached to a convict: this toil is 'his toil' (עמלו), an activity that is riveted to him, that dogs him, that characterizes his existence in Qohelet's world. The plain sense, whether future, present, or progressive, is iterative enough.

Furthermore, the context within which man performs his work is תחת השמש, under the sun. Man works under the sun. The sense is spacial. Man works no where else. Wherever he works, it is under the sun. But of course this is the case. Why mention it if the phrase is only telling us where man works? The fact is, the phrase is not telling us where man works as much as how he works. He works under the sun as under-foot. The phrase connotes subservience, even servitude. When Qohelet speaks of עמל here, he is not speaking of benign or even neutral work but of hard labour.

But man does not simply work under the *sun*. He works *under* the sun. To work under shade is one thing. To work under the sun is quite another. The sun might be many things, but within the context of work—work repeated (עמלו שיעמל), work ongoing (שיעמל being either iterative or future-fated in its sense), and work that is quite possibly profitless (the sense of the question in this verse seeming rhetorical<sup>43</sup>)—within such a

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<sup>42</sup>The rhythmic pause that falls between both occurrences of עמל adds to its iterative aspect and thus contributes to the sense that man cannot escape this toil: it is prolonged, repeated, central, comprehensive (כל), attached to his identity (עמלו), and aggravated in its subjection to a somewhat tyrannical and all-seeing eye (השמש). On this aspect of the sun, see just below.

<sup>43</sup>So, e.g., Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 107; Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 65. Lohfink entertains the possibility (Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, 36.). Murphy calls it 'rhetorical but . . . genuine' (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 7.).

context the sun is simply hot.<sup>44</sup> Its heat produces sweat on man-as-worker. And within the biblical, Hebrew mindset, sweat—especially within the context of work—recalls the curse (cf. Eccl 3.20, 12.7; Gen 3.17-19; cf. Eze 44.18).<sup>45</sup> The ground which is cursed in Genesis 3.17-19 is not mentioned here, but it is understood. Where else would man toil? It is not mentioned here, but it is in the next verse. In this way, verse 3 readies the reader for verse 4 to which it is coupled. In Genesis 3.17-19, man is told that he will sweat as he works to eat and that he will return to the ground from which he came. What is the first line following Ecclesiastes 1.3 but this very thing?<sup>46</sup> Ecclesiastes 1.4a assumes the destination to which man returns in death; the following line (1.4c) supplies it. ‘Under the sun’

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<sup>44</sup>In the ANE context in which this was written, this was especially so.

<sup>45</sup>Rodríguez Gutiérrez says that Eccl 1.3 refers us to the fall described in Genesis (Jorge Luís Rodríguez Gutiérrez, “¿Qué provecho tiene Adán de todo su trabajo con que se fatiga bajo el sol? (Ec. 1,2),” *RIBLA* 30 (1998)). See William H. U. Anderson, “The Curse of Work in Qoheleth: An Exposé of Genesis 3:17-19 in Ecclesiastes,” *EvQ* 70.2 (1998).

<sup>46</sup>See Bernard Maurer, “The Book of Ecclesiastes as a Derash of Genesis 1-4: A Study in Old Testament Literary Dependency,” diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 223-24. Also cf. Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 70.; Anderson, “The Curse of Work in Qoheleth.”; Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther*. NSBT, 10 (Leicester: Apollos, 2000); C.C. Forman, “Kohēleth’s Use of Genesis,” *JSS* 5 (1960); Robert V. McCabe, “The Message of Ecclesiastes,” *DBSJ* 1 (1996), 95-99; Walter R. Steele, “Enjoying the Righteousness of Faith in Ecclesiastes,” *CTQ* 74 (2010); Rodríguez Gutiérrez, “¿Qué provecho tiene Adán de todo su trabajo con que se fatiga bajo el sol? (Ec. 1,2);” Arian Verheij, “Paradise Retried: On Qohelet 2.4-6,” *JSOT* 50 (1991); Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *Der Prediger*. KAT, 17/4 (Gerd Mohn: Giitersloher Verlagshaus, 1963); Ma Claustré Solé i Auguets, *Déu, una paraula sempre oberta: El concepte de Déu en el Qohèlet*. Col·lectània Sant Pacià, 65 (Barcelona: Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya, 1999), 289-96; Melvin Tinker, “Evil, Evangelism, and Ecclesiastes,” *Them* 28 (2003).; Katharine J. Dell, “Exploring Intertextual Links Between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1-11,” in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, ed. Katharine Dell, and Will Kynes (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 3-14.

conjures up these connections, and it encourages us to read עמל in verse 3 within the context of pain.<sup>47</sup>

The arsenal of arguments aside, this verse simply reads like a rhetorical question which assumes a negative reply.<sup>48</sup> The question's comprehensiveness intimates exasperation ('is there ever profit with anyone, anywhere?'), even desperation. This sounds like a rhetorical flourish which invites the unstated reply 'none'<sup>49</sup> and which presses for a read-

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<sup>47</sup>Chiasm often heightens antithesis between entities it connects (Watson, Hebrew Poetry, 32, 35.). That effect can be easily seen here, between sun and man or, if we extrapolate, between nature and man. Parsons argues that תחת השמש speaks to death in Eccl (Parsons, "Guidelines.").

<sup>48</sup>So C.F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch. Commentary on the Old Testament. Vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1886), 658.; Seow, Ecclesiastes, 113.; Frydrych, Living under the Sun, 152. The phrase that begins this question, מה־יתרון, appears only 2x elsewhere in Eccl, in 3.9 and 5.15. While ambiguous context in Eccl 3.9 leads to an open-ended answer, the context in Eccl 5.15 is decidedly negative. The verse reads, "This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain (מה־יתרון) is there to him who toils for the wind?" The answer implied is that there is no 'gain'. Thus, in the only two other instances of this collocation in Ecclesiastes, one is ambiguous and the other starkly negative.

<sup>49</sup>As mentioned above, Ginsberg takes this line of reasoning even farther by reading this verse not as an interrogative but as an emphatic negative: 'Since there is no profit . . .' (Ginsburg, Coheleth, 260.). Ecclesiastes 2.11 is the only other verse in the entire book (and in the Hebrew Bible for that matter) to include the words תחת השמש and יתרון. The verse reads,

וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי בְּכָל־מַעֲשֵׂי שְׁעָשׂוּ יָדַי וּבְעֵמָל שְׁעַמְלִיתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהִנֵּה הַכֹּל הַכֹּל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ וְאִין יִתְרוֹן  
תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:

It also employs the noun/verb pairing of עמל in the same way as 1.3 and surrounds this word pair with the synonym עשה (Even-Shoshan lists עשה as a synonym of עמל, and Qoh uses it in inclusio with 1.3 in 1.9 [Even-Shoshan, New Concordance [in Hebrew], 897.]), using the noun/verb doublet of עשה preceding the עמל pairing as if to say, 'This verse is a resounding and decisive answer to the question I posed about man's activity at the beginning of my book (in 1.3).' The double-inclusion in 2.11 of כל and its finish with the phrase תחת השמש complete the lexico-syntactical parallels between the two verses and confirm 2.11 as a decisive answer to the rhetorical question raised in 1.3 (See

ing of עמל that sees sublimated its connotations of pain, misery, misfortune, and even despair.<sup>50</sup>

(ii) *Syntax, Stress, and Sound*

As we have seen, the fact that עמל is repeated in the middle of the verse emphasises its centrality in this line, syntactically so conceptually. The rhythmic break between the two uses of עמל creates a pause when reading the verse.<sup>51</sup> This pause thus falls directly after עמל and directly before שיעמל and serves to accentuate the noun/verb pair beyond the effect the word's doubling would have produced on its own. Thus do the word's doubling

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Schwienhorst-Schönberger. „Nicht im Menschen Gründet das Glück“ (Koh 2,24): Kohelet im Spannungsfeld jüdischer Weisheit und hellenistischer Philosophie. HBS, 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 18.).

Finally, the position of 2.11 at the end of Qohelet's efforts to create a garden paradise removes any doubt, not only that he is answering 1.3 but that 1.3 is a verse that constructs the framework for creation in Ecclesiastes. This verse is the crescendo of all that has been building, indeed of all that Qohelet has built, since 2.1. In 1.3 Qohelet asks, 'Is there any profit to anything in all creation, to anything in man's life, to anything in the natural world that delineates man's life?' Ecclesiastes 2.11 is his answer; and the answer is an unequivocal, though not explicit, 'no' (Cf. 'עמל', *TDOT* 11:200.). Whether or not עמל here in verse 3 means painful toil, it almost certainly means profitless toil. And that, in its own way, is painful. It is likely part, at least, of the pain עמל encompasses if it does encompass pain at all. The context of 1.3 suggests it does.

<sup>50</sup>For a more nuanced view, see William P. Brown, "“Whatever Your Hand Finds to Do”: Qoheleth's Work Ethic," *Int* 55 (2001). But see Anderson's critique in William H. U. Anderson, "A Critique of the Standard Interpretations of the Joy Statements in Qoheleth," *JNSL* 27 (2001), 67-68.; and Antoon Schoors, "L'ambiguità della gioia in Qohelet," in *Il libro del Qohelet: Tradizione, redazione, teologia*, ed. Giuseppe Bellia, and Angelo Passaro (Milano: Paoline, 2001).; also Anderson, "The Curse of Work in Qoheleth."

<sup>51</sup>Which the Masoretic *zaqep qaton* above the first עמל supports (עַמְלָו).

and placement in the middle of the line—as well as in the middle of the rhythmic break in the verse—combine to emphasise its syntactical centrality.

But עמל is also emphasized conceptually. As the center of the chiasm, the word connects the two ends of the chiasm, thereby linking אדם and שמש beyond mere proximate relation within the verse, thereby engaging them in a bond that will not be broken for the entirety of Qohelet's work. Here for the first time, man is introduced to the reader, but he is not introduced in a vacuum. He is introduced in pain within the context of a strong connection to nature, as represented by the sun and by the collocation in which it sits (תחת השמש), a collocation strewn throughout the book and which therefore helps set its atmosphere and tone. Man is solitary (*his* toil), and so is the sun (the word is not שמים ['heavens'] but שמש, signifying a solitary sun); alone, they are bound by עמל. The isolation of each is thus alleviated but the pain is not reduced. On the contrary, the pain seems to be exacerbated by the company each keeps; and עמל is the cause, or rather, the result.<sup>52</sup> It is painful toil that links this seminal appearance of man and nature and which therefore will characterise their relationship throughout the prologue and book.

The *zaqep qaton* above the first עמל (so עמלֹו) supports this contention as well, since it acts as a disjunctive but can also signal elaboration in what follows.<sup>53</sup> In this case, the *zaqep qaton* says to the reader that the Masoretes may have read the second half of

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<sup>52</sup>Depending on one's point of view: it is the cause of their uncomfortable association in the sentence (grammatically) but the result of their relationship (in reality).

<sup>53</sup>Israel Yeivin. *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*. (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1980), 173.

verse 3 as an integral explanation or even extension of the first half (If the first half of v. 3 is 'a', the second half is "a" and what's more, "b").<sup>54</sup> 'Toil' characterizes the הבל of man's life, but not completely. There is a missing ingredient, and that is the context of man's toil, the sun and man's position under it. 'Toil under the sun' characterizes the הבל of man's life completely. Thus does the *zaqep qaton* undergird the idea that at the root of Qohelet's thought about what characterizes the הבל of all things and of man's life is man's life in relation to nature. The *shin*-inclusio of שיעמל תחת השמש subtly supports this assertion, since the envelope corrals man's toil and the sun, limiting man's pain to that and only that which lay within the sun's particular province.<sup>55</sup>

One instance of עמל in particular buttresses the notion that Ecclesiastes 1.3 expounds verse 2 in a special way. Ecclesiastes 4.6 reads,

טוב מלא כף נחת מלא חפנים עמל ורעות רוח:<sup>56</sup>

The collocation that ends this verse, רעות רוח, occurs seven times in the book (1.14; 2.11, 2.17, 2.26; 4.4, 4.6; 6.9). In every other occurrence, the word directly preceding the collocation is הבל. Here it is עמל. If this is not to equate עמל and הבל, it is to get close. עמל holds Ecclesiastes 1.3 together, constituting its core and acting as the medium that initially and fundamentally binds the elements (man and nature) in Qohelet's creation. It not only constitutes the relationship between elements in Qohelet's creation; it characterises

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<sup>54</sup>Again, this parallelistic paradigm is Kugel's (Kugel, *The Idea*, 1.).

<sup>55</sup>See below for further comment on this inclusio.

<sup>56</sup>'Better a fistful of rest than [two] hands full of toil and wrangling wind.'

man's lot in life as well. And here, in verse 3, where עמל holds central sway, it directly follows and is strongly connected to the most *hevel*-saturated verse in the book (with 12.8). To put it bluntly, if we can reduce Ecclesiastes 1.2 to its dominant word הבל and Ecclesiastes 1.3 to its dominant word עמל, then 1.2-3 tell us what עמל ורעות רוח in Ecclesiastes 4.6 among the six other occurrences of הבל ורעות רוח do: man's עמל tells us what הבל means. More specifically, in terms of Ecclesiastes 1.3, the verse that is our opening to Qohelet's world, man's עמל in relation to nature tells us what הבל means.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Brown comments on Eccl 1.3-7, 'The cosmos, in short, reflects the crisis of the human condition as understood by this ancient sage. The cosmos is a corpus or, more accurately, a series of discrete bodies all in motion but without purpose or direction, a universe created in the image of the toiling individual' (Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 25.). Frydrych writes, 'The ultimate conclusion with respect to the question of Qoh 1:3 reached by Qoheleth is summarised in the word הַבֵּל' (Frydrych, *Living under the Sun*, 45.). Seemingly contrary to this understanding, however, is his view that 'Qoh 1:3 does not apply to the entire book' (contrary since the verse which Frydrych implies Eccl 1.3 speaks to directly [Eccl 1.2] does speak to the whole book, a fact Frydrych acknowledges five pages later: Frydrych, *Living under the Sun*, 45, 50, also 152.).

## Ecclesiastes 1.4: Death and Endurance, Man and Nature Locked in Opposition

*I am a sacrifice bound with cords to the horns of the world's rock altar, waiting for worms.*  
-Annie Dillard<sup>58</sup>

4a A generation <sup>59</sup> goes b and a generation comes, c and the earth <sup>60</sup> forever stands.	דָּוָר הַלֵּךְ 4a וְדָוָר בָּא b וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת c
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<sup>58</sup> Annie Dillard. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 242.

<sup>59</sup> דָּוָר as ‘a generation (of humanity) and not ‘a cycle’ as Ogden contends (Graham S. Ogden, “The Interpretation of דָּוָר in Ecclesiastes 1.4,” *JSOT* 34 (1986).; Ogden’s understanding of דָּוָר here is debunked by Fox [Fox, “Qohelet 1.4,” 109.], both on contextual and linguistic grounds. Also see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 59.). See note below for further comment. The word is used by Qoh only here. However, as Salyer observes, the note of death and of man’s return to the earth from whence he came is sounded more than once in the book, in 3.19-21 and elsewhere (e.g. 5.15-16, 12.7)(Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 5.).

<sup>60</sup> הָאָרֶץ as ‘the earth’ or ‘the land’ and not as ‘(the world of) humanity’ as Fox contends. In his article on Ecclesiastes 1.4, Michael Fox argues that the subject of the whole verse is humanity, not humanity and the earth, and that the verse therefore speaks to man’s ineffectiveness, not to his transience. Fox’s argument rests on his taking וְהָאָרֶץ in 4c to mean ‘humanity’ rather than ‘the earth’, or as he puts it, *le monde* rather than *la terre*. He can thus translate the word as ‘the earth’ but still understand it to mean ‘the earth full of persons, or again, “humanity”’ (Gary Salyer. *Vain Rhetoric: Private Insight and Public Debate in Ecclesiastes*. *JSOTSup*, 327 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 264 n.62.). The sense of the verse would then (according to Fox) read something like this: ‘Generations bustle about trying to effect change, but all the while humanity remains the same.’). Fox cites several examples in the Hebrew Bible where וְהָאָרֶץ is translated this way (‘Gen 6.1, 11.1; 1 Kin 2.2; Ps 33.8, etc.’); but its usage in Ecclesiastes and the context here combine to make Fox’s designation unlikely. אָרֶץ appears thirteen times in the book, in 1.4, 3.21, 5.1, 5.8, 7.20, 8.14, 8.16, 10.7, 10.16, 10.17, 11.2, 11.3, and 12.7. Only once does its context allow the possible reading *le monde* (10.16-17). What is more, its last usage is in 12.7, a verse that may mirror 1.4 (since 12.8 clearly mirrors 1.2), and in 12.7 the word cannot but mean *la terre* (since in it *la terre* swallows *le monde*). And although the word here in verse 4 could mean ‘the people of the earth’ and not ‘the earth’ itself, the amount of exegetical evidence we will see below that points to contrast between the two verse-halves (and in the first verse-half between hemistichoi) suggests that these lines are not speaking of the same subject but of two subjects which Qohelet wants us to think of in

(1) *Contrast Advanced*. The predominant sense here is one of contrast.<sup>61</sup> The verse is antithetical on every level, that is, between man-and-man and man-and-nature. Passing generations contrast with coming ones (4ab), and the generations of humanity speeding on and off the face of the earth collect to contrast with the earth which stolidly remains.<sup>62</sup>

Whereas the contrast in 1.3 was subtle, with man taking up most of the space in the verse and the sun appended, here the contrast is syntactically and semantically plain,

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some ways as fundamentally at odds (this verse's apparent resonances with verse 3, where verse 3 begins with man and moves to nature, argue in the same direction: verse 4, like verse 3, probably begins with man and moves to nature [that is, to *la terre* and not *le monde*]). Outside Ecclesiastes, ארץ is used as a subject in conjunction with the verb עמד only three times (Isa 48.13, 66.22; Ps 119.90), and each time ארץ means 'the earth' (Incidentally, in Isa 48.13 and 66.22, ארץ is used in conjunction with שמים to form a merism. This constitutes two-thirds of its uses under these conditions [as a subject with עמד] and argues for a meristic use together with שמש [v. 3] here.). Its use in Ps 119.90 puts it in parallel to 'enduring generations' (לדר ודר), which may argue for its use with a repeated דור here as meaning 'earth' and not 'humanity'. This is not to mention the use of לעולם to start off the previous verse (Ps 119.89), a verse that begins the *lamed* stanza and pairs beautifully with Ps 119.90. Between לעולם, an enduring earth, and דר repeated in collocation, key words in Ps 119.89-90 string together to compose most of Eccl 1.4. The similarities seem too numerous to be coincidental. Is Qohelet parodying this couplet (Ps 119.89-90) which speaks of the endurance of God's word and faithfulness with an affirmation of man's transience in Eccl 1.4? Also cf. Ps 89.5. Contending for הארץ as 'earth' here and not 'humanity', Fredericks cites Ps 104.5 as a strong parallel to Eccl 1.4 and notes its endurance and similar backdrop for natural phenomena (Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 67.).

<sup>61</sup>But see Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 7., who acknowledges the contrast but argues, citing Zimmerli, against its controlling influence here. Whether adversative or conjunctive, the *waw* in verse-middle connects both lines, providing continuity in the movement from one subject (דור) to the next (הארץ). Also Peter Enns. *Ecclesiastes. THOTC*, (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011), 33. Backhaus thinks the conjunction adversative (Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 12.).

<sup>62</sup>Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 81.

splitting the verse down the middle into two basically equal halves. Man stands on one side. The earth stands on the other. This contrast is underlined in a number of ways.

(2) *Contrast Underlined*

(a) *Verbs.* Qohelet accentuates the contrast between humanity and the earth through his choice of verbs. They are nearly antonymous: the seemingly revolving generations come and go (בא and הלך) from cradle to grave, while the earth forever stands (לעולם עמדת).<sup>63</sup> What the generations cannot do but no doubt seek to do, the earth does. And like the sun in verse three, it stands at the end of the line as if presiding over all the contents and characters therein.

All three verbs are also participles, which supports the idea that Qohelet means for his readers to understand these verbs, and so subjects, together and thus in tension.<sup>64</sup> Here, again, is the idea of separation-and-connection or, to put it in terms of this verse, contrast-through-connection.

As with verse three, here it is the tension that holds man and nature together. This tension connects both halves of the verse to form one complete thought and in so doing provides the grounds for their relationship. In other words, here we see yet again and in clearer display a relationship between humanity and nature characterised by ten-

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<sup>63</sup> עמד personifies the earth, especially standing as it does opposite the line from the unceasing הלך of successive generations.

<sup>64</sup>[The] wealth of participles gives the poem its main cohesion . . .' (Verheij, "Words," 185).

sion (much like two children swinging around in a circle with hands locked in the middle. The circular swinging motion is made possible by the centripetal pull, by the tension: they can swing only because they are in tension). In the same way, Qohelet is telling us from the start of his prologue that the every interaction of man and nature is made possible only because they are in tension. Because man and the elements (sun, earth, wind, water) alone constitute his creation, they speak for all things. This means that all things are in tension. In verse three, chiasm provides the framework for this tension that repels and binds the prologue's two players. The tension and connection are subtle and also slightly connotative. Here in verse four the pull between players (nature and man) is more obvious. The contrast is crystal clear, holding the verse together and keeping its players apart. It is as if man, ever frustrated in his efforts to remain and be remembered on earth (v. 11), reaches forward from the first half of the verse into the second but cannot grasp what the earth alone possesses—an enviable and effortless ‘perdurability’.<sup>65</sup>

Right from the start of the verse we see man coming and going, or rather, going and coming. Although the verbs (הלך and בא) are (active) participles, there is a sense in which man's going and coming is seen in a simple present rather than in an iterative way.<sup>66</sup> This allows us to view man's ceaseless coming into and out of existence from a calm and stable and seemingly objective present, as if watching a series of gophers pop into and out of a hole while standing some distance away on a nearby bluff. However,

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<sup>65</sup> Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 23., speaking of all the natural elements in 1.3-7 and not simply of the earth.

<sup>66</sup> Waltke, and O'Connor, *IBHS*, §37.6e.; Joüon, *A Grammar*, 410 §121d.

once the reader is made to feel this way, he soon realizes the joke is on him: he is the go-pher; the generation which so quickly passes is his own.<sup>67</sup> The standing observer here is not the reader. It is the earth.

On the other hand, the participles in this first line can be read as signaling continuous, repeated action, as participles commonly do.<sup>68</sup> The repeated subject here (דור) might encourage one to prefer this reading. In this case, the contrast between generations ever coming and going, never standing still, and the earth which literally 'stands' (עמדת) stock still and endures forever is even more explicit than in the simple present reading of the participles בא and הלך.<sup>69</sup>

The placement of עמדת at the end of the sentence highlights man's transience by punctuating the line with the earth's eternity<sup>70</sup> and reminds the reader, who is among the ephemeral generations, of his own inability to stand.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>The writer does not remove himself from this spinning cycle. He is sufficiently perspicacious to have observed and recorded the cycle that swallows us all, but he is under no illusions as to any personal exemption from it. See his subtle self-inclusion at the end of 1.10 in מלפננו.

<sup>68</sup>Williams, Syntax, §213. Also Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 60.

<sup>69</sup>Similarly, Charles Bridges. Ecclesiastes. Geneva Series of Commentaries, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 11, quoting Beza.

<sup>70</sup>עמדת, period. Long-pause. Verse 5. Commenting on Eccl 1.3-7, Brown writes that 'the universe is uniformly indifferent to human living, from birth to death' (Brown, Ecclesiastes, 23.).

<sup>71</sup>The positioning of עמד at the end of the line also allows the word's position to imitate its meaning (the word 'stand' stands out at the end of the line). The cadence of the verse also underscores the contrast: the revolving generations in the first half of the verse roll the reader to verse end where he is suddenly stopped (//) by an earth that stands.

However, not only is there tension between man and the earth; there is tension between man and man as well. The verse's two lines (4ab and 4c) pull at one another, but so do the first two hemistichoi (4a and 4b).<sup>72</sup> In its every part and as a whole, the verse is permeated by contrast, and thus by the tension contrast can create.

(b) *Subject.* The subject to start the sentence (דור) provides contrast between humanity and the earth as well as supplying it with an undercurrent of irony. Qohelet reverses the expected order in 1.4ab. One expects a generation first coming then going. It thus comes as a surprise to encounter a generation immediately moving away (דור הלך).<sup>73</sup> This tells us something integral to his thought. One might typically think of 'generation' as associated with life—to generate is to create, to produce some new thing<sup>74</sup>—but Qohelet associates it first with death, as the entirety of the book reveals.<sup>75</sup> It is not that he ignores the vitality perhaps normally associated with the word (as is clear through its second instance in 1.4, linked as it is with the 'coming' or birth of man) but

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<sup>72</sup>Jarick notes this, as does Schoors (Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 60.). To use Jarick's language, the verse is completely characterised by an antithetic parallelism, in its whole and in its parts. 4a and b are antithetically parallel, and taken together, they stand in antithetic parallel to 4c (Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 81.).

<sup>73</sup>Cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 63.

<sup>74</sup>"The primary emphasis of the word in East Sem. is on duration while in WestSem. it is on generation' (דור, *NIDOTTE* 1:930).

<sup>75</sup>Cf. Janzen's study of תחת השמש in Eccl, where he argues that the phrase, unique to the book, speaks to death and to *hevel* (J. Gerald Janzen, "Qohelet on Life 'Under the Sun,'" *CBQ* 70 (2008)). In short, the end of Eccl 1.3 (תחת השמש) prepares us for the beginning of Eccl 1.4 since both speak to death, the former less obviously to be sure. See also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 104.

that for him, the end of life eclipses life, if not obviating it altogether (cf. Eccl 4.3, 6.3-6; but see 9.4-5).<sup>76</sup>

The typical usage of דור in the Hebrew Bible to convey continuity and even endurance further serves to highlight its contrary usage here.<sup>77</sup> דור is often repeated in collocation<sup>78</sup> to speak of eternity, long endurance, or some form of continuity.<sup>79</sup> Repetition aside, the word is almost always used to signify continuity.<sup>80</sup> Here, by contrast, דור conveys discontinuity and through it, transience.<sup>81</sup> This aspect of Qohelet's usage of דור seems to underscore not only man's transience but his profitlessness as well.<sup>82</sup> Rather than generation coupling with generation to signal human endurance, one (1.4a) cancels out the other (1.4b) here, leaving us with a zero-sum game.

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<sup>76</sup>Cf. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lix; Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 71-72.

<sup>77</sup>*DCH* lists עולם as its only synonym for דור (as 'generation', etc.): 'דור', *DCH* 2:430. Hamilton begins his words study of דור by saying, '[t]he Heb. word may be associated with Akk. daru/duru, "duration, a long time, eternity."' (דור', *NIDOTTE* 1:930). Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 108.

<sup>78</sup>E.g. Ex 3.15, 17.6, Isa 13.20, 34.10, 51.8, 60.15, Jer 50.39, Joel 2.2, 4.20, Prov 27.24, Pss 10.6, 33.11, 45.18, 49.12, 61.7, 72.5, 77.9, 89.2, 89.5, 90.1, 100.5, 102.13, 106.31, 119.90, 135.13, 145.13, 146.10, Lam 5.19, Si 44.16, 1QLitPr 1.4, 11QPsa 26.9, et al.; cf. 'דור', *DCH* 2:428-29 for every instance.

<sup>79</sup>See Ps 33.11, where counsel of the LORD which 'stands forever' (לעולם תעמד) parallels the next line, 'the thoughts of his heart to all generations' (לדור ודור).

<sup>80</sup>See above note.

<sup>81</sup>See 'Syntax' section below for an argument of this assertion.

<sup>82</sup>See Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," 109.

Furthermore, if by encountering דֹּוֹר as the first word in the sentence, we think that generative life will be the thrust of this thought, the second word and the verb to which דֹּוֹר is coupled, הֵלֵךְ, disabuses us of any such notion. 'Going', that is, death, receives emphasis here. Poised for generation, for life, for continuity, we get death instead, and that in two short words. The life that appears on the scene in the form of the next two words, וְדֹוֹר בָּא, is almost worse than no life at all. It arrives alone, the former generation having just gone.

This, it seems, is Qohelet's first answer to the question he has just posed in verse 3. What profit is there to man in life? Verse four's oblique yet cogent response? Owing to death and the resulting brevity and solitariness of life and to the existential painfulness of life in the face of death, it seems that there is no profit at all.

This first line in verse 4 thus provides a neat and devastating contrast to the endurance of the earth. As has been seen, דֹּוֹר starts the sentence here and in so doing receives emphasis, if not because of inverted word order<sup>83</sup> then simply because it is first. It is also repeated, which further emphasises the subject, driving home its transitory nature by underscoring its movement.<sup>84</sup> Once the reader reaches the end of the verse the double

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<sup>83</sup>Subject-verb word order is sometimes emphatic (emphasising the subject, which is presented first), but according to Buth, only in finite verb constructions where this order is abnormal. Subject-verb is normal word order, and thus not necessarily emphatic, when the 'verb' is a participial (Buth, *Living Biblical Hebrew: Introduction Part Two*, 66 n.3.). But see Williams, *Syntax*, 201-04, esp. §572a, 573a, b, e.

<sup>84</sup>The syntactic progression of the word delivers an opposite message: though generations advance, there is actually no progress because of death.

irony emerges.<sup>85</sup> It is on the permanent, unmoving earth that humanity walks throughout its fleeting life, and as Qohelet reminds his readers explicitly twice in this book,<sup>86</sup> it is from the enduring earth that man comes, and to it he returns.<sup>87</sup>

(c) *Sound.* Qohelet also uses sounds to underscore contrast between the transient generations and the enduring earth.<sup>88</sup> Only two words of seven in the line fail to render ‘long-o’ sounds. This phonetic aspect gives the verse an elegaic feel,<sup>89</sup> imbuing its first half with a sad irony (the only thing unending about the generations is their constant ending, and beginning) and the second half with a resounding confirmation of that sad truth by way of contrast.

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<sup>85</sup>So Crenshaw, “Nothing New,” 242.

<sup>86</sup>Eccl 3.20, 12.7. As if to make the connection to 1.4 clear, in 3.20 Qohelet again employs the participle (הולך) to describe every man's inevitable walk toward death (6.6), a destination 3.20 also reminds us is the earth itself.

<sup>87</sup>Another irony reveals itself to us today: cosmologically speaking it is the earth, not man, that rolls on and on in a seemingly never-ending circle (and it is man who stands, not the earth). Qohelet inverts the motions we might typically associate with humanity and the earth, assigning man's posture (standing) to the earth and the earth's posture (endlessly going and coming, as only an orbiting, spinning sphere can) to man. In so doing he, intentionally or not, further interweaves the motions of humanity and nature while widening the breach between them. Doing so with several touches of irony only deepens the impression these opening lines leave on the mind.

<sup>88</sup>For a detailed accounting of these sounds and an evaluation of some of their uses/effects in this and following verses, see Verheij, “Words.”

<sup>89</sup>This fits the line's metre (if metre there be) which is *Qinah* (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 203.), a rhythm often used in lament. It is typical in Lamentations (See Lam 2.21; Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 98.).

While it is true that the long-o sound pervades the entire verse, the last word in 4b presents the listener/reader with another sound—the /a/ sound—that dots the verse and may help address some curious aspects it displays. It is the word אָז.

אָז is the last word in 4b and as such a linchpin that connects the two halves of the verse. It is the first word in the verse to produce a new sound by virtue of its *qamets*, and it is this sound that carries through all three words in 4c (again by virtue of the *qamets*). Thus does אָז serve as an aural connection between the verse's two lines, between the revolving generations and the ever-standing earth.

Just as the long-o sound characterises 4ab, so does the /a/sound characterise 4c. Although the long-o sound does carry through the entire verse, thereby providing cohesion where there is tension, it rolls through 4c rather than dominating it. This can be seen by looking at the stresses, all of which fall on consonants vocalised by *qamets*. Thus, every word in 4c is stressed on its /a/sound. It is the /a/sound that punctuates and so characterises the second half of verse 4. This quality is not without its effects.

While the long-o sound provides a forward motion to the verse, the accented *qamets* stretches out the sound and sense of 4c, the line it pervades. Verse 4ab is staccato, stabbing the consciousness of the reader with the fleeting nature of each generation. Verse 4c almost luxuriates in its lengthening, the accented *qamets* seeming to take more time to speak (than either the *cholem* or the *cholem-waw*).<sup>90</sup> This aural effect nicely un-

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<sup>90</sup>Especially the final (accented) *qamets* (אָז), stressing 'remains'. The sound of this word resonates in our ears (if we are reading aloud) and remains in our minds even as we move into the prologue's next stanza.

dergirds the freight 4c conveys by contrast: the earth . . . endures . . . forever. This duel of sounds in verse 4 highlights a face-off between man and nature in yet another way while also providing a cohesive unity (in the long-o sound and the participle that partly provides it) that binds them.

(d) *Syntax*. Ending 4b and abutting 4c, **וָיָבֹאוּ** is the word that holds the tension between them together. This is more than incidental detail. In his article on this verse, Fox rightly concentrates at one point on the reversed order of verbs in the first line.<sup>91</sup> Generations normally come and go. Here, however, they go and come. Fox sees this uncommon order as an argument against the phrase's speaking to the transience of man and for its speaking to his ineffectiveness, namely his inability to bring about any lasting change (in line with verse 3, verses 8-11, and in some sense the entire prologue). However, the unusual order of these verbs actually accentuates man's transience.<sup>92</sup> Fox fails to appreciate the facts we have just highlighted and will study more in depth below, namely that the word order as-is serves, both by way of stress and vowel-sound, to connect the verse halves while simultaneously contrasting them. At base, this is the whole point of verse 4 and one of the major points of the prologue.

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<sup>91</sup>Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," 109.

<sup>92</sup>The details of the verse amass to highlight man's transience, not his ineffectiveness (though transience leads to ineffectiveness). As Murphy states in his characteristically generous manner, 'it is hard to eliminate the note of impermanence and transience here when they appear with such frequency throughout the book; cf., e.g., 2:16' (Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 7.; also cf. *The Midrash and Ralbag in Koheles*, 54.; Leupold, *Ecclesiastes*, 45.).

Fox contends that the syntax of 4ab does not speak to transience,<sup>93</sup> but what could speak to transience more powerfully than a generation which we immediately find walking toward the grave? This is precisely what the reversed word order of 4a renders: it gives us הלך first. It is man's going and not his coming to which Qohelet gives pride of place. Man's walk toward death precedes his coming into life through birth. In this way we begin to see the prominent part death will play in Qohelet's thought. Even at this early stage and in this minor detail he is telling us that death should be foremost in our own thoughts as well. From our first breath we begin walking toward the grave (cf. 6.6c). The notion of life alone is an illusion. It is never life alone but life in view of death. The black shadow of death casts a grey pall over life's brightest moments. Wherever life is, death is never very far behind. It is ever before us, and in this way, it ought to be a prominent pre-occupation in the mind of thinking man. In short, because of death, we are always 'going'. Life is always moving away from us, just out of reach, at the very least ever-elusive because of its presence in the penumbra of death. Qohelet captures all this in these two words: דור הלך is this reality's terse and incisive expression.

The whole of verse four's first line combines to elaborate this fact. This sense of the prominence of man's 'moving away' from life and towards death is conveyed by what both verbs in 4ab together express. Man is never simply 'here', existing in some stable present. He is always either going or coming. In fact as we have seen, wherever he is coming he is also in the process of going; for as Qohelet says later, we are all only ever

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<sup>93</sup>Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," 109.

walking toward one place.<sup>94</sup> Life is caught between a going and a coming and is perennially in flux, never fixed. There is no stasis, no stability, no forever-standing—not for us at least.<sup>95</sup>

The strange order of 4ab also interrupts any continuity a normal order might have expressed. If a generation comes and a generation goes, one might read the ‘coming and going’ as speaking to the life-span of a single generation. As it is however, the possibility of continuity is out of the question. The generation the reader finds moving away from him cannot be the same one that then comes. Thus does 4ab speak of two generations at least and so destroy any sense of continuity, no matter how short-lived, by which the reader may have otherwise been comforted (cf. 1.11). Here is a lonely line, where on one level we find two persons passing one another during their short stay on earth. One is in the act of leaving and the other in the act of coming. If the two enjoy any contact at all, it is ephemeral. On another level, as ‘generations’ these two figures represent countless others whose who walk the face of the earth. Such is the ceaseless, hurried, and lonely motion of each man and woman and child who walks the earth. Especially in the light of verse 3, the picture Qohelet paints here is certainly one of unprofitability. It is perhaps not until we read 4c that we see the extent to which it is a picture of impermanence as well.

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<sup>94</sup>Eccl 6.6.

<sup>95</sup>Again, and of course, for the earth there is, which is exactly what Qohelet says in 4c and in so doing makes an already devastating 4a more devastating still. He is here pressing the deep wound of our own impermanence.

This first line seems to be yet another illustration of the separation-through-connection dynamic that has its roots in *hakkol hevel*. Generations belong together, they ought to live together, care for one another, and hand things down, one to the next; they are grouped together here; and yet, posited so compactly into this little four-word line, they move past one another with a perceived celerity. Placed tightly together, they are always moving apart. The separation-in-connection dynamic present in **הכל הכל** is concisely pictured here.

A closer look at the syntax and sound of 4ab may serve to show that there are still more reasons a reversed word order (**הלך** before **בא**) might be preferred as a way of rendering a keenly felt but as yet unexplained sense of man's mortality.

First and as we have already seen, the /a/ sound of **בא** joins with **וְהָאָדָמָה** better than **הָלַךְ** would. In this way the content of 4ab flows more smoothly (sonically anyway) into that of 4c than it would were the clause 'a generation comes and a generation goes'. One might object that Qohelet could have just as easily have kept a normal word order and changed **הָלַךְ** to a Qal Perfect 3rd singular had he simply been interested in linking the two lines (4ab and 4c) through sound. But as we have seen, sound was not the only factor that Qohelet used to link the two lines.

Furthermore, a Qal Perfect 3rd singular **הָלַךְ** would render the right sound to move the reader ahead into 4c but not the right rhythm. As it is, the line renders this rhythm: *dor ho-lek we-dor ba*. The first and last words of the phrase create a frame-like accent-inclusio with a repeated 'stress-unstress' pair between them. The rhythm thus gives us a

sharp (or punctuated) beginning and end with a rolling middle. In this way the sound and sense of 4ab move the reader ahead with an initial pulse (*dor*), a pulse that pushes the reader into a short but sustained repetition (*ho-lek we-dor*) that rolls the reader forward, just the like the cycle it is describing. The back-to-back stress in 4b (*we-dor ba*) jars the reader out of the lolling posture 4a has put him in while simultaneously casting him forward into the start of 4c, a line which (I have argued and will argue) further shocks the reader by providing a stark contrast-through-stasis and endurance to the fleet impermanence of man.

The greatest rhythmic reason for this divide has been mentioned but not yet expanded on. It is the back-to-back accent in 4b (*we-dor ba*). This is the only back-to-back accent in the verse, and it contributes greatly to the pause that divides both lines and thus spotlights the contrast between the motion of man and the stability of the earth. The double stress of *we-dor ba* creates a caesura that falls after the second stress (between 4ab and 4c).<sup>96</sup> The double accent encourages the reader to take a breath and thus pause as he does. Again, *הלך* at line end would nullify this effect and thus lessen the contrast between both lines that Qohelet has created.

Not only does the somewhat strange word order of 4ab create a greater contrast with 4c than would the more usual phrasing; it also links the two lines in verse 4 more effectively. *אֶבֶן* fits with the /a/ sound-dominated *וְהִיאֲרֵץ*. In fact, these two words are the only two in the verse void of any /o/ sound at all. A Qal perfect 3ms *הלך* would have pro-

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<sup>96</sup>The *zaqep qaton* supports this reading.

vided the aural /a/ connection as well, but its length would not have fused as well with the first word of 4c, וְהָאָרֶץ. The short, stabbing, mono-syllabic אֶבֶן combines more seamlessly with the quad-syllabic וְהָאָרֶץ while also nicely capping off 4ab as a self-contained unit via the accent-inclusio. Finally, it provides a pause for the reader before launching him into 4c. Thus does the word order as Qohelet has it contain 4a as a unit, contrast it with what follows, and link it to what follows.<sup>97</sup> The very generation so starkly contrasted with the earth almost bleeds into it by way of phonetics and rhythm. Such is Qohelet's artistry. Such is his ability to weave the separation-and-connection dynamic into every detail of his text, and of 'his' creation.<sup>98</sup> It all comes from *hakkol hevel* and is a sort of extrusion-as-exposition of that dense, oxymoronic phrase.

The aural, syllabic conjunction between 4ab and 4c also isolates וְהָאָרֶץ. The connections brought about by the *qamets* that run between בָּא and וְהָאָרֶץ and by the syllabic complimentarianism of בָּא and וְהָאָרֶץ are reinforced by the sound of 4c. Although all three words in 4c (וְהָאָרֶץ לְעֹלָם עֲמֹדֵת) make a clearly contained line, the final two words share an assonance (long-o) and a consonance (accented *mems*) that links them in such a way as to leave וְהָאָרֶץ almost floating alone in verse middle. The disjunctive accent

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<sup>97</sup>This linkage contributes to the contrast between 4ab and 4c in the same way that any link contrasts two different objects. We may not realise how tall a man is until we put him beside ('link' him to) a second man of normal height. The giant's height stands out all the more if we place him next to a boy or a dwarf (so does Goliath tower all the more menacingly on the field of battle with the shepherd boy David next to him in the narrative: 1 Sam 16.11; 17.33, 42).

<sup>98</sup>See Verheij, "Paradise Retried.", where Verheij claims that Qohelet sets himself up as God in Eccl 1-2 by trying to reproduce Edenic Gen 1-2. There is much to recommend this insight.

(טפחא) underneath the *aleph* in וְהָאָרֶץ may be evidence that the Masoretes discerned the same soft isolation of this word. After the strong pause that follows 4b, and in combination with the *qamets* that string בַּא and וְהָאָרֶץ together (not to mention the linking conjunction [waw], whether adversative or conjunctive), the sound that doubly-binds the verse's final two words is enough to cause the word to linger, as it were, in the middle of both lines. וְהָאָרֶץ floats. Like each דּוֹר, and like הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ and אֲדָמָה before it — indeed, even like הַכֹּל—it too is isolated. It contrasts. It connects. It is connected to its descriptors that follow; and yet, it somehow stands alone. Connected yet isolated, הָאָרֶץ here exemplifies one of the characteristics most prominent in the prologue. Here again is a 'separation-in-connection' that seems to stem from *hakkol hevel* in 1.2. The generations in the first line demonstrate this characteristic as well.

Although grouped, the generations are alone. The grouping shows this aloneness starkly. One generation walks away while another one enters the earthly scene. But the generations are not alone in their aloneness. The earth is isolated too, semantically and syntactically, as we have seen. Yet it is connected to the moving generations in this verse. The connection reinforces the contrast. It is the isolation of each entity (generations and the earth) that connects them. The tension between them makes their company more painful than their total isolation would otherwise be. Their connection exacerbates their aloneness, because it is their aloneness that links them. This aloneness further links this verse to the preceding. The earth is alone. So is each generation. Yet both are linked. The sun is alone. So is the solitary man who toils under it. Yet they are linked. And they are

linked to the generations and earth that follow in verse 4. All are linked, all alone. Fused together, each stands, or speeds, apart.<sup>99</sup>

The implications of each line (4ab and 4c) connect man and nature as well. The thing about generations that does not seem to change is that they are constantly changing, constantly passing away, and constantly arising anew. The earth is also unchanging but in an antithetical way.<sup>100</sup> It never moves. It never dies. It ever lives. Thus, the unchanging aspect of the subject of each line connects both subjects (generations and the earth), but it connects them in contrast.

Furthermore, the connection between human generations and the earth is underscored by a gender contrast, with a masculine דור and a feminine הארץ.<sup>101</sup> This antithesis emphasises the contrast between both entities while simultaneously linking them more forcefully, much like two opposite poles of a magnet. The contrast creates a connection.

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<sup>99</sup>We will see this aloneness-in-connection amongst the elements in vv. 5-7 and in man in v. 8, broken down to his composite parts as he is there. Verse 11 perhaps expresses this solitariness in the most wide-reaching and saddening way.

<sup>100</sup>The very idea of 'antithesis' also connects 4ab to 4c. 4ab is in itself antithetically parallel (generation goes, generation comes), and it is in antithetical semantic relationship with 4c (generations moving, the earth stands). One might even say that the antithesis which connects 4ab and 4c through contrast arises out of the antithesis inherent in 4ab. If we generalise this and make it a principle, according to verse 4, the tension that connects man and nature arises from man, specifically from that which pertains to his ephemerality, to his mortality. That which binds man and nature in tension is man's death, which arises from, what? Verse 8 alludes to an answer which highlights *hevel*: it is his idolatry.

<sup>101</sup>See Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 125-27.

Even the participle helps convey this separation-in-connection (cohesion-in-tension) quality. As we have seen, the fact that all three verbs in verse 4 are participles connects them, thus connecting the generations to the earth. At the same time, the different context each line provides divides them. Man is a blip. The subject of line one is repeated. Its verbs are antithetical, its hemistichoi staccato and iterative. Its verbs thus pick up on this iterative aspect and convey man as a dot on a line. Line two, however, flows. Lacking reiteration, it moves seamlessly through its three words, the /a/sound helping the words cohere. If man is a dot, the earth is an unending line. Unlike man, it goes on forever.

The continuity the participial aspect of all three verbs in verse 4 creates reveals an underlying irony which also connects and divides generations and the earth at once: there is a continuity to man, but it is in his lack of continuity, in his going and coming, his coming and going. This alone is continuous, one might even say עולם עמדת, about man.<sup>102</sup>

In a multitude of ways then, some blatant and some subtle, Qohelet creates a contrast between generations and the earth here in verse four that reveals a fundamental tension between both entities. This tension is profound, deeply embedded in the fabric of the text through verbal conjugation, word choice, syntax, sounds, and irony.<sup>103</sup> This tension is therefore not peripheral to the line but integral. It is literally what holds the verse together. Here again, as in verse 3, man and nature are tied together in tension. There is

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<sup>102</sup>I expand on this concept in the section below.

<sup>103</sup>Another irony: man is animate but constantly dying while the earth is inanimate but ever-'living'.

separation-and-connection at the heart of their relationship that seems to express what *hakkol hevel* means. In fact, we have seen how this dynamic seems to find its source in these two words.

Yet, even as the earth here exemplifies characteristics displayed throughout the prologue by the other elements (both human and natural), it is in one way at least unique. We have shown how it is connected yet isolated, how it stands alone. It alone stands while man and the other elements swirl around it (excepting the sea, in v. 7). We are tempted to say that the sun stands too. Yet it sweeps across the sky and, what is more, in verse 5 the sun gets sucked into the cycle that man begins in verse 3, the cycle from which it then seemed exempt. Alone, the earth stands. In its unique role, the earth serves as a key link in the chain that binds man and nature together in Qohelet's creation. As ארץ is a linchpin in verse 4 linking generations to the earth through comparison and contrast, so verse 4 is a linchpin in the prologue, linking humanity and the natural elements in the same way (through comparison and contrast).

The earth serves another function. It connects the generations in verse 4 and the elements in verses 5-7 by being what neither is (unmoving) and what both are (enduring). It is thus at once semantically connected and separated. It is also a separated or isolated textual connector, as we showed above. Because of a combination of syllabic, assonantal, and alliterative factors, ארץ floats alone in the middle of the lines it connects. Both semantically and syntactically, the earth connects and contrasts with the generations that also inhabit verse 4 and with the elements that follow within the wider prologue, thus

embodying the separation-in-connection dynamic that increasingly appears ubiquitous in this creation and original to *hakkol hevel* in 1.2.

Furthermore, in line with Kugel's theory of subjunction, where a line parallel to the one before it often adds something to that line before and in so doing develops its truth and sharpens its point, the contrasting earth in 1.4c sharpens the point 1.4ab puts forth.<sup>104</sup> The endurance of הארץ 'drives home' the transitoriness of the generations and in this sense completes the idea that man is mortal, connecting it to the related ideas (put forward in verse 3) of his profitlessness and pain. Just as man's connection to the sun 'perfects' the pain he endures in life, so his connection to the enduring earth 'perfects' the pain he feels in acknowledging his own mortality. Somehow, the earth speaks to him of this mortality and is thus his antagonist in a unique way. The last mention of הארץ in Ecclesiastes (12.7) may tell us how.<sup>105</sup>

#### Conclusion of Chapter 4

Ecclesiastes 1.3 is a bridge. As such, it conveys the content of *hakkol hevel* to the verses that follow by beginning to unfold (the meaning of) that phrase within Qohelet's cre-

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<sup>104</sup>Kugel, *The Idea*, 1.

<sup>105</sup>So may Gen 3.16-19, where the painful toil (עצבון then עצב) of human generation follows man's painful toil (עצבון) on the ground (אדמה), which follows the foretelling of man's death by way of his return to the ground. Eccl 1.3-4 also lists and connects these realities (painful toil of man's work and of human generation on the earth and to the earth, in death). The fact that they are consequences of the curse (ארורה) in Gen 3 (cf. v. 17) suggests something similar for their appearance here in the prologue of Ecclesiastes. Qohelet may be enunciating the effects of the curse over all creation. That Eccl 3.20 and 12.7 are unequivocal allusions to Gen 3.19 strengthens this possibility.

ation. It does this both through its relationship to the surrounding verses and within itself, through its content. Firstly, it conveys tension inherent in *hakkol hevel* through its relationship to surrounding verses. It is connected to the surrounding verses (like, e.g., v. 5) but distinct from them (and so unlike v. 5). As such, it both embodies the separation-in-connection dynamic *hakkol hevel* expresses and heads what follows (and thus represents, directs, and speaks to what follows). Secondly, its content begins to unfold the tension, even antipathy, within *hakkol hevel*. It achieves this by first revealing representative players within creation (man and the sun) as bound in pain. This pain characterises man's existence. He conveys it to creation. Yet nature (expressed in v. 3 by the sun and in v. 4 by the earth) seems exempt from this pain even though it, the pain, is what holds creation together, what constitutes the relationship between man and nature. Nature also seems to be an ingredient in man's pain. Though apparently exempt from it, she is somehow a contributor to it (as the hot sun makes man's digging in the dirt more painful than it would otherwise be).

Ecclesiastes 1.4 advances these aspects by coupling to verse 3 and developing the pain of man and the tension between man and nature. In verse 4, the earth is not only an ingredient in man's pain but a reminder of it, being both the scene of toil (man toils on the earth) and the seat of death (man is buried in the earth). Nature seems not only exempt from man's pain but aloof (standing as man passes), even antagonising.

Together, the toil of man coupled to his return to the earth in death recalls Genesis 3.16-19.<sup>106</sup> Is this first unfolding of *hakkol hevel*, where separation-in-connection and antipathy between man and nature are so strongly present, an expression of the curse brought about by humanity's disobedience?<sup>107</sup> If so, we should expect to find more evidence of this within the prologue. We do.

The one thing we do not find amidst this opposition between distinct, different, and opposing entities (as with *hakkol* and *hevel*) is those distinct things becoming one thing (as they do in *hakkol hevel*, as *hakkol* becomes *hevel*).<sup>108</sup> We will. The process of nature being drawn into man's pain and of different things within nature (amongst the elements) being drawn into one thing begins in verse 5, runs through verse 7, and empties into a three-word concentration which begins verse 8. Verses 9-11 are the consummate exposition of this fusional process within the prologue.

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<sup>106</sup>Cf. Hengstenberg, *Ecclesiastes*, 51.

<sup>107</sup>Again, cf. Anderson, "The Curse of Work in Qoheleth."

<sup>108</sup>Although, this process is assumed in v. 4, where contrasting things (human generations and the earth) become one thing (the earth) in death.



## CHAPTER 5. ECCLESIASTES 1.5-7: NATURE ALSO PROFITLESS AND IN PAIN

*the ancient Hebrew poets are constantly advancing their meanings where the casual ear catches mere repetition.<sup>1</sup>*

*as we go round this space, our pain's renewed*

-Dante<sup>2</sup>

*καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται*

-Saint Paul<sup>3</sup>

זורח השמש ובא השמש ואל מקומו שואף זורח הוא שם  
הולך אל דרום וסובב אל צפון סובב סבב הולך הרוח ועל סביבתיו שב הרוח  
כל הנחלים הלכים אל הים והים איננו מלא אל מקום שהנחלים הלכים שם הם שבים ללכת

5. And the sun rises, and the sun sets, and to its place, panting,  
it is rising there.

6. Going to the south, and turning around to the north, turning, turning, goes the wind.  
And upon its turning returns the wind.

7. All the streams are going to the sea, but the sea, it is not full.  
To the place to which the streams are going, there they are returning to go.

### Introduction

Ecclesiastes 1.3-4 leaves us thinking that within creation, man alone ails. Verses 5-7 suggest otherwise. Man does not ail alone. Nature, or the rest of creation, ails with him. Like man, she is in pain, though in her own way. Man's pain was a product of his inability to endure: his painful toil is made more painful by his being cut short in death. By contrast, nature's pain consists in the fact that she must endure: her toil—the elements are by

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<sup>1</sup>Alter, "Ancient Hebrew Poetry," 615.

<sup>2</sup>Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Purgatorio*. (New York: Bantam, 1984), canto 23, l. 70.

<sup>3</sup>Heb 1.11b.

turns exhausted (v. 5), disoriented (v. 6), and dissatisfied and diminishing (v. 7)—is painful because it never ends. Thus are man and nature once again bound by a common element, by painful toil. It seems the עמל that afflicted man afflicts all things. The curse 1.3-4 hinted at is affecting, is infecting, all creation. This is more of what הכל הבל means.<sup>4</sup> The elements in this stanza are distinct, even isolated, but bound. As such they imitate and thus exegete הכל הבל. Even nature is subject to this painful prison. This is what הכל as הבל looks like. It stultifies. It leaves man mute. But that is the subject matter of 1.8 and must wait for the following chapter. Finally, the new temple text in Ezekiel 42.15-20 may be alluded to in these three verses, serving as an almost invisible backdrop to this elemental text. This would meld the realities of Israel and creation in still another way.

#### Ecclesiastes 1.5: A Depleted Sun

5a And the sun rises,	וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ 5a
b and the sun sets,	וַיָּבֵא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ b
c and to its place, panting,	וְאֶל-מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף c
d it is rising there.	זֹרַח הוּא שָׁם: d

(1) *Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 a Departure from Ecclesiastes 1.3-4.* Despite its clear continuity with what has come before, verse 5 is a departure from preceding verses. The verse's increased length alone signals this departure.<sup>5</sup> While no verse preceding verse 5 exceeds nineteen syllables (1:15, 2:18, 3:19, 4:16), verse 5 contains twenty-three. Verse 4 is sixteen syllables, making the jump to twenty-three in verse 5 more noticeable and fairly

<sup>4</sup>See Parsons, "Guidelines," 302 n. 125.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 64.

significant. From this point forward, the verses only lengthen, with verse 7 at thirty-seven syllables as the longest verse in the prologue and in many ways (treated below) the prologue's—and certainly the section's (1.5-7)—crescendo. Verse 5 is the threshold of another dimension in Qohelet's world, the portal into his raveling of natural and human phenomena into an inextricable cluster of cosmic activity.

But it is mainly the internal consistency of the verse (and the verses that follow: vv. 6-7) which distinguishes it from verses 3 and 4. While verses 3 and 4 include both humanity and natural phenomena, verse 5 concerns itself with nature alone. Many other details signal a departure in this elemental trio (sun, wind, water; but four bodies: water in verse 7 includes streams and sea). However, the glaring factor that separates this section from the others is its subject (nature alone) and her movements (they seem circular, at least cyclical: the movement of the subject in each verse's [vv. 5, 6, 7] second half mirrors and completes its movement in the first). In this way, each of these three verses is like a dog chasing its tail: the last word takes us back to the first (to the movement the first begins to articulate). The mirrored metre (4:4) of verse 5 speaks to this singularity of subject and to nature's circular course: the first half of verse 5 (ab) is concerned with the sun's course, and so is the second (cd). The metric symmetry of the verse reflects its symmetrical verbal content, where 5ab reveals the sun arcing over the sky and 5cd speaks of its journey from its setting at the end of 5ab to its rising again in 5d. Verbally and conceptually, then, we return—with the sun—back to where we began, back to the beginning of

verse 5 (neatly, as the last word in the verse, **שם**, recalls **שמש** [through its morphological similarity to **שמש**] and in so doing takes us back to verse beginning).

This verse signals a departure from verses 3-4, but it is also bound to them. Something perpetually moving in a circle: what could be more profitless than this?<sup>6</sup> At the end of each cycle, much work is done, but no progress is made. The fact of elemental cyclicity in this stanza forges a connection between (seemingly) profitless man in verses 3-4 and (seemingly) profitless nature here in verses 5-7. Despite the departure of this stanza from the former, its course—namely that of the elements and so of all nature—is determined by the predicament of man. This connection or binding reveals a number of contrasts that create a tension between man and nature in this prologue.

(2) *The Connection Between Man and Nature and Between the Natural Elements*

*Reveals Contrast: Creation is Bound in Tension.* The first thing that strikes us in verse 5 is the subject. By the time we read through the entire verse we have seen the sun run a breathless circle. This movement serves as quite a contrast to the standing earth that precedes it. We may have been tempted to associate the stasis of the earth with a stasis of the sun. The last lines of verses 3 and 4 encourage this temptation; then verse 5 takes us back to the sun and shatters any such illusion. Owing to a semi-parallel syntax and shared lexical stock, we are now forced to look at the first line of verse 5 (5ab) in light of the first line of verse 4 (4ab), thus linking it to the revolving generations of man and not

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," 109.

only to the stable earth.

Our first clue that verse 5 follows from 4 is that verse 5 follows from verse 4. There is tacit continuity in proximity. This obvious point is made more obvious still by the *waw* that starts the sentence: here is a continuation of what has come before.<sup>7</sup> In fact, verse 4 is the first verse to include a *waw*, and verse 5 carries that grammatical phenomenon forward and advances it by adding another. Verse 4 has two *waw* conjunctions, and verse 5 has three. Perhaps Qohelet starts this verse with a *waw* (unique in the prologue) to reassure the reader of its connection to what has come before. In so doing he reinforces the distinction between verses 4 and 5 (and, I think, between verses 3-4 and 5-7) while underlining their connection. This *waw* actually encapsulates the distinction and connection between verses 4 and 5 in that it could be read as either contrastive or conjunctive. The former case would link the sun to the generations in 4ab (the earth remains, but the sun [like the generations] comes and goes), while the latter case would link the sun to the earth in 4c (the earth remains, and [unlike the generations] the sun does too). We have

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<sup>7</sup>The *waw* that begins verse 5 seems to carry forward the durative aspect of הַאֲרֶץ at the end of verse 4: 'The *waw*-perfectum . . . is a sequential tempus . . .' (Jenni as quoted by Waltke, and O'Connor, IBHS, 524.). Futato writes, '[The] *vav* "relates" the verb to which it is attached to a previous verb' (Mark D. Futato. *Beginning Biblical Hebrew*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 162.). *BHQ* proposes וֹזֶרֶח here as participle by simply repointing it (*BHQ*, 65\*). This would not change the *waw*'s conjunctive effect. *BHS* also suggests reading the first word as a participle but by switching the first two consonants: זֹרֶחַ. This would eliminate the *waw*-conjunction. I think the MT reading (וֹזֶרֶח, not זֹרֶחַ) likely the original since וֹזֶרֶח near the end of this strophe (5d) would have discouraged the recording of a different form (in זֹרֶחַ). The writing of וֹזֶרֶח was thus likely intentional because not just like זֹרֶחַ at verse-end. For this reason and since the *waw* reads a bit awkwardly, וֹזֶרֶח is the *lectio difficilior* on two counts at least and thus more likely original.

canvassed and will canvass more evidence supporting both readings. The fact is, the *waw* here is ambiguous. This is probably just what Qohelet wants, because it creates cohesion and tension at the same time and in the same place (in the text), between **הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, הָאֶרֶץ**, and **דָּוָר**—between nature and nature and between nature and man.<sup>8</sup>

The continuity and contrast conveyed by the *waw* that starts the sun's motions is furthered with a syntax that is antithetically parallel to the first line of the preceding verse. Verse 4 has subject/verb, subject/verb where the subject is repeated; verse 5 has verb/subject, verb/subject where the subject is repeated.

Furthermore, each line (4ab, 5ab) has four words and as many beats, and each set of words conveys a similar, circular sort of motion. In each, too, there is going and coming involved. However, through this similarity Qohelet forges another contrast between the generations and the sun. It is through his apparently opposite use of **בָּא** in both half-lines (4b, 5b).

Verse 4 tells us that generations go and generations come (**בָּא**), while verse 5 begins, 'And the sun rises and the sun sets (**בָּא**)'. Using this word (**בָּא**) in opposite ways in the space of a single verse ties the movements of man and nature together while at the same time serving to highlight their distinction. It also adds to a sense of ambiguity, irony, and discombobulation. As Good notes,<sup>9</sup> the use of **בָּא** here urges a reconsideration

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<sup>8</sup>'The antonyms create a dynamic link' (Daniel Grossberg, "Form and Content and Their Correspondence," HS 41 (2000), 51.). Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 64.

<sup>9</sup>'It did not occur to us in vs. 4 that the remark about the generations meant anything but "A generation goes (out of life) and a generations comes (into life)." In the light of vs. 5, however, it now seems possible to read vs. 4 as "A generation walks (its way of life) and

of its use in verse 4. Antithetical to וְדוֹר הַלֵּךְ as it (4b) seems to be, we thought it meant something like ‘a generation comes (בא)’. The use of בא to mean ‘set’ here (5b) in another antithetical line, a line that is in many ways parallel to the first line in verse 4, makes us wonder if our reading of verse 4 was correct. If we apply the meaning of בא in verse 5 to its use in verse 4 and thus reread verse 4, the supposed meaning of 4b is reversed: it meant ‘a generation is born (comes)’; now it means ‘a generation dies (sets)’.

This has at least three effects. Firstly, it changes the meaning of 4b and indeed of the whole line (4ab), making it more morbid. Even if the clearly antithetical structure of the first line in verse 4 secures the meaning we thought we understood (‘a generation goes and a generation comes’), the insinuation of verse 5 has done its damage by urging reconsideration. Secondly, we become less sure about what we will read from this point forward, about our understanding of what Qohelet is saying about how this creation works. This confuses us, hazing the sharp edges of our analysis, and this confusion draws us into the creation Qohelet is picturing. It toils to no apparent effect; so do we. It seems to emit tension and a sense of frustration and disorientation; so do we.<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, this feeling readies us for what immediately follows, for the sun’s exhaustion and the wind’s disorientation. Thirdly, bleeding of שמש and דור through the use of בא connects the human and natural elements even further in our minds and in this creation. The two inform one another and seem to relate antithetically, though at this point we are not sure. In short,

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a generations enters (like the sun into death)” (Good, “Unfilled,” 65.).

<sup>10</sup>Alonso-Schökel, *A Manual*, 198.; Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 262-70.

the relationship between human generations and the sun here seems to be characterised by connection and contrast. This of course recalls הכל הבל and suggests that the relationship between humanity and the elements is rooted in this phrase. More to the point, the relationship between humanity and the elements, between human generations and the sun, shows us what הכל הבל means. And if the parallel between these first lines in verses 4 and 5 tells us anything, it tells us that man and nature are bound in tension. Their coexistence is characterised by it. This must be a fundamental expression of what הכל הבל means.

But the use of בא in the first lines of verses 4 and 5 suggests a fourth thing, a thing which also exegetes הכל הבל. Commonly, בא can mean 'go' or 'come'. We read it as 'come' in 1.4b because of הלך before it (in 1.4a). After הלך, we expect antithesis, maybe because of the line's parallel syntax. So reading of a generation 'going', we read ודור again, followed by a verb again, a verb that can mean 'come', and we fill in the blank almost unthinkingly: ודור בא: 'a generation comes'. But why could it not read 'a generation goes'? The meaning is also common to בא.<sup>11</sup> The possibility of this meaning applied here, if it does not occur to us as we read this verse, may occur to us one verse later, as we read the first line of verse 5. Maybe Qohelet does this here in verse 5 to suggest that we should have considered this meaning in 4b too: maybe he is reprimanding us for being so hasty. Maybe he is toying with us. What if we accept that the word may mean both things here, both 'comes' and 'goes'? What is the result? Firstly, it makes 4ab more morbid, as I

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<sup>11</sup>“בוא”, *DCH* 2:102.

asserted above. But secondly, it is both an instance of one word being forced into two opposite moulds—made to (possibly) mean two opposite things at once—and an instance of a word that ostensibly means something opposite the word with which it is antithetically paired (הלך) which, owing to context, is made to mean essentially the same thing as that word. This last phenomenon is of most interest for our purposes because it recalls הכל הבל in verse 2, specifically *hakkol*, where הכל (everything) is made to mean הבל (nothing). The echo of that two-word collocation here in the interaction between בא and בא in verses 4 and 5 means something: it means that the birth and death and life of men (its ‘generation’, the passing of a generation, and the span between generations) is an expression of that phrase, of הכל הבל. Again, Qohelet is exegeting הכל הבל for us here within the context of creation.

Moving on, in 5ab, two verbs apply to one subject—one sun. In 4ab they apply to two subjects—two generations. This similarity thus highlights the discontinuity and transience of man in verse 4, especially since in both verses there seems to be only one subject (since one word is used as subject in each: דור and שמש, respectively). Of course, the syntactical, metrical, verbal parallels between the beginnings of verses 4 and 5 point out the parallel courses of their subjects: as generations go and come, so does the sun.<sup>12</sup> Still, these similar courses make opposite points: generations do not last; the sun does. As ever in this creation matrix, the connection makes the contrast. It also points out the rub, the very thing that seem to frustrate each entity. As the transience of the generations illus-

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<sup>12</sup>Good, “Unfilled,” 65.

trates their pain, so the endurance of the sun seems to illustrate its pain. My reading of 5c below elaborates this point.

With its first four words then, verse 5 makes its readers aware of at least four truths: something new has started; what has begun (the cycle of the sun and through it the other elements) is connected to what comes before (the cycle of the generations and by connection to the labour and life of man); the cycle of the sun informs the cycle of generations and threatens to make it more painful than it already is; and the connection between both spotlights the contrast. The sun is like the earth and generations in some aspects but unlike them in its combination of aspects. Like the earth, the sun endures. But like the generations, it runs a course; it moves. Unlike either, it is both enduring and moving. The question becomes, is this constant movement, this unending course, run with exuberance or exhaustion? This is the central question of the verse and one whose answer will affect an overall understanding of this prologue. It will shape our understanding of the state of creation as here presented. And, in large part, it reduces to one word, to *שואף*.

(3) *השמש is Exhausted, Toiling Like Man (v. 3), Weary Like All Things (v. 8)*

Although this verse about the sun's journey through the sky (presumably) and back again possesses a metrical symmetry by way of beats, the breakdown of its stressed and unstressed syllables uncovers some intricate differences between its two lines, differences that mirror the apparent meaning of the lines, agree with what the plain meaning of the

key-word **שואף** seems to be, and argue for an exhausted sun at the end of its daily (and nightly) course.

The *waw* that opens the sentence aside, 5ab has a regular, repeated rhythm that carries the reader along the path of the sun from rising to setting by punctuating the verbs. In this first line containing four words, each word receives a second syllable stress (where underlined syllables are stressed):

זֹרַחַּ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּבֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ<sup>13</sup>

The second and fourth stresses are soft since they help begin their respective words (**הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ** in each case)—bleeding into the breathy *he* in so doing—and are somewhat overshadowed by the hard, verbal stress which precedes in each case. These hard stresses end both verbs and thus punctuate them, emphasising the regular motion of the sun in this section of loping, easy cadence. The phonetic transition from verb to noun in each hemistich (*chet* to *he*, then *alef* to *he*) is aurally un-forced, breathy, and open and adds to the sense of the sun's regularity and ease.

The second line (5cd), however, is laboured in its rhythm, and its meaning coincides.<sup>14</sup> There is less regularity here than in the first line, and this produces a laboured ef-

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<sup>13</sup>The opening *waw* conjunction does provide an extra unstressed syllable, but it is slight since running into the second unstressed syllable, 'za' of 'za-rach' (זֹרַחַּ). If זֹרַחַּ is repointed as a participle (זֹרֵחַ; *BHQ* suggestion [BHQ, 65\*], on which see my comments above) the rhythm changes but remains fairly regular, serving more to couple the first two words (זֹרַחַּ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ) to each other and the last two (וּבֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ) to each other as well (The *waw* of זֹרַחַּ aside, זֹרַחַּ [as ptc] and שֶׁמֶשׁ both scan unstress/stress/unstress, while בֹּא and שֶׁמֶשׁ both scan unstress/stress, שֶׁמֶשׁ having a final unstress as well). Whether as the MT presents it (זֹרַחַּ) or as *BHQ* suggests it (זֹרֵחַ), the punctuation and focus is on rising and setting (and rising again at verse end).

fect, especially following the first, easy line as it does. The four beats of 5cd break down accordingly:

הוא שם	זורח	שואף	ואל־מקומו
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The rhythm of this line stretches out at both ends and is staccato, stabbing in the middle. It is a rhythmic chiasm. This convey's the sun's celerity at beginning and end, and the slow-down in verse-middle places the focus on these two, central words (שואף and זורח). Kamano notes the anadiplosis through the same vowel-sounds in שואף and זורח.<sup>15</sup> This produces cohesion and tension within the line;<sup>16</sup> as the line is stretched, helping create the sense of the sun's speed, the cohesion helps hold the line together. The tension created by this device complements what the words say: 'panting, (it) rises' or 'panting, rising (again)'. We read of the sun racing to complete its course. Will it? There is a sense of tension, not ease, in this syntax, and certainly in these semantics, especially once שואף is rightly read. The stretch of ואל־מקומו is accomplished through its four unaccented syllables that precede its final, and the line's first, stressed syllable. To put it pictorially, which Qohelet does, the *maqef* in the first beat (ואל־מקומו) stretches it (and thus the sun) out,

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<sup>14</sup>Whitley calls the phrase 'cumbersome, while the application of שואף to the sun is unusual and forced' (since the word elsewhere refers to a woman in the pains of childbirth and to a slave longing for shadow)(Whitley, Koheleth, 8.). See my comments below on שואף.

<sup>15</sup>Kamano, *Cosmology*, 49.

<sup>16</sup>Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 209.

like a runner stretching for the tape, and this reach readies the reader for the second beat, which is **שוא**.

Reading this line's rhythm slightly differently, with a soft-stress<sup>17</sup> on the line's second syllable (on **א** of **ואל־מקומו**), renders a parallel rhythm on either side of **שוא**: unstress/stress, unstress/unstress/stress, **שוא**, unstress/stress, unstress/unstress/stress. This both spotlights **שוא** and underscores the way in which it interrupts the otherwise-easy rhythm of the line, making it laboured. In short, the word 'panting' makes the line splutter rather than read smoothly. It does what it says. And what it says is that the sun is out of breath.<sup>18</sup> After reading, we are too (if slightly). Thus does Qohelet connect his audience to this element. He is telling us we are all tired.<sup>19</sup>

The second beat, comprising one word, **שוא**, consists of a simple unstress/stress. Following the quadruple unstress-then-stress syllabic formation (**ואל־מקומו**) as it does, this unstress/stress beat receives focus for its comparative brevity. The attenuated first beat (**ואל־מקומו**) makes us rush to, and rest in, the second (**שוא**). The word as placed here requires a deliberate and sustained pause. The fact that it is followed by another unstress/stress (then unstress) may compound this halting sensation in the line's rhythm. These two, middle words must almost be over-pronounced. The deceleration has some-

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<sup>17</sup>Or silent stress: see Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 99-100.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 72.; Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 58-9, quoting N. H. Snaith.; Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 24.

<sup>19</sup>Contrary to the opinion of some (e.g. Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.5-7."; Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, 40.), this verse is hardly evocative of praise. Cf. Ps 113.3. Could this verse (Eccl 1.5) be a parody of that (Ps 113.3)?

thing to do with it. Reading, we feel as if we have slid down into a trough. זורח begins the climb out, which is apt, and by הוא שמ we are speeding again.

What is also apt is the pronounced pause that falls on שואף. The *zaqep qaton* above מקומו (so מְקוֹמוֹ) presents something of a small problem. It kills the sun's 'momentum' (by killing the flow of rhythm) in the verse and so argues against any word suggesting unabated speed as a translation of שואף.<sup>20</sup> However, Gordis writes that the verse must be read against this marking, and Goldman states that it (the *zaqep qaton*) should be placed over שואף, not מקומו, assuring his readers that his recommendation is 'supported by all the versions . . .'.<sup>21</sup> This shift of the *zaqep qaton* facilitates the sense of the rush of the sun in its returning. In this case, the reader pulls up for a pause after pronouncing שואף. In taking a breath, he 'pants' as the sun does.

However, in another way, the Masoretic marking seems to show what I have been asserting. שואף interrupts the rhythmic flow of the verse. It does read awkwardly. And that is the point. The sun sputters. It stutters. This is what שואף means. Here it pants, or gasps, for breath, before rising, and while rising, as we have seen. This marking conveys the rhythm which, together with the semantic meaning of שואף, combines to picture a sun both speeding and sputtering, and sputtering because speeding.

The different recordings as to the placement of the *zaqep qaton* among the various manuscripts (again, as reported by Goldman in *BHQ*) appears to argue just how diffi-

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<sup>20</sup>ESV/RSV: hastens, NAS: hastening, KJV: hasteth, NET/NIV: hurries, NJB: speeds.

<sup>21</sup>Gordis, *Koheleth*, 206.; *BHQ*, 66\*.

cult and awkward this word (שואש) makes the rhythm of this last line. It disrupts. In both readings, שואש receives the focus. With the *zaqep qaton* over it, it is lingered over (because the last word before the pause). With the *zaqep qaton* before it (over מקומו), it is the first word after the pause and therefore in a kind of rhythmic no-man's land, which forms a stutter in the line. In the first case, שואש gasps; in the second, it sputters.<sup>22</sup>

Some have argued that the word means 'glides' here.<sup>23</sup> But the rhythm does not glide here; it stops, stutters, spurts. The sun seems out of breath. And this is exactly what the normal meaning of the word conveys. Its two lexica mean 'pant' and 'trample', respectively.<sup>24</sup> The former meaning applies here in verse 5.<sup>25</sup> As such, it can mean to pant with desire or exhaustion. Sometimes, it can mean both, as in the case of a woman in labour.<sup>26</sup> In both cases (whether involving exhaustion or desire), with only one Hebrew Bible exception,<sup>27</sup> the panting is always at least tinged with pain. So here, שואש almost certainly means to pant, or gasp, with pain. The central question of this verse converges here: is

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<sup>22</sup>Whitley points out that the LXX translates ἔλαλει (gasps), the Targum שיתש (crawls)(Whitley, Koheleth, 9.).

<sup>23</sup>'glides back': JPS Hebrew-English TANAKH: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation. (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999), citing the Targum; but see Fox's correction of this translation to 'pants' in Fox, Ecclesiastes, 5.

<sup>24</sup>Listed thusly in 'שואש', *DCH* 8:217 and Even-Shoshan, *New Concordance [in Hebrew]*, 1101.).

<sup>25</sup>Both meanings involve pain, which recalls עמל in verse 3, a verse to which this verse is not a little connected in other ways as well.

<sup>26</sup>As, perhaps, in Isa 42.14, where the word is paired (synonymously) with נשם, which means the same thing (gasp, pant).

<sup>27</sup>Ps 119.131.

this panting one of an eager sun hungry to run her course or of an exhausted element?<sup>28</sup>

Verse rhythm, sound, syntax, and connections within the prologue argue for the latter.<sup>29</sup>

First for rhythm. As we pointed out above, the reading surges with אֶל-מִקוֹמוֹ and then almost stops on שׁוֹאֵף. By this point in our analysis of the prologue, we have every reason to expect consonance (or irony, or both) between what the word is saying and doing, especially since we get it in the next word, זֹרַח (where the rhythm ‘rises’ from this rhythmic nadir into a regathered haste). The sun is panting here. Is it panting with eager desire or exhaustion? The rhythm argues the latter. It pauses here in its pant, stopping to draw breath. The sun’s head is down, its hands on its knees. It is collecting spirit for another sprint (to begin in the next beat).

The last three words in verse 5 (זֹרַח הוּא שֶׁם) seem to argue ‘exhaustion’ in another way.<sup>30</sup> This slight pause is all the rest the sun gets. The very next word it is rising again.<sup>31</sup> Here, before verse end it is rising, only to loop back (to verse beginning, conceptually at least) to rise again (in 5a). Rising, rising; setting, setting; ever-running. This is the sense this verse gives off. The back-to-back participles in this second line—panting (שׁוֹאֵף), rising (זֹרַח)—both receive a single beat. They are thus rhythmically central, and

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<sup>28</sup>Cf. Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 70.

<sup>29</sup>So Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 70.

<sup>30</sup>Some think this clause a gloss (e.g. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 62, citing Loretz and Jastrow.). *BHS* (but not *BHQ*) wonders.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 64.

they slow the reading down, as we have seen. They thus receive grammatical (double participle), rhythmic (slowed), and syntactic (central) focus.

Because both verbs in this last line are back-to-back and both participial, the panting runs into the rising despite the pause. The pause accentuates **שואף**-as-exhaustion but suggests it cannot catch its breath because the line reads like this: ‘. . . panting, it is rising . . .’ The two verbs overlap, the former overtaking the latter: the sun is panting as it rises. And this last hemistich (5d) shows it does not stop. The inference is that it will never stop panting. As it is ever-rising and running, it is ever panting, ever in pain.

In the fourth and final beat (**הוא שם**) of this fourth and final hemistich (**זורח הוא שם**), the reader is left breathless, along with the sun. Whether as a single-stress, double-stress, or no-stress (double unstress),<sup>32</sup> these last two words finish with a puff and a fizzle. The back-to-back *chet* and *he* in **זורח הוא** combine to squeeze the breath out of the reader, and the **שם**, whether soft (unaccented or soft-accented) or stressed, concludes the verse with a fizzling sound, but one that resonates with the seven *shins* (**ש**) that precede it (and if accented, with the three, accented *shins* preceding, making for four, stressed *shins* occurring on every even beat in this verse). The aural coordination reminds us that we are at the end of a journey, but that, even here at the end, the sun has already begun to run it (to rise) all over again.

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<sup>32</sup>The MT notes a double-stress, but these last two words can easily read in all three ways.

The sound of this verse's last word is not its only feature to give off a sense of fatigue. So does its shape. In 5ab שמש gives an initial sense of completion and fullness: its circuit seems roundly run. At the tail end of 5d, however, we find שם. The word gets us 'there'—gets the sun there (literally, as שם means 'there')—but just barely, because it is a severing of שמש, the object which begins the verse and seemed to start it—and the race to be run—with seemingly easy regularity, even verve. Thus does שמש end its course with שם and in so doing leave the reader with a verse unable, or perhaps better unwilling, to return us full circle to שמש and to where we began. In this verse, then, although the sun runs its course with haste and energy, it finishes with fizzle rather than force and in so doing appears to reveal its fatigue.

Perhaps, however, this is just an instance of paranomasia<sup>33</sup> that cleverly emphasizes the full cycle of the sun at verse-end by reminding us of verse-beginning: morpho-syntactics mirroring semantics. Perhaps. We almost certainly have word-play here, in all of 5d in fact (הוא שם sounds like השמש [in 5ab], and זורח הוא שם like זורח השמש [in 5a]), but word-play (paranomasia) which illustrates an abbreviated finish. The sun gets there, but it is not quite enough. The subtle message is that eventually, the sun will run out of steam or that it, like man (v. 3), is a slave to its course.<sup>34</sup>

The consonance in this verse helps convey the sun's fatigue as well. In the first line (5ab) we find the sun mentioned twice, at the second and fourth beats. The four

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<sup>33</sup>A word sounding like another word. See Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 242-43.

<sup>34</sup>Or, that it is a slave to its course as man is to his lot (עמל).

*shins* in measured cadence produce a sound strangely similar to that of a long distance runner, especially when combined with the *shins* in line two, both of which also fall on the second (שׁוֹאֵף)<sup>35</sup> and fourth (הוּא שֵׁם) beats of this line. Sprinters do not focus on the sound or cadence of their breathing to the extent long distance runners do, because a sprint is so short and explosive: breathing is not something the sprinter thinks about as much as something she simply does. By contrast, any long-distance runner can testify not only to the importance of regular breathing but also to the way the sound of one's own pattern of breathing becomes pronounced and at times pervasive: sometimes it is all a runner can hear, and the more tired a runner is, usually the more dominant the sound of one's own pattern of breathing becomes. The sounds suggest that here we have sun-as-exhausted long-distance runner. On the other hand, this could simply suggest the sun's regularity, in a positive sense, compared to the regularity of the rolling generations of

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<sup>35</sup>The *BHS* apparatus proposes שׁוֹאֵף as an alternative, which would render something like 'and to its place it returns until it rises there'. This alternative reading is to be rejected for the following reasons at least: (1) This is an editorial proposition and not a preference because there is no cited evidence suggesting textual corruption, as Gordis notes (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 205.); (2) perhaps for the reason just stated, *BHQ* does not propose an alternative reading ('All witnesses support [the MT]'; *BHQ*, 65\*.); (3) every other element in the prologue (earth, wind, streams, sea) is personified in some way. Accepting this proposed change would greatly lessen the sun's personification and thereby fight against a trend the context of the wider prologue encourages; (4) the strain שׁוֹאֵף conveys matches the strained rhythm of the line in which it is set; (5) שׁוֹאֵף reads a word from verse 6 (שׁוֹאֵף) into verse 5; owing to Qoh's penchant for recycling words, this temptation is easily understood but by the same token ought to be dismissed. שׁוֹאֵף being a much easier reading than שׁוֹאֵף, it stands as a textbook example of probable eisegesis and, perhaps, (6) as a proposal based on Symmachus' and Theodotion's 'to return', an interpretation Jerome records in his commentary as *recurrat* (*BHQ*, 65\*.); (7) finally, it can be seen how scribes in their piety would wish to 'avoid the common ancient Near Eastern personification of the sun in its journey' (*BHQ*, 66\*.).

man. But the normal meaning of שואַ<sup>36</sup> (pant, gasp) combines with its interruption in rhythm to convey fatigue. Either way, the sounds combine with the plain meaning of the verse to convey endurance. Like the earth and unlike the generations, the sun endures. But unlike the earth and like the generations, the sun comes and goes. It thus contrasts and connects with both elements in verse 4 and recalls the fact that in this creation, not only do man and nature connect and contrast; nature connects and contrasts within herself as well. Everywhere there is connection; everywhere there is tension<sup>37</sup>.

Here is a verse whose dominant consonantal sound occurs every other beat (2nd, 4th, 6th, 8th). Thus we find in verse 5 a measured cadence produced by the sound of six *shins* (each שׁ providing two) falling at regular intervals. The sound, something of a susurrus, is produced by the sun itself (beats two and four), next by שואַ (beat six), and

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<sup>36</sup>Or שאַ.

<sup>37</sup> שואַ serves another, more obvious purpose. It personifies the sun. שאַ appears fourteen times in the Hebrew Bible in various forms and only seven times in this particular lexeme (Meaning ‘pant’ [Jer 2.24, 14.6; Eccl 1.5; Isa 42.14; Ps 119.131; Job 7.2, 36.20], the other lexeme meaning ‘trample’ [Eze 36.3; Job 5.5; Pss 56.2, 3, 57.4; Amos 2.7, 8.4]). Only twice does it describe something non-human, both times in Jeremiah. In neither case is the object inanimate (Jer 2.24: donkey; Jer 14.6: jackals). So שאַ never modifies an inanimate object in the Hebrew Bible. Ecclesiastes 1.5 may be the exception, but it would speak against total usage elsewhere and against context in this verse and in surrounding verses. Very well; it is little if ever denied: the sun is here personified. This links it in one more way to persons, furthering the argument that its pain is derivative, a consequence of man’s. More fundamentally, the process whereby all things (viz. man and nature) become one thing is expressed in the short sentence, הכל הכל, as we have seen. Accordingly, that one thing that all things become is *hevel*. Thus does the personification of the elements bind them to man. This binding, and the tension it produces, seems to be an expression of *hevel*. But the binding between man and nature is not the only tie to express *hevel*. So does the binding between elements within nature.

finally by םש in beat eight. םש is the last word in the line and acts as a sort of finish-tape that the sun breaks through—only to start the circuit all over again, *ad infinitum*.

But what if the regularity of the *shin* conveys the endurance and not the exhaustion of השמש? The runner might not be weary but steady, determined and set in his course. It is true: there is a regularity in the sounds the sun ‘produces’ in this verse. But as we have seen, coinciding with this regular sound is a somewhat complex rhythm that suggests fatigue. It begins loping and measured (5ab) but moves to a hurried stretch (ואל־מקומו), then to a sputter (שואף), and finishes in 5d with what seems to be something of a taper. Attenuated, having reached the end, there is no rest for the sun but only a rising again here at verse-end which presumably meets up with another rising, back at verse-beginning (in 5a). This by turns easy, then speeding, then halting, then speeding rhythm coincides with the regular, breathy sound produced by the four steady *shins* to layer this verse and thus the sun’s course. There is regularity and seeming ease. But there is a sense of exhaustion, even desperation<sup>38</sup> running alongside. שואף appears to confirm this, in its lexical meaning and in the way sound and stress converge in it to speak to a weary sun.

The larger context of this verse also speaks to שואף as an exhaustion characterised by pain and not ebullience or desire. The various uses of עמל in various contexts

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<sup>38</sup>שואף as ‘pant’ conveys fatigue but also desire. The word is used in both ways in the HB. In this context, this desire seems something unattained and perhaps unattainable, ever out of reach. The negative nature of שואף as ‘desire’ elsewhere in the HB supports this inference (the exception is Ps 119.131). שואף is desire frustrated, not fulfilled. Verse 7 consummates this quality.

throughout the Hebrew Bible gather to express a basic meaning of ‘fatigue’ or ‘become fatigued’.<sup>39</sup> This word, עָמַל, ties verse 3 together, is its center. Verse 3 speaks to the whole prologue. Verse 5 reflects this exhaustion (שׂוֹאֵף) and is the beginning of the next section. Verse 8 also reflects this exhaustion (עָגַע). It is the beginning of the final section and the centerpoint of the whole creation matrix. Everything converges here.<sup>40</sup> Thus, עָמַל works its way through the prologue, and thus through creation, and thus through the book (so much so that by chapter 12 it becomes the controlling metaphor: man and nature are tired or ‘fatigued’ to death, compressed into one, monolithic, indivisible thing).<sup>41</sup> עָמַל thus characterises שָׂמַח and its movements in verse 5 and not just אָדָם in verse 3.

The fact is, though, every aspect of this verse could be, and has been, read two ways. The rhythm is ambiguous (is it speedy or sputtering?); the sounds are ambiguous (do they exhaust or keep a regular, runner’s pace?); even the key-word is ambiguous (שׂוֹאֵף means ‘pant’, but what does that mean? Does the sun pant with eager desire or fatigue?).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>עָמַל, *TDOT* 11:196; Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 139.

<sup>40</sup>As I attempt to demonstrate in my reading of v. 8 in ch. 6.

<sup>41</sup>So Carolyn J. Sharp, “Ironic Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet,” *BibInt* 12 (2004), 55.

<sup>42</sup>Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 56-64, also 70-74. Ibn Ezra and Rashi think the former (Koheles, 55.).

That said, the sun does seem tired.<sup>43</sup> The verse's syntax seems to join with its metre, stress pattern, and use of participles to suggest a laboured course for *שֶׁמֶשׁ*. And all of these dynamics aggregate to argue for a meaning of *שָׂאָה* that conveys fatigue or desire or both.<sup>44</sup> Here we see a sun characterised by her regular courses yet seeming to run them with something of a stitch in her side. And her course is never-ending and ever the same, a picture of profitlessness and monotony if ever there was one, and a far cry from other, more pleasant illustrations of the same sun running the same circuit.<sup>45</sup> Her endless cycle exhausts. It is as if she is being stretched thin in her course, like a piece of pulled cotton, hanging together but with holes through the threads. Verse 5 shows the sun starting its course and running a full circuit, ending where it began: it is the same entity making the same circle, presumably over and over again. Is this an exertion of exuberance or exhaustion? Likely the latter.

Reaching the end of the verse, we find the sun having flown full circle, arriving where it began at verse-beginning, taking the reader back to the start of 5a with a repeat

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<sup>43</sup>So Schoors, quoting Trapp, 1660, who wrote of the sun that she 'panteth, as if tired, and even breathless' in Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 64.; also Gordis, *Koheleth*, 205-06; Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 33; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 107; Fox, *Ecclesiastes*; Leo G. Perdue, *Ecclesiastes. OTL*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 63; Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 23-24; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 205-06; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 63.).

<sup>44</sup>Of the few instances of *שָׂאָה* where the context does suggest desire, the desire is never wholly positive, tinged as it is either with a lustful craving (Jer 2.24, [14.6]; Job 5.5) or a desire to escape pain (Job 7.2). Ps 119.131 is the one exception (and Job 36.20 is difficult to discern, though certainly not positive). If desire is involved, the word's HB usage suggests it is a painful one, that is, unfulfilled. Verse mechanics, and context with this stanza (v. 7) and in the wider prologue (v. 3, et al.) argue the same.

<sup>45</sup>Ps 19.5-7.

of the word 'rise' (זרח). In this sense we have come full circle, not just back to the beginning of verse 5, but back to the beginning of verse 4. Like those generations (דור), the sun ends up where it began, only to start the whole cycle over again.<sup>46</sup> In this way all of verse 5 mirrors 4ab in meaning, while 5ab mimics 4ab syntactically, verbally, and semantically but in so doing conveys an endurance which the (combined) generations picture but which each generation fails to display.<sup>47</sup> The sun's motion seems to take its cue from the human generations in verse 4 but conveys the opposite point: its motion is evidence of its endurance; the similar motion of the generations is evidence of their transience.

Yet, our analysis seems to have revealed a deeper resonance. The sun has taken its motion from the generations, but it has taken something else too. As the generations express their pain in transience, the sun seems to express its pain in endurance. This helps explain why Qohelet may have chosen to connect the circling generations and the circling sun through contrast. They share something that pains them but which evinces itself in opposite ways.

*(4) Transition: The Strong Connection Between השמש and הרוח Reveals Further*

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<sup>46</sup>Admittedly, the cycle is less completely described in 4ab, and one must but use imagination and intelligence to see the generation coming (בא) in 4b as soon becoming another generation going (הלך)—just like the one that starts the verse.

<sup>47</sup>Again, 4ab and 5ab each consist of 4 words and 4 beats, one repeated subject (דור and שמש respectively), and two verbs—one of which (בא) is used in both verses. While it is true that the syntax is not the same (the order of the subject and verb is reversed), this only reminds us of what we already know: while in some way integrally tied to the movement of man, the sun is running its course and thus experiencing הבל in its own way, even inversely to man.

*Tension Between the Natural Elements.* Verse 5 ends in enjambment. We continue reading and find what we think is the sun ‘going to the south’. Only one line later do we discover it was the wind that was being described.<sup>48</sup> The two lines bleed together with perfect effect: the sun seems to ‘break free’ from the same, never-ending cycle of which it is weary—but only seems to; the wind’s apparent disorientation is added to, as is ours as readers; and this has the effect of reminding us that in this unit where nature seems so self-contained, man (as reader) and nature alike are disoriented and weary. This thought takes us back to verses 3-4, reminding us that man and nature together form this creation-matrix and are together affected by *hevel*. No thing is exempt. All ail. All are weary. Verse 8a assures us of this. The enjambment here leading to disorientation and greater ambiguity helps drive these points home. This enjambment has at least one more effect.

As the first verb in verse 6, הלך joins with the second verb in verse 5 (בא) to match both verbs describing דור in verse 4. His first time through, the reader is made to think הלך in 6a applies to the sun. He would thus be justified in combining this verb of motion (in his mind) to one that helps start the sun’s journey (בא) in the first line of verse 5. Put another way, 5d—combined with the first word of verse 6, which is meant to seem a natural continuation, a run-on, of verse 5—reads ‘rising, the sun goes (הלך) to the south’. This would join with 5b (ובא השמש) to fully recycle the generational verbs of 4ab (הלך then בא). It would reverse the order in which 4ab presents them, which is typical. Again,

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<sup>48</sup>Even after reading through verse 6, some remain convinced the sun is still being described. The LXX translator did, as he assigns 5d to verse 6. V and T also understand 6a as speaking of the sun (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 206.).

this conveys contrast through connection: the sun is like the generations in 4ab, but their opposite. She is trapped in a cycle just like the generations are, and perhaps because the generations are; only, her pain is for opposite reasons. They cannot endure. She must. This further emphasises the link between the sun and man forged by the first lines of verses 4 and 5 and extends it to the wind in verse 6.<sup>49</sup>

This textual fact has multiple effects: as mentioned, it further ties the sun to generations in verse 4; it connects the elements by bleeding one (השמש) into the other (הרוח); it disorients us as readers; it underscores the disorientation of the wind; and ironically, it emphasises the incarceration of the sun. Though the sun may wish freedom from its fated track, and a breaking out of this strophe by way of illustration, it is frustrated in its desire: rather than ranging south and north it must (presumably) start where it began and end and begin again, running full circle, forever.

Ironically, this connection created by enjambment underscores the isolation, and subtly expressed desperation, of each element. Again, through connection, Qohelet masterfully achieves further separation, and frustration, in his creation. In some ways, the howling wind seems most frustrated of all.

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<sup>49</sup>See Pierre Auffret, "Rien du Tout de Nouveau sous le Soleil: Étude Structurale de Qo 1,4-11," FO 26 (1989), 150. It also recalls the source of all this pain by joining unlike entities (generations and the sun) through opposition. הכל הבל.

## Ecclesiastes 1.6: A Disoriented Wind

*We found fault with the unliterary for reading with insufficient attention to the actual words. This fault, as a whole, never occurs when the literary are reading poetry. They attend very fully to the words in various ways. But I have sometimes, found that their aural character is not fully received<sup>50</sup>*

*where written texts are intensely oral<sup>51</sup>*

6a Going to the south, b and turning around to the north, c turning, turning, d goes the wind. e And upon its turning f returns the wind.	6a הוֹלֵךְ אֶל-דָּרוֹם b וְסוּבֵב אֶל-צָפוֹן c סוּבֵב   סוּבֵב d הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ e וְעַל-סִבִּיבֹתָיו f שׁוֹב הָרוּחַ:
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(1) *The Wind is Lost and Lonely.* If verse 5 evokes the exhaustion of the sun, verse 6 seems at first to also describe its disorientation. It is not until halfway through the verse that we as readers understand that Qohelet is not characterising the sun at all. Yet again, he has masterfully made the medium the message, as the words not only describe an element that is here then there, turning around in never-ending circles; they do so in part by turning around themselves through word repetition<sup>52</sup> and iteration<sup>53</sup> and by being themselves disoriented, in search of their subject until the end of the second line (הלך

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<sup>50</sup>C. S. Lewis. *An Experiment in Criticism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 102.

<sup>51</sup>Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 7.

<sup>52</sup>הלך appears twice, הרוח twice, and סבב four times.

<sup>53</sup>e.g. סוּבֵב סוּבֵב

הרוח). Managing a sort of syntactical onomatopoeia, Qohelet keeps invisible from his reader the one of these elements that is invisible in the natural world—the wind. In both cases, we see its effects but fail to see it. Again, the medium is the message, and the message is repeated over and over until, as Alonso-Schökel notes,<sup>54</sup> the reader is dizzy, numbed and depressed by the monotony of this element that is ever-moving<sup>55</sup> but going nowhere. The disorientation and ennui of the reader is matched and, more, produced by what seem to be the disorientation and ennui of the wind. Thus does Qohelet further fuse the movements of man and nature<sup>56</sup> (and nature and nature)<sup>57</sup> while, for the time being,<sup>58</sup> keeping the distinction between them clear.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Alonso-Schökel, *A Manual*, 198.

<sup>55</sup> Participles abound in the prologue, particularly here, where five participles inform the wind's unending movement. On the grammatical function of participles in this prologue, see Verheij, "Words," 186.n.12. In short, and chiefly, they cause cohesion among the elements (and man: they begin in v. 4ab) and stir up a sense of haste which ends in exhaustion (v. 8a).

<sup>56</sup>The sun did too: exhausted, it recalled toiling man in v. 3. The streams in v. 7 work similarly and recall man similarly, while the sea in its un-fullness looks ahead to man in v. 8.

<sup>57</sup>Via elision of sun (v. 5) and wind (v. 6).

<sup>58</sup>Until v. 8a.

<sup>59</sup>Again, until v. 8, where the ambiguity and fusion of the prologue peak, and differentiation (between man and nature) becomes essentially incomprehensible. This dynamic characterises the prologue's final stanza (vv. 9-11), runs through the book, and finds consummation in the creation episode that ends it (12.1-8), where fusion between nature and man is made complete in one morbid metaphor, ending, picturesquely, with the earth eating man (12.7). **הכל הכל**.

The wind disorients because the wind is disoriented. Not only does a lack of subject until the tenth word (of fourteen) in the verse convince us that we are reading about the movements of **השמש** from verse 5, but as Good points out, the fact that at the right time of year in Palestine the sun sails through the southern sky makes for an extremely deceptive beginning (**הלך אל דרום**).<sup>60</sup> To any Israelite, this could be the sun walking to the south. Again according to Good, the second part of the line disabuses the reader of any such perception.<sup>61</sup> Even so, this whole second line is something of an apocalypse by stages, gradually revealing to the reader the idea that something other than the sun might be the subject here. The fact is, it is only once **הרוח** is 'revealed' that we are made fully aware that we have been reading of the wind (and, again, some remained convinced that the first line spoke of the sun: LXX, V, T), as **הרוח** is the last word of this second line. **אל-צפון** ends the previous line and might make us question the sun as subject, but as the repeated **סבב** which follows is ambiguous—it can mean turn around, surround, or journey<sup>62</sup>—it could apply to any number of elements, the sun included. Finally, the verb that follows and just precedes **הרוח** is **הולך**; since this is applied to the sun in the previous verse, it could just as easily apply to the sun here. Of course, the next and last word in the

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<sup>60</sup>Good, "Unfilled," 66.

<sup>61</sup>Since, "[i]n the northern hemisphere, one never looks north for the sun, except in Arctic latitudes . . ." (Good, "Unfilled," 66.). For reasons I just laid out, though perceptive in his reading and mainly right, Good may not give due allowance to the degree of ambiguity and elision this second line achieves.

<sup>62</sup>'סבב', *DCH* 6:105-06.

line, הרוח, tells us it does not. This elision conveys a wind that seems disoriented, almost lost or having lost something. But this withholding of the subject has other effects as well.

Other dynamics within this verse underline the wind's disorientation and isolation. סבב and הולך create a chiasm that leaves the wind outside its own compass (*holek/sobeb//sobeb/holek*). The wind is the next word after the final הולך.<sup>63</sup> This has the same effect as the elision: it effectively erases the wind. In both readings, whether looking at the verse through the lens of elision or chiasm here, the wind is largely absent from the strophe in which it features. This may just be a clever construction designed to convey the invisibility of the wind. But other verse details suggest it is something more, suggest that the wind itself is lost, or looking for something, or both.

This chiastic construction features סבב. It holds the chiasm together. Whatever the word means here,<sup>64</sup> the wind is clearly going around and around on a circuit, and it may be turning around and around (on) itself. Like the sun before it and the streams after it (in v. 7), whether through encircling (surrounding) or turning (spinning on itself, as the earth does on its axis) or both, the wind returns (שב in v. 6f) to where it began. It is es-

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<sup>63</sup>הולך אל דרום וסובב אל צפון סובב סבב הולך הרוח ועל סביבתיו שב הרוח. Granted, the chiasm is selective (leaving out the first סבב), and it renders the reading unnaturally (הרוח is not 'outside' הולך but after it); still, the chiasm is there. And it has the same effect a plain reading does—of edging out the wind. It just shows that effect in another way.

<sup>64</sup>See above comments. It can mean 'turn about' (on itself) or 'go around/surround' (something else) (סבב, BDB 685). So DCH (saying that the three instances here in verse 6 could mean 'circumnavigate' [go around] or 'turn', 'turn around' [סבב, DCH 6:105-06]). Qoh's next two uses of the word (2.20, 7.25) mean something like the former ('turn'), the use after that (9.14) something like the latter ('surround'). The final use (12.5) could mean either, or both.

entially moving in circles, whether large or small or both. And circles make no progress. This, then, may speak to the question raised in verse 3 ('Is there any profit?'). If it does, it reveals a connection between man and nature, between the wind's course and man's. It further suggests that all things are connected in a certain unprofitability and lack of progress.

**סבב** seems to provide another of chiasm of its own (*wesobeb/sobeb//sobeb/sebib-otav*).<sup>65</sup> This construction may clarify some characteristics of the wind here. First, it highlights the second line, the verse's median. This is where we find the back-to-back **סבב**, the middle, four-beat line of three that make-up the strophe (4:4:4). It is as if both outside lines collapse into this verse-middle, being characterised and well-expressed by it. It simply shows us a wind that is 'turning, turning', ever-turning. Like a dog chasing its tail, it expends a lot of energy but makes no progress. Again, our minds may return to verse 3, or to the first half of verse 4.

Secondly, this chiasm, this four-fold repetition of the root **סבב**, gives the verse cohesion. This further distinguishes and even isolates this element. Ever-turning, it is turned in on itself, like a circle. The elision gave the appearance of connection, but only the appearance; that appearance underlines the actual isolation. The wind is only

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<sup>65</sup> הוֹלֵךְ אֶל דְּרוֹם וְסוֹבֵב אֶל צָפוֹן סוֹבֵב סַבֵּב הוֹלֵךְ הַרוּחַ וְעַל סַבִּיבְתָיו שֶׁב הַרוּחַ. I say 'seems' since a chiasm normally consists of at least two different roots. But the four instances of **סבב** here (admittedly, the fourth is a different lexeme, **סביב**) inhabit many roles and do more in this strophe than simply repeat. This is just one of many ways of looking at their collocation here. Rousseau, not I, noticed this chiasm (François Rousseau, "Structure de Qohélet I 4-11 et plan du livre," VT 31 (1981), 203.).

connected to the other elements, and to man, in its isolation, in its constant, fruitless movement, and in a sense of desperation that its sounds express (see below) and that it develops from previous verses, especially from verse 5. Whereas the sun seemed desperate to rest and perhaps to break from its course, the wind is even more entrenched.<sup>66</sup> It seems to howl and shriek (again, see below), as if bemoaning its condition.<sup>67</sup> It is a maturation of what was embryonic in the sun in verse 5. This process that was conceived by man in verse 3 grows throughout these elemental courses, reaches consummation in the sea in verse 7, and is given birth in and through man, and through him in all things, in verse 8.

Thirdly, this chiasm divides the double סבב in line two. This is not merely a repeated word, one right after the other. There is a crease between the pair; and even if it is slight, it is there. This crease separates the turning from itself. And what is turning but the wind? In its turning, even in its turning upon itself (see especially line three, 6ef), the wind is divided, schizophrenic and separated from itself. Conceptually, there is a sense in which this is true. A full turning is always, by stages, a turning away and a turning back toward. This divide, if slight, between the two סבבs pressed together, indicates that the wind is isolated—even from itself. This facet recalls the generations, ever passing, ever moving away from one another, ever divided one from another, even when they are

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<sup>66</sup>Crenshaw describes the wind here as ‘being caught in a rut’ (Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 64.).

<sup>67</sup>On the importance of sound in ancient Hebrew poetry see Shimon Bar-Efrat. *Narrative Art in the Bible*. (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 200; Hrushovski, “Prosody, Hebrew,” 1200-02.

pressed together—sharing life and as close one to another as are these two סטבב. In the case of the generations in 4ab, division and constant flux were their only continuity. So it is with the wind here, a fact that the core of this chiasm, and verse, uncovers. The wind is howling here, but its howling read by man conjures up man's own, somehow related angst and almost seems to be an expression of it.<sup>68</sup>

Another, larger-scale chiasm (among the elements) reveals the wind's isolation. The unmoving earth and sea stand outside, flanking the running, seemingly exhausted sun and streams, all of which ring the wind:

A: הארץ (v. 4)

B: השמש (v. 5)

C: הרוח (v. 6)

B': הנחלים (v. 7)

A': הים (v. 7)

Of all the elements, only הרוח has no chiastic counterpart. It is alone. It also seems to want to escape its fate, to break free. The words tell us it cannot: it only ever walks in circles. The chiasm tells us the same thing: the other elements hedge it in and thereby act as

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<sup>68</sup>Crenshaw speaks of the 'feeling of restlessness generated' by the wind in this verse (Crenshaw, "Nothing New," 244.).

a sort of prison. Like slaves, the elements are shackled one to another and not only to man.

The verse's aural aspects also indicate the wind's isolation and disorientation, even grief. The long /o/ of the five participles together with צפון, דרום, and סביבתיו produce a resonant, hollow sound that combines seamlessly with the sharp, sibilant /s/ of the samech (ס, four times)<sup>69</sup> and the tsafon (צ) to mimic the howl and hiss of the wind (not to mention the final stab of שב in 6f).<sup>70</sup> The swirling blow and screech is onomopoeic artistry at its best, and it makes us not only to feel the dizzy turning, turning, and returning of the wind but also to hear its aeolian ache of confusion and despair as it does so. This wind is mourning. This is ululation, not susurration (as with the sun). The sounds in this sentence make us wonder how we ever could have mistaken the wind for anything other than a mourner.<sup>71</sup> The alliteration and assonance here combine with the

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<sup>69</sup>The *BHS* critical apparatus (CA) asks whether the second סבב may be a duplicate. The divider *paseq* (|) between the סבבs suggests that it is not (according to the Masoretes), as does the conjunctive *maphak* (<) under the first (סוּבַב). These Masoretic markings agree with the context against the CA suggestion, as repetition is a major part of the style and meaning of this verse. It is perhaps for these reasons that the *BHQ* makes no such suggestion. The same can be said of the *BHS* comment on the entire third line of the verse (6ef): should it be deleted? Repetition is integral to the verse's meaning. Form portrays content. *BHQ* once again drops the comment from its CA.

<sup>70</sup>More on this effect below in my reading of verse-rhythm.

<sup>71</sup>Perhaps it is no wonder then, and no accident, that the final use of סבב (in Eccl 12.5) articulates the action of mourners (ספּדִים). This is yet another of a host of instances that argue for the single-authorship of these passages, contra Longman (Longman III, Ecclesiastes, 57.).

heavy use of participles to provide further cohesion and to comprise a verse, and an element, that is distinctive—all its own.

Sound pours into meaning and pulls us into its effect. Now we feel as the wind does. The despair touches us too, and in so doing it involves us in the elemental swirl. We are part of this problem. Verse 2 has told us. Verse 3 made it more clear. And verse 8 will confirm this fusion and the gravity of our cosmic predicament.

In this verse, the creational aspects of connection and isolation are significantly developed. The parallel syntax of lines two and three supports this fact, simultaneously reinforcing the wind's insularity and its connection to what precedes. Both lines (6cd, ef) consist of adverb/verb/subject, in that order, and in both cases only the verbs differ (each has **סבב** as its adverb, **הרוח** as its subject).<sup>72</sup> Per Kugel's seconding, line three does seem to repeat then develop line two, to elicit what is latent in it. Line three makes obvious the wind's unproductivity. The wind returns (6bcd), but to what? It returns to its own turning (6ef), to its track, its circuit.<sup>73</sup> Literally, this last line reads, 'upon its turning re-turns the wind'. It is going in circles forever. That is all. Here is major endurance, major movement, and zero progress. The isolation of the wind could not be more stark. At the same time, the connection to mankind in verses 3 and 4 could not be clearer. Does the

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<sup>72</sup>ועל סביבתיו שב הרוח (line 3), then סובב סבב הולך הרוח (line 2)

<sup>73</sup>The word (**סביבתיו**) is variously interpreted because it has various meanings, as does its root (**סבב**). Simply, it means that the wind is returning to its track, to its turning (its track is a turning, or turned). Ellermeier interprets **על** causally: the wind returns *because of* its circuits (Friedrich Ellermeier. *Qohelet I/1. Untersuchungen zum Buche Qohelet.* (Hertzberg: Jungfer, 1967), 200-01.).

wind here merely remind us and clarify for us that man is unprofitable in his movements, in his toil, in his life?<sup>74</sup> Or is the wind unproductive and pained too? Verses 3-4 suggested the former, but our reading of verses 5 and especially 6 suggest the latter. Further evidence within this verse, especially in its final line, corroborates this conclusion.

The final line in this verse (ועל־סביבתיו שב הרוח) is a consummation of the wind's insularity. In his helpful breakdown of this stanza's (1.4-7 for him) syntax and structure, Kamano points out many of the shared characteristics woven throughout yet notes that this colon (line) is unique.<sup>75</sup> It does not fit in his scheme. It is a strange line: repetitive,<sup>76</sup> in some ways mirroring the previous colon (6cd), yet peculiar. A more elusive phrase could not be found. Here in four words is an encapsulation of the separation-through-connection phenomenon, devastating both in its simplicity and in the endlessness of the circle it describes. The line connects itself to other lines, strophes, and stanzas through its rhythm (it is the third of three 4-beat lines: 4:4:4), syntax, shared wording, and verbal aspect but separates itself by stress, sound, accent, *inclusio*, and a unique adverbial expression (ועל־סביבתיו, a *hapax*).

The sound that rings throughout the verse's first two lines is the long-o. Only אָל is excepted. The first הרוח (in 6d) changes that. From this first הרוח to the last (in this last line), the sound pattern changes to an /a/ pattern. Thus does the sound of this last line

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<sup>74</sup>This is the nature-as-foil position. For its advocacy, see Fox, "Qohelet 1.4."

<sup>75</sup>Kamano, *Cosmology*, 48-9 (49 n.85).

<sup>76</sup>*BHS* (but not *BHQ*) wonders whether it may be an addition.

follow the sound the wind sets for it. It is dominated by the wind, literally hemmed in by it. Here is a captive circuit. But it is captive to—itsself. The wind is its own prisoner.<sup>77</sup>

The accent pattern is also unique. The first two lines feature a rhythm that is easy, almost loping, one that circles round and round listlessly. The first line's unstress/stress followed by a repeated unstress/unstress/stress gives way in the second line to a quicker clip (a treble unstress/stress) as the wind whips round and round. The slow and then quicker pace of these first two lines switches to something completely different in the third and final line. This is the first third line in the book,<sup>78</sup> and it serves as a sort of consummation. סביבתיו introduces the first string of three unstressed syllables in the verse.<sup>79</sup> Like a bullwhip, the three unstressed syllables take time to circle round, only to release into the verse's single back-to-back stress with a snap. The accents land on סביבתיו and שב. These staccato stresses join with the consecutive /v/ sound (שב) to create an aural focus on שב: it stabs with its stress and sound and lands the reader on הרוח, the verse's last word.<sup>80</sup> The fact that the entire phrase is surrounded by the wind itself (הרוח flanks

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<sup>77</sup>This complements the wind-as-prisoner-of-other-elements aspect that the chiasm laid out above (A: earth, B: sun, C: wind, B': streams, A': sea) elucidates.

<sup>78</sup>That is, of any one strophe.

<sup>79</sup>Though not in the book. The only other trio of back-to-back unstressed-syllables thus far is at the end of v. 5, where the sun finishes its circuit with a wheeze. The fact that both trains of unstressed syllables lay at the end of proximate verses, which are connected by enjambment and elision, might say something. May it suggest what other exegesis seems to confirm, that the element in each verse, despite the vigour with which it begins, finishes with a subtle show of exasperation or even—more concretely—exhalation (*hevel*), in the case of the sun with a gasp, in the case of the wind with a frenzied and inward turning?

<sup>80</sup>The accentual focus of the previous line (סובב סבב הולך הרוח) is also הרוח (the last

the line) pictures what the words tell their readers. This line is a syntactic and lexical expression of its semantic: it does what it says. 'On its turning (or circuits), the wind returns'. הרוח rings its own course, and the stress is on its turning in on itself. This is what the line (6d-f, actually) looks like, but it is also what it says. הולך הרוח in 6d walks the reader, and the wind, forward, toward the final line (6ef), and שב הרוח returns the reader and the wind to 6d and even back to 6a, where הולך begins the verse, and the circuit, all over again.

Metre, wording, and sound combine to render a last line that expresses an element utterly insular and self-incarcerated. Yet, sharing many characteristics with surrounding lines and strophes (shared words, similar movements, use of participles, subject matter, and apparent personification), it is at the same time integrally connected. It is utterly bound, in itself and to others, and utterly alone. The wind is another expression of הכל הבל.

(2) הרוח connects man and nature to one another and to הכל. The wind is alone here, but it also connects. We saw this through the enjambment and elision that seem to fuse verses 5 and 6, and we have seen it through shared vocabulary, similar elemental motion, element-as-sole-subject, and through the use of participles in a long, participial chain that stretches through and links verses 1.5-7, even 1.4-7. These devices link the wind

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word in this line, as in line 3) since it is a departure from the regular unstress/stress metre of the first three words in the line.

to what surrounds it. But so does the very concept of הרוח.

הרוח connects man and nature in this prologue through its polyvalence. The word can mean wind, spirit, or breath.<sup>81</sup> Here in verse 6, it clearly means 'wind'. But it means man's 'breath' elsewhere in the book (cf. 3.19, 21; 7.8; 8.8; 11.5; 12.7). Furthermore, as we noted, the sun seems breathless, and it seems to bleed into הרוח's domain here in verse 6. It is almost as if the breathless sun carries its panting (שואף) into הרוח here. This concept dovetails with the enjambment and elision to further connect the dogged sun to the disoriented wind. It further harks back to the toiling (and, we imagine, panting) man in verse 3, who himself is connected to a stoic sun, which leads us back again to the breathy 'breath' of verse 2, to *hevel*, the headwaters from which this creational eddy issues. The personified feel of the wind here, its howl and shriek, its incarceration, only underlines the ambiguity, indeed the polyvalence, of the word; and this makes the fusion of man and elements in this prologue stronger still.

(3) *Key Words Connect הרוח to Man and His Pain: The Wind is Not Just Circling; It is Lost and Lonely and Howling in Pain.* Qohelet's use of the key words in this verse (רוח שוב, סבב) is consistently negative throughout the book. He uses the term סבב seven times in this book; four of them are here, in verse 6. He uses it twice as a verb applied to himself (2.20; 7.25); in each case he is despairing.<sup>82</sup> In both cases, Schoors translates the

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<sup>81</sup>It can mean other things too, like 'side', as in Eze 42.16-20. This meaning of רוח, and this text in Ezekiel, will prove relevant to our study below.

<sup>82</sup>In the first case (2.20), he has surveyed all his work and come to hate life. In the

phrase, vernacularly, as 'I began to despair'.<sup>83</sup> The word's last use, in 12.5, is perhaps its most negative occurrence. It speaks to death and its attendant terrors. Much like the wind in verse 6, here in 12.5, mourners circle (סבב) the streets. Especially since this word occurs only twice elsewhere in the book, this first and last usage of סבב may connect the mourning people (12.5) to the mourning wind (1.6) and help make sense of the wind's moaning here in verse 6. The fact that 12.5 and its larger context (12.2-6) may be speaking not only to the death of an individual but to the death of all things only strengthens the possible connection between סבב in 1.6 and 12.5.<sup>84</sup>

שוב is also negative in its every usage in Ecclesiastes.<sup>85</sup> Its next occurrence is in the next verse, 1.7. This case is less clear, but my reading of the verse below shows that it is consistent with the elemental swirl that precedes it and is in fact its consummation, proving a vortex of dissatisfaction forever un-full. The word's use in 3.20 follows. The verse reads, 'All is walking to one place. All is from the dust, and all returns (שוב) to the dust.' It is characteristic. Ecclesiastes 5.14 says essentially the same thing. The word's penultimate occurrence seems to speak of man's death in terms of nature's (12.2), and its

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second (7.25), he aims to search out wisdom and 'wickedness, stupidity, madness, and folly' (*NJPS*), only to find a woman 'more bitter than death' (*NJPS*), a single worthy man (one in a thousand), no accounting for the sum of things, and the crookedness of humanity.

<sup>83</sup>Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 230.

<sup>84</sup>As hinted at in the note above, it is my contention that Eccl 12.2-6 speaks of the death of all things and not just the death of man. I will develop this thought, briefly, in my conclusions chapter.

<sup>85</sup>שוב occurs 10x: Eccl 1.6, 7; 3.20; 4.1, 7; 5.14; 9.11; 12.2, 7.

last use in 12.7 speaks of man's death unequivocally. In so doing it recalls the curse (Gen 3.19) and looks back to שׁב's other uses in the book (e.g. 3.20).<sup>86</sup>

Most significantly, of its twenty-four occurrences in Ecclesiastes, only one use of רוּח is positive (11.5).<sup>87</sup> The rest are negative, some severely so. Some of these occurrences mean 'spirit' or 'breath', some 'wind'. Of those that mean 'wind',<sup>88</sup> none are positive.<sup>89</sup>

Verse 6 here could be the exception, but since what follows is so overwhelmingly negative, that possibility is improbable. Bitter waters do not flow from a sweet stream.

What is more, in most of its instances in the first half of the book (after 1.6), רוּח appears in the context of striving,<sup>90</sup> and it is often in collocation with *hevel*, as a sort of

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<sup>86</sup> שׁב often speaks to man's repentance or need to repent in the HB. Is this Qoh's subtle way of saying that although the wind returns, man has not and will not, which is the reason for the cosmic predicament Qoh describes and, therefore, ironically, the cause of the wind's situation?

<sup>87</sup> And one neutral (Eccl 7.8): part positive, part negative.

<sup>88</sup> Eccl 1.6, 14, 17; 2.11, 17, 26; 4.4, 6, 16; 5.15; 6.9; 11.4, which is negative, but only slightly so.

<sup>89</sup> Not only does 'wind' never feature positively in this book, it is often a negative image elsewhere in the HB, especially in BWL. Ingram quotes Seow (Seow, Ecclesiastes, 122.) on this point: 'throughout the wisdom literature of the Bible, [רוּח] 'wind' is frequently a metaphor for things that have no abiding value or are insubstantial. Thus, the sages spoke of inheriting wind (Prov 11:29), restraining wind (Prov 27:16), gathering wind (Prov 30:4), windy knowledge (Job 15:2), and windy words (Job 16:3; cf. 6:26; 8:2). In every case 'wind' indicates futility or meaninglessness' (see Isa 41:29). Ingram continues, 'Seow thus covers most of the popular translations of הַבֵּל in his description of רוּח. The parallel is shown to be even closer by M.V. Van Pelt, W.C. Kaiser and D.I. Block, who write, "Like idols, false prophets are also said to be 'like wind,' or of no real substance" ("רוּח," *NIDOTTE* 3:1073-78 [1074]). Albertz and Westermann note, "[רוּח] can consequently become a designation of the nothingness . . . senselessness, and uselessness of human action and has thus undergone a shift in meaning similar to that of hebel . . . although to a lesser degree" (*TDOT* 3:1205)' (Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 115 n.118.).

<sup>90</sup> 1.14, 17; 2.11, 17, 26; 4.4, 6, 16; 6.9. The collocation (variously רוּח ורעות or רעיון רוּח)

(epexegetical) extension of it.<sup>91</sup> In almost all these instances, רוח is 'wind', not 'breath' or 'spirit'. The two exceptions (3.19, 21) have הכל הבל at their center (3.19 and 3.21 flank the phrase), speak of death as the end of all living, and use language in so doing that recalls the curse in Genesis 3.19. רוח as 'wind' in Ecclesiastes is not only negative in its every instance, it is intimately associated with death, the curse over all creation, the word הבל, and the collocation הכל הבל. Its movement in 1.6 is an exposition of הכל הבל in 1.2 and thus seems to make sense of the howling we have discerned in our reading.

Finally, the last use of רוח in Ecclesiastes coincides with the last (two) use(s) of שוב, in 12.7. The verse reads, 'And the dust returns (וישב) to the earth as it was, and the breath returns (והרוח תשוב) to God who gave it'. The first occurrence of שוב is in 1.6. As the second-to-last word in this verse, it receives accentual and positional emphasis. The first occurrence of רוח is also in 1.6. As the last word in the verse and its subject, רוח receives even greater emphasis. Furthermore, in שוב's first occurrence here in verse 6, it occurs with רוח (as שב הרוח). In שוב's last use, in 12.7, the same is true (as והרוח תשוב). These are the only two occurrences of שוב and רוח together (one after the other) in the book. This last use in 12.7 is of course an allusion to Genesis 3.19 and the curse. It is the ultimate 'return' of רוח, the ultimate reason for sorrow, the ultimate loss, the ultimate show of total lack of progress. It is a return to the beginning in the worst way.

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ends in 6.9. Through 6.9, רוח only occurs outside these collocations in 1.6; 3.19, 21, and 5.15.

<sup>91</sup>In the phrase הכל הבל ורעות רוח (but once as גם זה הבל ורעיון רוח), in 1.14; 2.17, 26; 4.4, 16; 6.9.

Is it too much to suspect that these first and last occurrences of both words are linked, both of them occurring together for the first and last and only times in the book? Ecclesiastes 1.6 pictures רוח making no progress, and in this there seems to be a howling owing to loss and lostness, a sense of pain. Ecclesiastes 12.7 pictures רוח making no progress again, this time returning not to its turning (or circuit) but to God. Each case is a circumscription, a circle, and it blows from the beginning of the book to its end, from nature in 1.6 to man in 12.7. And in neither case does either make any progress. Both make small circles and connect from beginning to end to make one big profitless path that ends where it began (The fact that 12.8 returns us to 1.2 all but confirms this). In the first case (1.6) רוח means 'wind'. In the last (12.7) it means 'breath' or 'spirit'. These connected usages, together with their connection to שוב, rivet nature and man in still another way.

The relation between the first and last occurrences of שוב and רוח together may also be seen in the fact that they are reversals of each other. 1.6 renders 'שב הרוח', while 12.7 reads, 'והרוח תשוב'. The medium is the message. In 12.7, the רוח is returning from whence it came and thus reversing the direction of man: coming from the earth, he now goes into it. But this only works if we read 1.6 and 12.7 together; it only works if they are linked. And they are.

הרוח connects nature and man in each context (in and around 1.6 and 12.7) as well. In 1.6 the wind is connected to the natural elements surrounding it and to man in 1.3 and 1.4, through its personification, participles, word choice, and movement, as we have seen. In 12.7, man's רוח is connected to the earth, having come from it and returning to it,

not to mention its interconnections with the natural imagery that precedes it in 12.2-6.

And in 1.6, the wind seems to blow out of *hevel* in 1.2, while the breath of man in 12.7 seems to merge with the breath of *hevel* in 12.8.

We have seen that רוח merges man and nature in contexts to do with death and *hevel* throughout the book. Their two occurrences together in 1.6 and 12.7 do the same.

We might expect something similar of שוב on its own, and we would not be disappointed if we did. Again, שוב occurs ten times in the book. Its first two occurrences in 1.6-7 are ‘up for grabs’—they are the readings we are trying to better ascertain through this analysis—but the other eight instances of the verb participate in passages that explicitly link man and nature. And we have seen that every one of them is severely negative. In 3.20 man-as-dust returns to dust; in 4.1 and 4.7 Qohelet turns to consider all done under the sun: the first case is oppression, the second *hevel*; 5.15 is much like 3.20, 9.11 much like 4.1 and 4.7; 12.2 pictures the death of the elements (and perhaps, metaphorically, of man), 12.7 the death of man.

רוח fuses man and nature under death and *hevel*; so do רוח and שוב together; so does שוב on its own. The prominence of רוח in 1.6 and of שוב in 1.6 and 1.7 suggests the same for these verses. Therefore, they are not positive, and they are not only concerned with nature’s course or estate nor only with what nature says about man’s estate. Rather, they are concerned with the estate of nature and man together, with their relationship and with what that tells us about *hevel*, about what is wrong with the world, about the death not only of man but of all things. Ecclesiastes 1.6, seemingly just about the wind

blowing around, seemingly just about nature, is about much more. It is about nature in pain;<sup>92</sup> somehow, this is a comment on—linked to—man in pain. And all this together, this man and nature linked in pain, is a comment on, an exposition of, הכל הבל in 1.2. Man and nature are brought together to the point of becoming one thing within the context of death and death's cause, the curse. Verse 6 and its lexical progeny scattered throughout the book strongly suggest that this is something at least part of what הכל הבל means.

### Ecclesiastes 1.7: A Dissatisfied Sea

*the prologue . . . lacks the heightened presence of . . . parallelism, terseness, and wordplays.*<sup>93</sup>

*Everything is not enough*<sup>94</sup>

Lines	Half-Lines (Hemistichoi)
1 All the streams are going to the sea,	כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים a הֹלְכִים אֶל־הַיָּם b
2 but the sea, it is not full; <sup>95</sup>	וְהַיָּם c אֵינָנוּ מְלֵא d
3 to the place to which the streams are going,	אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁ הַנְּחָלִים הֹלְכִים f
4 there they are returning to go.	שָׁם הֵם g שׁוֹבִים לָלֶכֶת: h

(1) *The Un-full Sea as Focus.* We have run the course with an exhausted sun and a

<sup>92</sup>Fredericks says the wind is “nearly writhing” (Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 73.).

<sup>93</sup>Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 59.

<sup>94</sup>Townes Van Zandt, ‘To Live’s To Fly’.

<sup>95</sup>Or, ‘there is not (for) it filling’.

frenzied, disoriented wind only to finish this elemental trio by encountering waters that are by turns perpetually dissatisfied and almost imperceptibly but nonetheless actually diminishing. This seems a fairly simple, straightforward verse. ‘The streams pour into the sea and the sea never overflows. Repeat.’ But a closer look reveals possibly unnoticed intricacies, all of which seem to underscore a ubiquitous and perennial dissatisfaction, a hungry hole that mirrors הכל הבל and thereby helps us understand more fully what it means at the head of this prologue and book.

The sea’s ‘un-fullness’, its lack, especially as encapsulated in the three short words of line two (v. 7cd), is the focus of this verse.<sup>96</sup> A glance at the verse reveals this: line one (v. 7ab) runs to the sea; so does line three (v. 7ef); so line four (v. 7gh). All this pours into the sea, into line 2 as it were, and yet the sea is never full. By contrast, line two is the only line that does not detail constant movement. It is simply stative, describing a purely receptive subject.

The progression of both verse-halves speaks to this focus. The sea swallows the streams<sup>97</sup> in each bicolon (7a-d, e-h). It is as if 7ab and ef are declines down which the streams run into the sea. Exemplars of synthetic parallelism, the two latter lines in each verse-half (lines 2 and 4) seem emphasised: they ‘complete’ the lines that respectively precede them (lines 1 and 3). This spotlights the un-fullness of the sea in line 2 and the forev-

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<sup>96</sup>Cf. Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 72.

<sup>97</sup>The word can also mean ‘rivers’ (נַחֲלִים; *DCH* 5:658). I refer to the word variously below.

er return<sup>98</sup> of the streams in line 4. Despite their best efforts, the streams will never fill the sea for whom and to whom they seem to run.

Synthetic parallelism highlights the unsated sea; so does chiasm. The sea and streams recur throughout these four lines: the sea is referred to four times, the streams three—so seven times in total. But they are only explicitly named four times altogether.<sup>99</sup> These four, explicit instances compose a chiasm—streams (7a), sea (b), sea (c), streams (f)—which places the focus at the center, on the sea.<sup>100</sup>

Other word-play also spotlights line 2. Lines 1, 3, and 4 all mention the sea and the streams. Line 2 mentions the sea alone. Here, where the sea is mentioned (end of 7b) then mentioned immediately again (beginning of 7c),<sup>101</sup> the sea is engorged, eternally swallowing the streams. Ironically, the very place of the sea's swelling (7b) is where we are told the sea is never full.

The layout allows for a parallelism that also highlights the sea in at least two ways. The verse consists of two bicolons, or four lines. Seconding emphasises the second of each pair of lines (7cd, gh);<sup>102</sup> and in an instance of synthetic parallelism, the entire second bicolon (the verse's latter half, 7e-h) is also underscored. In other words, lines 2, 3,

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<sup>98</sup>This phrase resonates with the translated title of Eliade's work (Mircea Eliade. *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History*. Bollingen Series XLVI, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1954)). I probably owe it to him.

<sup>99</sup>The other mentions are instances of anaphora, on which see below.

<sup>100</sup>Cf. Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 9. This is word-play via anaphora and syntax.

<sup>101</sup>Anadiplosis.

<sup>102</sup>Kugel, *The Idea*, 13, 61.

and 4 (7c-h) are all emphatic. 7cd heads these lines and thus aids and abets the second bicolon (7e-h), as it emphasises the sea's lack in its own way. Line 2 (7cd) does this overtly (by saying that the sea is never full), lines 3 and 4 less obviously. The only line that is not emphasised is the first, 7ab. It contains the only hint of fullness (כֵּל) and is the only verse where the sea is not portrayed as somehow un-full. Thus does the parallelism of the four lines and two bicola combine to highlight the sea's lack of fullness.

In short, seconding and synthetic parallelism combine to read the verse in two ways. Firstly, lines 2 and 4 'complete' (through seconding) lines 1 and 3, respectively. Line 2 completes line 1, where the completion is an un-fullness, an incompleteness. This is ironic, to say the least. Next, line 4 completes line 3, where the completion is a return to perpetuate the filling to un-fullness. Secondly, the second bicolon (syntactically, verbally, and rhythmically parallel to the first) completes the first (synthetic parallelism), where the second (7e-h) simply repeats what the first has told us but in 7ef lacking explicit mention of the 'sea' and in 7gh lacking explicit mention of both 'streams' and 'sea'. The 'completion', therefore, of the first two lines by the second two lines turns out to be a gradual diminishment (via anaphora). This is what Qohelet emphasises. The first hemistich of verse 8 (8a) seems to confirm this reading.

The verse's 'progression' also emphasises the diminishment of sea and stream, again by way of anaphora, and again ironically, even oxymoronically, since the verse seems to tell us (to imply) that sea and stream never diminish. But it shows us something different. In the first line, the sea and streams are named. In the second, as we have seen,

the streams are absent. In the third line, the sea is present but unnamed (the sea being, perhaps, diminished after its gorging), whereas the streams are named. And in the fourth, the sea and streams are both present but both unnamed (being mentioned only anaphorically). Thus, from the the first bicolon to the second, there is increasing diminishment.

The metre mirrors this subtle dimishment as well, but in a different way. Reading 4:3||4:3, in every other line (lines 2 and 4) there is a loss. Four diminishes to three (where the streams are absent in line 2); then again in the verse's second half (where the streams are named in line 3 and neither sea nor streams are named in line 4).

The number of words in this verse also underscores diminishment as its subtle theme even as swelling and stasis are the surface-level, apparent topoi. From verses 4 to 5 to 6 to 7, verses Qohelet connects in obvious ways (e.g. elementally), there is a swell in verbiage. Verse 4 has seven words, verse 5 ten, verse 6 fourteen, and verse 7 sixteen. This makes verse 7 the longest in the prologue, by way of word and syllable. In fact, the syllable swell from verses 4 to 7 is constant: the verses grow by seven each time, cresting in verse 7.<sup>103</sup> However, although verse 7 is the longest verse, in one sense the most swollen and steady, there is subtle diminishment. While verse 5 is a three-word increase from verse 4, and verse 6 a four-word increase from verse 5, verse 7 is only a two-word increase from verse 6. There is a dip here in amplification.

Verse 7 is thick with irony: its plain meaning speaks to the water's constancy, but its mechanics tell in minutest detail of diminishment and loss. The words are clear: the

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<sup>103</sup>V. 4: 16 syllables; v. 5: 23; v. 6: 30; v. 7: 37.

water level remains, but un-fullness is the focus of the verse.<sup>104</sup> It is a paradox that points to a loss that is deeper than that of the water level. The literal meaning of 7cd, the verse's focus, speaks to this deep loss that is in fact a deep dissatisfaction, an emotional state which is nothing if not anthropopathic and which connects verse 7 and all the elements through it to verse 8 (especially its latter half).

The literal sense of the second line reads, 'And the sea, there is not for it a filling.'<sup>105</sup> The phrase does not only read (but may perhaps read) 'the sea is not full', as if the streams do not cause it to overflow. Instead, these words seem to say that the sea always lacks filling. Despite the streams, whatever might fill the sea does not seem to exist. To speak anthropomorphically, despite the continual 'labours' of the streams, the sea is never sated.<sup>106</sup> Always filled, it never feels full. This personification is in-line with the elements that have come before, with the standing earth, the panting sun, and the howling wind. Man start-

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<sup>104</sup>Whybray mentions that on their surface, the words are absurd (Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 42.). On the contrary, the sea is always full (Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 69.). This seeming absurdity points to the non-literal nature of the sea's un-fullness here and, by extension, to the more profound message Qohelet is expressing about creation's condition.

<sup>105</sup>The standard meaning of *אין* being something like 'there is not/no' and not simply 'not/no'. *אין*, *DCH* 1:214. As it is pointed here (*מלא*), *מלא* could be a ptc or adj ('מלא', *CDCH* 220-21). The adjectival reading would fit most naturally with a simple negative particle like *לא* or *על*: 'the sea is not full' (cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 69.). The presence of *אין*, plainly translated 'there is not/no', suggests reading *מלא* as a ptc: 'and [for] the sea there is not/no filling'. The fact that a long string of participles precedes this word (with two directly following) may also argue in favour of reading *מלא* as a participle here. Also cf. Verheij, "Words," 185-86 n.11.

<sup>106</sup>Gregory of Nyssa speaks here of the rivers 'being swallowed up by the insatiable nature of the sea' (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 197.).

ed the vicious cycle (in v. 3), but the 'source' precedes him by a verse; it is of course *hakkol hevel*.

Again, the literal meaning of this second line does not seem to speak to the sea's physical filling with water, since streams do fill the sea (at least in part) by pouring into it.<sup>107</sup> This likely speaks to a deeper dissatisfaction.

The verse's final word, ללכת, seems to lend some, if slight, support. הלך occurs throughout this verse (3x), finishing it here. Both verse halves run to their respective ends, just as streams run to the sea. Thus, being the last word, does ללכת receive amplified emphasis. This particular infinitive does not occur often in the book, but when it does (5.14, 7.2, 10.15), it is in very negative contexts. Ecclesiastes 5.14 has man going to the grave, 7.2 to the funeral home, and 10.15, cryptically, to the city he cannot find. Qohelet chooses, and places, his words with care. This first of four instances of ללכת gives birth to ailing triplets. It is not an auspicious start; the run it indicates likely refers to more than the movement of water. On the contrary, there is every sign that in running into the sea, these streams are running to their death,<sup>108</sup> only perhaps to be succeeded by more streams

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<sup>107</sup>Of course, Qoh could be saying 'the sea is not filled to the brim: it does not overflow'. But again, a literal reading combines with myriad nuances in the verse to argue for a deeper meaning, a gnawing hunger that is never satisfied. נחל can mean 'wadi', a stream which only flows during the rainy season ('נחל', *DCH* 5:657). Such a stream would argue for a sea that is wanting (not full enough) and not a wonder (forever filled but never overflowing).

<sup>108</sup>In both testaments, running into the sea is hardly ever (if ever) good (Ex 14 [and Josh 3] proves the point, where the Hebrews walked through death, 'baptised' as they were [cf. 1 Cor 10.2], on dry ground by the hand of God) and is almost always indicative of an evil situation (cf. Matt 8.32).

that will run the same route again. Such a cycle recalls the generations of 1.4ab and reminds us that the circularity of this and the preceding elements began there. The roots of nature's ailments are in man.

Verse 7 is a consummation of what has come before, but it is more than that. It is a picture of consummate dissatisfaction, a dissatisfaction featuring 'the unfilled sea'.<sup>109</sup> In these four lines (7ab, cd, ef, gh), the streams are forever working, the sea forever wanting. We have seen that many aspects of the verse point to the one phrase that captures this lack of satiety, a sort of un-fullness which seems to spill over into unrest or existential ennui, an almost anthropomorphic starvation that is constantly fed but constantly hungry. It is **איננו מלא**.

Rhythm, sound, syntax, and semantics further show the second line (**והים איננו מלא**) to be the focus of the verse. We begin with rhythm. The first line's metre marches alongside its meaning, beginning with an initial fullness. The **כל** starts the line with a stress and is followed by triple-unstress/single stress **הנחלים**, from which flow two words of equal metre, each an unstress/unstress/stress (**הלכים / אל-הים**).<sup>110</sup> The verse tells us that all the rivers are walking to the sea, and the rhythm makes us feel it: from the fullness of 'all the rivers' the rivers flow, rhythmically regular, 'walking to the sea'.

The sea starts line 2 and so provides yet a third unstress/unstress/stress which lines up nicely with what has come before. The back-to-back mention of **הים** (anadiplo-

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<sup>109</sup>Good, "Unfilled."

<sup>110</sup>Counting **אל-הים** as one 'word' here.

sis) presents us with a sense of fullness—the sea is swelling—and then we encounter something unexpected. So far we have been carried along by a full and loping, almost downhill movement of rivers to the sea, but the last two words jar. The sea is **מלא**. These two words make 7cd a 3-beat line. Following from a 4-beat line (and from the 4:4:4 of v. 6 and the 4:4 of v. 5), this lack of metric symmetry alone provides for something of a sense of incompleteness: the final (4th) beat seems missing.<sup>111</sup> But something strange is happening here too. Although these words (**מלא**) provide the last two beats to this three-beat line, almost inexplicably, with the pace the verse has thus far provided, the final beat seems to fall after the final word, **מלא**, is spoken. It is as if the word ‘fullness’ (**מלא**) is absent from the line. At the pace set from the start of the verse, the reader finishes reading **מלא** before the beat ‘lands’. There is something wrong here, something missing. This 4:3 first half of this verse reads almost like a 4:2. Again, it is as if the **מלא** has been erased or at least absorbed into the un-full sea.<sup>112</sup>

One thing is certain: this line is ‘un-full’. It is definitely the focal point of the verse,<sup>113</sup> sitting like a strange centerpiece that is slightly off-center. This makes some sense,

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<sup>111</sup>Again, Gordis designates the 4/3 rhythm as ‘Kinah’ (Gordis, *Koheleth*, 203.). This metre is often used in lament and would make sense here, accounting for a certain, inexplicable lacuna.

<sup>112</sup>An instance of elision.

<sup>113</sup>And, it turns out, of the prologue. Verses 1-11 contain 123 words. This makes 61.5 the median, which means the sixty-first and sixty-second words flank dead-center. **מלא** in Eccl 1.7 is the sixty-first word, **אל־מקום** the sixty-second and sixty-third. This puts the space between **מלא** and **אל־מקום** at the exact middle of the prologue (if we are counting words; one syllable-count yields the same center). This space acts as a mirror, reflecting **מלא** in its reverse, the 3 letters which follow, **אל־ם**. The space following **מלא**, this median-point in the prologue, creates a chiasm (**מלא|אלם**) with nothing in the middle (see Jarick,

because although these words lie near verse median, there is no metric middle as with verse 6, where three lines make for a middle line (4:4:4). By contrast, 1.7 is the first verse 4-line verse of the prologue. It is full, a consummation of sorts, as we have seen. But with an even number of lines it lacks a middle (4:3//4:3).<sup>114</sup> So are the two words at the end of this second line as close to center as words can get here (the chiasm confirming: streams [7a], sea [7b], sea [7c], streams [7f]), and yet they are not central. All of this seems to show that through his fine-tuning, Qohelet is telling us that something is off-kilter in his cosmos, and at the heart of this dissonance is a certain disturbing and voracious dissatisfaction.

Unsurprisingly, this mirrors the meaning of the phrase in ironic fashion by using rhythm to bypass ‘fullness’ in expressing a lack thereof (איננו מלא). In order to match the last two words in this second line (7d) with their proper stresses, we must slow our speech way down, almost to halt. This rhythm underscores מלא איננו by forcing the reader to spend more time on these words, here at line's end, than he has on the words that flitted on before them. The rhythmic pause acts like a vortex, pulling our attention to what

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“hakkol hebel,” 96-98. for his reading of the same artistry and message in Eccl 3.1-8. Also see note below.) and ‘the sea’ on either side (as referent, since מלא איננו and אל-מקום both refer to אל-הים). At the center of Qohelet’s cosmos is a space, nothing, nothingness. This is another way of saying הכל הבל and lends support to my contention that Eccl 1.3-11 is an exposition of those two words. This also validates my reading of an almost imperceptible emptying and emptiness being at the heart of verse 7, and of the phrase מלא איננו playing a central role in that syndrome, and of the special connection these two words seem to have with another pair, הכל הבל (on which see the end of this chapter preceding its conclusion).

<sup>114</sup>For a similar insight into the white space that runs down the syntactic and semantic spine of Eccl 3.1-8, see Jarick, “hakkol hebel,” 98.

seems to be the perpetual state of this water—forever filling, forever un-full (so does the phonetic ‘stickiness’ provided by the back-to-back nun in **אִינְנוּ**, a word which, incidentally, recalls the streams [**נַחֲלִים**], the only other word in the verse to possess a *nun*).

But the rhythm is not the only dynamic in verse 7 that points us to this phrase that finishes the second line. The sounds do too. Consonance characterises this verse, and while the /sh/ sound (**שׁ**) and the aspirate /h/ (**ה׳**) alliterate the lines (the *shem* only in the last two), it is the *mem* (**מ׳**) that dominates. Of course, the plural masculine ending contributes easily and mightily to the effect, but over half of the instances owe to words that either begin or end in *mem* for other reasons. While it is a favorite sound of Qohelet’s here<sup>115</sup> and a prominent letter/sound in the Hebrew Bible, these two factors do not seem to suffice to explain its pervasiveness here. There are twelve instances in this verse. The next highest count in the prologue is five.<sup>116</sup> This is quite a spike. The only words in this long verse that do not include the letter are **כֹּל** (which is attached by *maqfep* to **הַנַּחֲלִים**), **אֵל** (likewise attached to **הַיָּם** and **מִקוֹם**), **אִינְנוּ** and **לִלְכַת**. Interestingly, every one of these words begins or ends a line, except for **אִינְנוּ**.<sup>117</sup> This means that *mem* strings through the core of the verse, sounding out from its center, helping provide cohesion. And the single word (**אִינְנוּ**) that is not on the edge of a line and does not also contain a *mem* means ‘is not/there is not’ and is semantically attached to and fully characterised by **מִלֹּא**. Here may

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<sup>115</sup>Verheij, “Words,” 186.

<sup>116</sup>V. 3, 5, 8, 11.

<sup>117</sup>The first **אֵל** is attached by *maqfep* to **הַיָּם**, which ends the line.

be the reason *mem* dominates and drives the phonetics of this verse: it drives the content of the verse to this phrase. The fact that **אִינְנוּ** is the only word aside from the final word (**לִלְכַת**)<sup>118</sup> not to end with a *mem* makes it stand out, drawing attention to it and to the word to which it is connected. The fact that this word, **מֵלֵא**, is the only word in the verse to begin (rather than end) with a *mem* underlines this effect. The string of *mem*-ending words runs into the first and only *mem*-less word (**אִינְנוּ**), which leads to the first and only *mem*-initial word, **מֵלֵא**. The alliteration spotlights **מֵלֵא**, fixing our attention to it.<sup>119</sup> The rhythm and meaning of 7a and b pour into it, and the last two lines (7e-h) return to it by returning the rivers, and the reader, to the start of the verse. Thus the cycle starts again, ever new, ever old, ever going, ever un-full. Semantically, metrically, phonetically, this verse pours into a forever un-filled sea.<sup>120</sup> But that is not all. Syntactically the sentence does the same thing, perhaps with even greater flourish and yet, as ever, with a subtlety that is a wonder to behold.

As the rhythm, sound, and meaning of the sentence focus on the phrase **אִינְנוּ מֵלֵא**, so does the syntax. Lines 2 and 4 in this verse (7cd, gh) correspond in a number of ways. Firstly, their beats are parallel. 7ab and 7cd scan 4:3, and 7ef and 7gh scan 4:3. Especially once the circularity of the verse (some of which we have seen) comes into view, it

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<sup>118</sup>And aside from the three, two-consonant words attached by *maqef* to words with *mem* (**אֵל**, **אֵל**, **בֵּל**).

<sup>119</sup>Alliteration gives emphasis to the alliterated words . . . (E. R. Eddison. *Styrbiorn the Strong*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 259.).

<sup>120</sup> I stole this phrase from Good (Good, “Unfilled.”).

is easy to see the lines of like-beat aligning, 7ab with 7ef (4//4) and 7cd with 7gh (3//3).

While 7ab and 7ef do parallel one another in some ways (each focusses on הנהלים),<sup>121</sup> 7cd and 7gh align in a host of ways that spotlight מלא איננו.<sup>122</sup> הלכים

The second and fourth lines in verse 7 have the same number of beats: each has three. There is no word-to-word correspondence, but a syntactical one seems to exist. The correspondence between the first beats of each line, between והים in 7c and שם הם in 7g, is particularly striking. The sea is the focus of 7cd. It consumes the line. Nothing else is mentioned; the streams are notably absent: they have poured their full strength, their very selves, into the sea, 'and the sea is not full'. So in this second line, the subject that started the verse has disappeared into the sea, and the sea alone spreads across all three beats. הם appears in the last portion of the first line (in 7b) and then again, immediately, as the first word and first beat (7c) in line 2. Corresponding to this word are the first two words in line 4, two words that combine to form one single beat, שם הם. Both the sea and the streams are represented by these two words, respectively. However, whereas in line 2 the streams are missing, it is the sea that is missing not only here in line 4 but in line 3 as well. Although the sea is semantically present twice (אל-מקום and שם) just as in the first half of the verse, it disappears morphologically (being mentioned only anaphorically). In the verse's first half, the sea swallows the rivers; in its second half, the rivers (which are ex-

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<sup>121</sup> In fact, the stresses in each phrase are the same: (7a) כל הנחלים הלכים and (7c) שנהנחלים הלכים, where the *shin* in 7c matches the כל in 7a.

<sup>122</sup> Incidentally, being at the end of the bicolon, איננו recalls כל, the word that begins it. איננו is thus in counterposition to כל and as such proves a counterpoint. It recalls the streams and their 'all', telling the reader that this all is not enough.

explicitly mentioned in both halves of the verse, in 7ab and 7ef) swallow the sea. Line 2 tells us the sea is never full. Lines 3 and 4 advance this reality by revealing its diminishment.

But there is something more. In 7g, **הם** speaks of the streams. This is a morphological shortening of **הים**: the *yod* has been elided.<sup>123</sup> In this way also, then, the streams swallow the sea in the second half of verse 7. But morphologically speaking, the streams (**הם**) may be seen as a shortening of the sea (**הים**): running without rest though they do, they fall short of filling up the sea.<sup>124</sup> Yet again, the medium is the message in more ways than one.

Another way of looking at the elision of the sea is by looking at the first lines of each bicolon (7ab, 7ef) in parallel to one another. 7ab begins, 'All the rivers (A) run (B) to the sea (C)'. When we look for these three components of the line in the parallel 7ef, we find A and B but are missing explicit mention of C: 'to the place (C) which the rivers (A) run (B)'. The sea is mentioned (as **מקום**) and so present; but seen in parallel with 7ab, it is the only feature listed anaphorically and so essentially erased. Reading 'rivers (A) run (B)' we are ready for 'sea' (C) but find that it is missing. In sum, while 7ab gives us A, B, C, 7ef yields A and B; this leaves us waiting for C but not finding it in this third line.

The first word of the next line (in 7g) does supply it but, again, anaphorically, this time as **שם**. In this final verse line, the streams are mentioned anaphorically as well (as **הם**), followed by **שבים ללכת**. Ignoring the **שבים** for now, this renders the same syntax as

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<sup>123</sup>An instance of paranomasia.

<sup>124</sup>One may return here to the idea of **נחל-as-wadi** and thus to a sea which is not getting what it needs.

7ef, both yielding 'sea' then 'streams' then a form of 'run' (הלך). In 7ef, only 'sea' is mentioned anaphorically. In 7g, both 'sea' and 'streams' are. The only element from 7ab which remains (as explicitly mentioned) by 7gh is הלך (B). It finishes the line. By verse end then, the movement (ללכת) is essentially all that remains. It is the verse's last word. The streams and sea remain, but morphologically and perhaps semantically as well, they do so in diminished form (as הם and שם). Their existence is enduring in a way that man's is not, but in these long-standing cycles it seems that with each circuit something is lost. Again, man's loss is in his transience while nature's seems to be in her longevity. Loss connects man to the elements in this creation, though each manifests this loss in a different way.

Moving on but looking back a line, line 3 (7ef) follows line 2 (והים איננו מלא) and is exegetical of it: in one sense present (anaphorically) but in another sense absent (explicitly), the sea is always filled but never full (7cd). The second and third beats of line 4 (7h) also correspond in that a sea which is 'never full' (beats 2 and 3 of line 2: וְהַיָּם אֵינָנוּ מֵלֵא) is never full in part because of the returning rivers (7h: שְׁבִימִים לָלֶכֶת). In other words, the water the streams empty into the sea is lifted out of them only for the rivers to run their cycle anew. Thus do the parallel rhythm and syntax mirror the parallel meaning, the activity of nature Qohelet is describing.<sup>125</sup> This is mimetic artistry at its best and a concentrated parallelism that looks to *hakkol hevel* as its source.

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<sup>125</sup>I am not claiming that Qohelet knew of the cycle of evaporation and precipitation. I am saying that he describes it well (if unknowingly), even meticulously through some of the smallest details of this verse.

Still other devices focus the reader on the sea and its attendant (and perpetual) lack of fullness. We are apt to read line 4 in parallel to line 2, because lines 1 and 3 are parallel, and because lines 2 and 4 both have 3 beats. Reading lines 2 and 4 together, we may note that the first two words of line 4 (שם הם) recall the sea in line 2, though only one (שם) actually represents it lexically. שם refers to the sea, but הם recalls it through paronomasia by sounding like it: הם here in line 4 sounds like, and looks like, הם in line 2. It is thus an ironic instance of the streams swallowing the sea. In more ways than one, this last line returns us, as ever in this verse, to the sea, which is never full. The pounding away at this fact, at this unfullness, seems not to be a rejoicing in the wonders of the water cycle but a focus on a certain, almost indescribable lack.

This un-fullness (7d) is also why the rivers must continually return (7h), to feed an ever un-full sea. These morpho-syntactic parallels reveal an insatiable cycle wherein two phenomena (streams, sea) of one single element (water) combine and separate endlessly, only to consume and subsume each other by turns, each seemingly vying for a satisfaction or rest that never obtains. The focus of the verse is איננו מלא—an unfullness that makes the waters to meet, a dynamic at the center of this final verse in the ‘natural element quartet’ (1.4-7: earth, sun, wind, water) and one that in many ways characterises and itself subsumes earth, sun, and wind within its hungry cycle.

There are at least two verbal features that reinforce the sense of loss that runs like an undercurrent through this verse. The first is apparent via verbal absence. The streams’ return to their place of ‘origin’, to their source, is never actually mentioned. Their re-

turning is, but that always refers to the sea. In other words, in this verse, the streams are always running/returning to the sea; they are never running/returning to their source to run to the sea again. Their return to the source is assumed in lines 2 and 4 but never explicit. This has the effect of swelling the sea in our minds, and thus of swelling its dissatisfaction—since it is never full.

The second verbal feature underlining loss reveals itself in the verse's final word. At last, we have ללכת. As we have seen, this is the third usage of the verb in this verse and the sixth usage in the prologue thus far. In this last usage in 1.7, הלך is hanging off the end of the verse and altered morphologically. It has lost its initial consonant and gained a *lamed*. In this verb alone, we find many features of the verse and prologue encapsulated, where loss and gain are perennial. Because of meaning and because it runs twice throughout verse core, we find ourselves taken back to verse beginning (where הלך begins the running of the rivers) and then through the verse again.<sup>126</sup> And so the process continues, like streams running to the sea. As the third usage, it calls back to the three uses in what has come before, harking to the previous, separate cycles of human generation (v4: דור הלך) and wind (v6: הולך אל-דרום). Thus are we reminded that these separate cycles are also connected, not necessarily in harmony but in unceasing, unsatisfied, hurried, and harried movement. Not only man but all things toil and weary (see v. 8a).

The הלך that ends verse 7 produces repetition in sound and spelling (twin *lameds*: ללכת), mirroring the repetition we have seen from verse 2 onward. Of course, the repeti-

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<sup>126</sup>Cf. Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 70-71.

tion takes it toll: it costs הֶלֶךְ its first letter, *he*. This cycle that seems to characterise all things does not produce fullness but rather peels substance away. In this ‘tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow’, in this incessant circling, something is lost. Almost imperceptibly, it increases diminishment. Ever going, ever panting, ever turning in on itself, ever ending and beginning, ever toiling and toiling again, Qohelet’s creation is ever-moving but never progressing. Far from it. Instead of stasis, there is loss. This creation seems to feel pain too, and in this pain it finds its connection to man. There is an emptiness at the center of this complex.<sup>127</sup> The question is, what has caused it? The very layout of the prologue has suggested man (where the creation complex begins with man, in vv. 3-4); verse 8 picks the subject of man back up, supports these suggestions, and offers some reasons why.

(2) *Consummation*. It is not just the streams the sea swallows. In a sense, it is all things. Just as the streams run into the sea in this verse, so do the other elements in the prologue. As the end of the elemental section, verse 7 is every bit a consummation of the cycle that verses 5 and 6 have been building. If the sun is weary and the wind disoriented, the water is dissatisfied—forever going and forever unfull.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>This recalls Ravasi’s translation of הַבֵּל הַבֵּל, ‘un immenso vuoto’ (Ravasi, Qohelet, 63.). The sea’s un-fullness flows out of, is an elemental expression of, that phrase. The LXX translates הַבֵּל in Job 7.16 as κενός (‘empty’); in Ps 31.7 (LXX 30.7) אִשׁוּ is bound in collocation to הַבֵּל, descriptive of it, and also rendered κενός (κενής); cf. ‘הַבֵּל’, *TDOT* 3:313-20 (bottom 314) and Parsons’ comments in Parsons, “Guidelines,” 302 n. 125..

<sup>128</sup>Cf. Ps 96.11b, where a filled sea roars in praise to God its Maker (also Ps 98.7). Perhaps most significantly, however, see Gen 1.22 (as a type of ‘creation control’ or

First, verse 7 is a consummation of verses 5-7 at least,<sup>129</sup> a place where the movement of nature in many ways finds concentration and reaches a crescendo, only to be consumed by the ever-unfull sea. The first argument is simply one of length: verse 7 is the longest verse so far; in fact it is the longest in the prologue. It contains the most syllables (37),<sup>130</sup> making for a jump of seven from the previous verse and besting the next longest verse in the prologue by five.<sup>131</sup> It is also the first four-line verse (4:3||4:3), 1.6 having three lines and 1.1-5 two each. In this opening where the medium is so often and integrally tied to the message, the length of this verse is no irrelevant or even incidental detail. As the cycle of labour and movement moves from man in verses 3 and 4 to the sun and then the wind, the verses basically lengthen by degrees until verse 7, after which they taper but remain significantly longer at the prologue's end than they are at its beginning.<sup>132</sup> Verses 3 and 4 each scan 4:3. Verse 7 scans 4:3||4:3 and in so doing mirrors that stanza (1.3-4) met-

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standard for the sea. Interestingly, מלא, its first use in Genesis being here in 1.22, is attached to the sea in collocation: (ומלאו את־המים בימים).

<sup>129</sup>Kamano writes that 1.7 implies climax of the first section of the prologue, by which he means 1.4-7 (Kamano, *Cosmology*, 49.). It might also be argued that this verse serves as climax or partial climax to 1.3-7 or even to 1.2-7. This of course depends on one's view of the prologue's structure. The point is, for many reasons enumerated below, 1.7 shows itself to be an intensification and unification of various features found in the section of the prologue which precedes it. Also see Auffret, "Rien du Tout de Nouveau," 150.

<sup>130</sup>And the most consonants (60), although syllables seem to matter most in this evaluation since they take time to speak.

<sup>131</sup>Verse 8, next longest by syllables.

<sup>132</sup>Verse 1 is 15 syllables; 2 is 18, 3:19, 4:16, 5:23, 6:30, 7:37, 8:32, 9:29, 10:29, 11:32.

rically. From the start of the prologue, the verses swell in a (sad) symphony of motion, reach crescendo in verses 7-8, then proceed in verses 9-11 to a diminuendo.

The cycle spins on, the motion expands, the reader is fatigued and depressed by length alone, not to mention semantic content which aptly accompanies the long and interlaced sentences. Here in 1.7, then, we have a verse focussing on a lack of fullness which is more full of sound and words than any other in the prologue.<sup>133</sup> The irony punctuates the lack of satiety the verse points to, if only in a minor key.

Kamano also argues for 1.7 as implied climax of what comes before by showing it to be the only verse of 1.4-7 to include every major component of that section.<sup>134</sup> This fact again points to the fullness of the verse: it subsumes what has come before. Thus does the verse do morphologically and lexicographically what it does semantically by way of the sea. As the streams pour into it, so do some if not all of the verses that come before (beginning with 1.3).

Verse seven's use of הלך is a case in point. Ecclesiastes 1.4 uses the word once; 1.6 uses it twice; 1.7 uses it three times. More interesting, however, is the connection that 1.7 seems to be making with 1.4 by way of this verb. In the entire prologue, these two verses

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<sup>133</sup>One cannot help but think of Macbeth's soliloquy here—'full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing'—and wonder if it was perhaps this verse, or prologue, or book, that inspired Shakespeare to pen these memorable words.

<sup>134</sup>1.7 includes 1) an element of no-change or stasis (the sea, which in this way is like the earth in 4c), 2) all three elements of movement in 1.4-7 (subject, verb, direction), and 3) four words from 1.4-6 (מקום שם, הלך, and שב; and I would add כל from 1.3 [and 1.2]). Kamano, *Cosmology*, 48-49.

alone begin with a noun-then-participle pairing; in both cases the participle is הלך.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, in 1.4 the pairing is repeated and the same noun (דור) used. 1.7 duplicates this syntactic feature by repeating הנהלים הלכים at the beginning of each half (or colon) of the verse. Additionally, both verses follow this repeated noun-then-participle pairing with a third noun-then-participle instance in each verse's final line.<sup>136</sup> Whereas 1.4 uses הלך only once in these noun/participle constructions, 1.7 uses it in the first two occurrences and in the third instance uses שב as its participle, following it with the final word of the verse, ללכת. By ending the verse in this way Qohelet uses one of his favorite verbs of movement (הלך, as ללכת) to combine with the preceding שב to move (or return) the reader to the start of the verse (where הלך starts the sentence) and even to the start (1.4) of the larger section on movement (1.4-7).<sup>137</sup> This is no self-contained section on natural elements. It includes man as well. The two are integrally related.

So does Qohelet use 1.7 to mirror what is happening lexicographically and syntactically in 1.4, meanwhile doubling and trebling features of 1.4 in various ways. Viewed through a wider lens, he takes a favourite verb of movement used three times in 1.4-6 and uses it three times in verse 7, using it in its last instance (ללכת) to bring us as readers not only back to the beginning of the verse but back to the beginning of the section. He perhaps does this most supremely and most subtly by ending both verses (1.4 and 1.7) with

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<sup>135</sup>Verheij, "Words," 187.

<sup>136</sup>In this case too, הלך is involved, this time as an infinitive (ללכת).

<sup>137</sup>Backhaus groups Eccl 1.4-7 (Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 33.).

words that are phonologically, accentually, and even somewhat morphologically similar (segolate, ending in -ת) but semantically opposite.<sup>138</sup> Thus do both words (עמדת and ללכת) hang out over intervening lines as a sort of inclusio, once again offering up every indication that they are to be understood as linking—yet through tension. The question that at this point remains is, ‘What is to be understood as included, the words between the inclusios (so vv. 5-7) or the verses to which these inclusios are appended and everything in between (so vv. 4-7)?’ The syntactic and lexical interplay between verses 4 and 7 urges the latter,<sup>139</sup> which means that in still another intricate way, Qohelet is tying man (in his generations in 4ab) and nature (4c-7d) together. These and many other details discussed above and just below suggest the inclusiveness of this verse: it is not only the streams being swallowed but all things, from verse 4 on at least.<sup>140</sup> On that note, we might do well to assume that it is not only the sea that is dissatisfied but, again, all things. The verse is inclusive. It speaks to what has come before, which again, ties nature and man together under yet another rubric; in this case it is the rubric of ennui.

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<sup>138</sup>עמדת (verse 4) and ללכת (verse 7). The insight is offered, somewhat tentatively, by Verheij (Verheij, “Words,” 187 n.17.).

<sup>139</sup>Especially since the noun-then-participle resonance between the two verses is between the part of verse 4 dealing with human generations (4ab) and nature-as-water, not between the earth (4c) and water. Furthermore, it is the generations at the start of verse 4, and not the earth at its end, that ‘begin’ the motion that moves through verses 5, 6, and 7.

<sup>140</sup>But since v. 4 is integrally connected to v. 3, as its unfolding, verse seven’s connection to v. 4 means its connection to v. 3 as well.

Other, more obvious aspects tie verses 4 and 7 and everything in between them. There are parallels of motion: generations go and come in verse 4; streams go and come in verse 7. The הלך in the first line of each verse, describing the movement of respective subjects, clinches these connections. There are also parallels of motion-and-reception, which speaks to the similar outlay of each verse. In verses 4 and 7, the first element goes and comes while the second element remains still. In each case, this highlights the contrast between the two respective subjects (הארץ and דור; then הים and הנהלים).<sup>141</sup> Finally, the infinitive, segolate verbs that end each verse (ללכת and עמדת) bracket the section, yes, but also connect 1.4 and 1.7 in another way, linking the moving streams (which 'go') to the stable earth (which 'stands' or 'remains'). Thus do these two verses triply connect: earth to sea because both are static,<sup>142</sup> streams to man (in his generations) through similar movement, and streams to earth through the words that end each verse. There is a tension in this last connection, though, as these end-words (ללכת and עמדת) are essentially antonyms. The connection sets nature in tension with itself. And the connection between generations (1.4) and streams (1.7) reveals tension between man and nature, since the same movements produce different results: they mean man's demise and nature's (the streams') continuance. Thus are verses 4 and 7 and everything in-between all a-tangle. Man and nature and nature and nature are interconnected, like cooked spaghetti on a

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<sup>141</sup>Note that in the first case (v. 4) man and nature contrast; in the second (v. 7), nature and nature do. The contrast and connection is not simply between man and nature but among the elements themselves. Tension binds everything is Qoh's creation.

<sup>142</sup>Kamano, *Cosmology*, 48-49.

plate. And though there is much apparent concert, there is much contrast too. Tension underlies everything.

Verse 7 also shows itself as a consummation of what has come before by being about water. Qohelet is clear in telling us as readers that he will proceed to speak about 'the all' (*hakkol* in v. 2). He then proceeds to unfold the components of his cosmos, showing them in the very next verse (v. 3) to be man and nature. In the verses that follow (vv. 4c-6) he unfolds the natural representatives of that cosmos: they are earth, sun, and wind. Only water is left in what is everywhere recognised as being the four elements that represented the cosmos in toto in the ancient world.<sup>143</sup> Only water is left, and in verse 7 the rivers and sea supply it and in so doing complete the cosmos. In this way as well, Qohelet features 1.7 as consummation of what has come before.

Additionally, beginning 1.7, כָּל makes its first appearance since 1.2-3. Thus does 1.7 tie back into not just 1.4-6 but 1.3-6 in yet another way (we have analysed others, such as the use of שָׁמַשׁ in vv. 3 and 5, above) showing verse 3 to be part of the composite portrait of man and nature in the prologue, even if it is a representative, a headline for what follows.

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<sup>143</sup>Verheij, "Words," 184.

For all its connections to 1.4 and through it to 1.3,<sup>144</sup> verse 7 is also the end of a somewhat self-contained section within that bracket (1.4, 7). It is the end of the elemental trio of fire, wind, and water that alone pictures natural elements in like movement. Verse 7 ends an intense parallelism that verse 5 begins, where the second half of the verse contributes no new action of the element, simply returning the subject to the beginning of its course and, in the case of verse 7, simply doing what the first half of the verse does, again. This section distinguishes itself in a number of ways. It speaks to the elements alone: shared words, a similar cycle, and a string of participles make this fact obvious. Interestingly, these three verses alone are concerned with directions, which combine in at least three ways to form merisms that picture these elements as a totality all their own, quite apart from anything else.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Since 1.4 is the beginning of an answer to 1.3, and since these verses are connected in other ways, some of which we have explored. One of those ways is through **כל**, a word mentioned once, and seminally, in verse 2, next in verse 3, and not again until the start of verse 7 here. One might say that as a representative, verse 3 takes 'all' (**כל**) the toil of man and nature and dumps them into the 'all' of verse 7, where they run downhill, with the streams, into an all-consuming, ever-hungry sea.

<sup>145</sup>In the ANE (as today), speaking of the four cardinal directions at once was a way of speaking of 'everything'. Sennacherib called himself 'king of the four quarters' and 'king of the totality (universe)', seeming to equate the two (Anson F. Rainey, and R. Steven Notley. *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World*. (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006), 25., citing Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*). See too the annals of Adad-narari II, who also called himself 'king of the four quarters' (A. Kirk Grayson. *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114-859 BC)*. *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods*, vol. 2, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 148§16-18.).

Firstly, there is EE, SN, WW:<sup>146</sup> the sun rises twice (EE); the wind travels south then north (SN); then the sea (𐤆), which also means ‘west’ is named twice (WW). The double-mention of east and west on either end frames the wind and so features its constant turning, from south to north, in the center.<sup>147</sup>

Secondly, there is E, S, N, W, a simpler reading of the layout just mentioned.

Thirdly, there is E, W, S, N, where the sun speaks to east and west in its rise and fall (5ab) and the wind to south and north. In this reading, the sea remains just the sea and suggests no double *entendre*. This final reading leaves out verse 7, which not only points once more to the polyvalence of this prologue but to the fact that the first two readings, and especially the first, might be preferred.<sup>148</sup> Verse 7 is clearly a cap to verses 5 and 6: they belong together. The reading that includes it in the directional complex appreciates this fact. Furthermore, it is no accident that ‘rise’ is written twice in verse 5 and ‘west’ (𐤆) twice in verse 7. Whether they were meant to correspond is left to our discernment. The fact remains that all three readings are feasible and cogent in their own ways. This com-

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<sup>146</sup>East east, south north, west west.

<sup>147</sup>This almost seems a sort of incarceration from which the wind cannot escape.

<sup>148</sup>Although this reading completely elides (erases) the water, a feature which we have seen verse 7 majors in as it speaks of streams and sea. This would be a macro-read which harmonises with the micro-reading of verse 7 we have laid out above. In this way, it may confirm our understanding of what verse 7 is saying.

plicates things, but that seems to be part of the point.<sup>149</sup> These elements are ever-separating, ever-converging.

Another aspect of verse 7-as-consummation touches on this very fact. It is its elementalism. The fact that this verse is about water and water only connects it to verses 5-6, and the fact that it is about water and not some other element connects it to verses 4-6 (to form the meristic quadruplet of earth, fire, air, and water). However, whereas the other elements speak to one subject, this element alone speaks to two (streams and sea). This underlines verse 7 as consummate in yet another way. Furthermore, it highlights a feature that is latent (but which I have brought out) in previous verses: it is a cycle of convergence and divergence. As such, this run of streams to the sea *ad infinitum* epitomises the connection-and-separation aspect laced throughout Qohelet's creation thus far. These elements run their courses seemingly independent of one another and alone, yet connected almost imperceptibly in a thousand ways, connected so strongly that though they sometimes seem to try and break free,<sup>150</sup> they must always converge. This is the syndrome in which these elements, and man with them, are stuck. In their distinction, they are isolated. In their convergence, they are robbed of distinction and freedom and subject to pain.

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<sup>149</sup>See Lindsay Wilson, "Artful Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes 1,1-11: A Wisdom Technique?," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 364., esp. the final paragraph.

<sup>150</sup>As the sun seems to be apparently breaking into v. 6, and as the wind seems to want to through its howl and frenzy.

The cycle of convergence and divergence is easily discerned even through the most cursory reading of verse 7. It is what this verse is clearly about. But the details also speak to this phenomenon. Alliteration showcases the dynamic. In the first line, *he* and *mem* begin and end the subject, verb, and object of this clause (in הנהלים then הלכים then הים). This holds together the streams and sea, since alliteration helps words (and the things they speak to) cohere.<sup>151</sup> The *shem* and *mem* underscore cohesion in the last bicolon (in the verse's second half).

The divergence is clear enough and indicated in the sound of the verse's final word (ללכת), where a singular sound emerges, speaking to the separation of water from water in this 'eternal return'.<sup>152</sup> As we have shown, the sound and shape of this last word recall the last word of verse 4 and thus underscore the return not just of the waters but of all that falls between earth and sea (including the return of human generations to the earth in 4ab, as demonstrated above).

This separation and convergence is summed up in the last two words of verse 7. ללכת is a one-word résumé of all that has come before, not only of this verse, but since this verse is a consummation of verses 5 and 6 at least, of the entire stanza this verse concludes (so verses 5-7). Line four's first three words, שם הם שבים, basically repeat lines 1 and 3. What then is the purpose of the last word, ללכת? It seems to describe the run of

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<sup>151</sup>The principal function of alliteration is *cohesive* in nature, binding together the components of line, strophe, stanza or poem' (Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 227.; emphasis his).

<sup>152</sup>Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*.

the streams to the sea, but as the 'beginning' of the cycle and the last word in this verse, it is also a sort of synecdoche of the entire process of running, reception, and return. As the last word in this somewhat self-contained stanza (vv. 5-7), it may even be an encapsulation of the cycle that has been described since verse 5 at least, and I would argue since verse 3, and even verse 2.

Backing up a word, we find **שבים** occupying a similar, summary role, though on account of different devices. It is the only word in this last line un-matched by a word from the previous line, line 3. Line 4 begins with **שם**, which speaks of the sea. **אל-מקום** begins line 3 and also speaks of the sea. The second word in line 4 is **הם** and speaks of streams. So does the second word in line 3, **שהנחלים**. Lastly in line 4 we have **ללכת**, and so the same verb, **הלכים**, to end line 3. Only **שבים** is un-matched. Like **ללכת** but through different devices, it is isolated and thus highlighted, also encapsulating the process verse 7 and indeed verses 5-7 describe and, together with **ללכת**, describing the entire process from start to finish to start again, and so it goes, and goes: two words encapsulating a whole stanza and indeed a whole prologue (dare I say a whole book?). In these ways, and in these divergences, in these last two words alone, the convergence of all things is once more recalled.

In some ways, these three verses are self-contained, sealed off from all else, sealed off from man. In this way they are severed. But as we have seen, they are also connected by myriad details, some overt, some subtle. This is the push and pull created and characterised by **הכל הבל**. For reasons just enunciated, such a connection is hardly far-fetched

and seems, rather, to be fully justified. The fact that the focus of the verse, **איננו מלא**, mirrors **הכל הכל** syntactically and semantically further establishes this connection. The phrase **איננו מלא** is essentially *hakkol hevel's* inverse:

הכל הכל

איננו מלא

If the first phrase reads 'everything is nothing',<sup>153</sup> the second reads 'nothing is full', or even 'nothing is everything'. This hungry hole in the middle of verse 7 is essentially **הכל הכל** flipped. Read together, they form a chiasm, with 'nothing' in the middle.<sup>154</sup> It turns out there is a hole not only in the middle of verse 7 but in the middle of creation.<sup>155</sup> This reading equates **הכל** and **איננו**, confirming Jarick's reading of *hevel* as essentially meaning 'nothing[ness]' or 'no-thing'.<sup>156</sup> Everything is one, big negation, an **איננו**.<sup>157</sup> Verse 8 tells us why.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>Again, Jarick's reading (Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 79-80.).

<sup>154</sup>הכל הכל איננו מלא

<sup>155</sup>As I mentioned above, Jarick's reading of 3.1-8 resonates with this sort of statement about Qohelet's creation (Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 79-99 [98].). This apparent emptiness in creation is also evidenced by the fact that the prologue represents all of creation sans man through the elements alone. All of the animate, non-human creatures that fill creation on days 5-6 in Gen 1 are absent. This creation in Eccl 1 is filled with man and elements but still un-full.

<sup>156</sup>Jarick, "hakkol hebel," 82..

<sup>157</sup>Verse 7 houses the only occurrence of this collocation (**מלא + אין**) in the book.

<sup>158</sup>Is there any profit to man's constant movement (toil) or to nature's? Verse eight's three-fold answer is 'no, no, no' (where a triple **לא** forms the structure for the guts of the verse).

Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 and Ezekiel 42.15-20: Creation/Israel Nexus Underscored?

There is an uncanny textual correspondence between Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 and Ezekiel

42.15-20:

Ecclesiastes 1.5-7	Ezekiel 42.15-20
<p><u>זורת</u> השמש ובא השמש ואל מקומו שואף <u>זורת</u> הוא שם</p> <p>הולך אל <u>דרום</u> ו<u>סובב</u> אל <u>צפון</u> <u>סובב</u> <u>סבב</u> הולך <u>הרוח</u> ועל <u>סביבתיו</u> שב הרוח</p> <p>כל הנחלים הלכים אל הים <u>והים</u> איננו מלא אל מקום שהנחלים הלכים שם הם שבים ללכת</p>	<p>וכלה את מדות הבית הפנימי והוציאני דרך <u>השער</u> אשר פניו דרך <u>הקדים</u> ומדדו <u>סביב</u> <u>סביב</u> מדד <u>רוח</u> <u>הקדים</u> בקנה המדה חמש אמות מאות קנים בקנה המדה <u>סביב</u> מדד <u>רוח</u> <u>הצפון</u> חמש מאות קנים בקנה המדה <u>סביב</u> את <u>רוח</u> <u>הדרום</u> מדד חמש מאות קנים בקנה המדה <u>סבב</u> אל <u>רוח</u> <u>הים</u> מדד חמש מאות קנים בקנה המדה לארבע רוחות מדדו חומה לו <u>סביב</u> <u>סביב</u> ארך חמש מאות ורחב חמש מאות להבדיל בין הקדש לחל</p>

The textual correspondences are two-fold. Firstly, both texts repeat the roots סבב and רוח in close connection. Secondly, both texts lay out four cardinal directions: east (זרח), south (דרום), north (צפון), west (ים) in Ecclesiastes; east (קדם), north (צפון), south (דרום), west (ים) in Ezekiel.

The main discrepancy with regard to the first case (רוח and סבב) is that Ecclesiastes 1.6 means ‘wind’ when it mentions הרוח; whereas Ezekiel means something like ‘side’.<sup>159</sup> With regard to the directions, each text uses a different term for ‘east’ (Ecclesi-

<sup>159</sup>So RSV, ESV. *DCH* ‘side, corner’ (‘רוח’, *DCH* 7:428). Possibly having to do with sides in relation to wind direction (Walther Zimmerli. *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*. Hermeneia, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 404., citing J. T. Milik, “Notes d’épigraphie et de topographie paléstiennes,” *RB* 66 (1959), 557.).

astes actually has 'rises', זרח, not 'east'; Ezekiel has קדם), and the order of 'north' and 'south' are flipped between texts. Even so, the correspondences seem too significant to ignore.

The first involves the root סבב. Ecclesiastes 1.6 is the sole back-to-back occurrence of the verb סבב (meaning 'turn around' or 'surround') in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>160</sup> The related adverb סביב ('around') occurs twenty-eight times back-to-back in the Hebrew Bible;<sup>161</sup> only one of those instances is outside Ezekiel,<sup>162</sup> and of the twenty-seven occurrences in Ezekiel, only two of those lay outside chapters 40-43,<sup>163</sup> the text that describes the new creation/temple before the Spirit of the LORD reenters it. All twenty-eight instances of this back-to-back adverb occur in texts to do with the temple, 2 Chron 4.3 included. This back-to-back סביב occurs in Eze 42.15 and 20, flanking the four cardinal directions laid out by the Prophet, directions which pertain to the sides (רוח) or edges of the temple area all around (סביב סביב). Despite the fact that Ecclesiastes 1.6 has סובב סבב (the verb: 'surround') and Ezekiel 42.15 and 20 has סביב סביב (the adverb: 'around'), the

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<sup>160</sup> סבב (not סביב) occurs twice in a row only in Eccl 1.6. Ps 118.11 is close, where the repeated סבב is separated by גם. First Kin 7.24 and 2 Chron 4.3 are perhaps even more similar, where the former passage has סביב סבבים and the latter סביב סובבים. The passages are parallel accounts: they are accounts of Solomon's temple before God's glory enters it. So is every passage, save one, where סביב occurs back-to-back (see next note). Eze 8.10 is the exception. In this case, God's glory is about to leave.

<sup>161</sup>Eze 8.10; 37.2; 40.5.14.16 (2).17.25.29.30.33.36.43; 41.5.6.7.8.10.11.12.16.17.19; 42.15.20; 43.12; 2 Chron 4.3.

<sup>162</sup>2 Chron 4.3.

<sup>163</sup>Eze 8.10, 37.2.

former text includes the adverb סביב (Eccl 1.6e), and the latter text includes the verb סבב (Eze 42.19). In any case, as Qohelet uses the back-to-back collocation, it means something like 'turn around and around'; as Ezekiel uses his, it means something like 'all around'. Though different, the two collocations are very close in appearance and meaning.

As for the directions in Ecclesiastes and Ezekiel, not only are they laced in each case with the rare back-to-back collocation סובב סביב and סביב סביב, respectively, and with רווח; they also share a similar order and count. Ecclesiastes mentions east ('rise') twice (1.5), then south (1.6), north (1.6), west (1.7). Ezekiel mentions east twice as well (42.15, 16), then north (42.17), south (42.18), west (42.19). Although north and south are flipped from one text to the other, they are the same terms in both passages. This is of particular significance, since the term used for south, דרום, occurs only seventeen times in the Hebrew Bible, thirteen of which are in Ezekiel.<sup>164</sup> The fact that Qohelet chooses this word rather than the more common ימין or נגב (or even תימן) is eccentric, to say the

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<sup>164</sup>Deut 33.23; Eze 21.2; 40.24 (2), 27 (2), 28 (2), 44, 45; 41.11; 42.12, 13, 18; Job 37.17; Eccl 1.6, 11.3. Thus, דרום occurs only twice outside either Eze or Eccl. See Schoors' comments in Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 66.

least.<sup>165</sup> The other similarities these texts share make this choice, and these directional parallels, more striking still.

This textual correspondence may signal a conceptual one. The Ecclesiastes text clearly speaks of creation, the Ezekiel text of the future temple. However, many believe that Ezekiel's new temple speaks to a new creation.<sup>166</sup> If these connections are cogent, why would Qohelet make them here? Why allude to a new temple and new creation in the heart of a passage which conveys the opposite, namely that of a dying creation and a dying nation? Is Qohelet hinting at the hope of national and cosmic renewal beneath the surface of what his words obviously say (e.g., 1.9-10)?<sup>167</sup> Or, as he seems to do in 1.9-11 with

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<sup>165</sup>One might object that Qoh could well have used דרום simply for reasons of sound, to connect consonantly and assonantly with צפון. Maybe. But the other verbal echoes with Eze 42.15-20 argue that sound was not the only consideration, as do more convincing resonances with Ezekiel in the next verse, Eccl 1.8. Besides, ימין or, better, תימן, fill aural functions similar to דרום (cf. Ps 89.13, Songs 4.16). Both are more common words than דרום and much more widespread in the HB. And תימן has a cosmological connotation ('SOUTH', *DBI* 808; cf. M. O'Connor, "Cardinal-Direction Terms in Biblical Hebrew," in *Semitic Studies: In Honor of Wolf Leslau on the Occasion of His Eighty-fifth Birthday* November 14, 1991, ed. Alan S. Kaye (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), 1140-57 [1145].), which is why they are paired far more often with צפון than is דרום (*BDB* registers צפון as opposite תימן under its definition for תימן in 'תימן', *BDB* 412). In any case, in the HB, דרום and צפון are paired in two places, Ezekiel 40-42 (40.23, 24, 44, 45, 46; 41.11; 42.13, 17, 18) and Ecclesiastes (1.6, 11.3).

<sup>166</sup>Even if it does not, the renewed land follows closely (Eze 47-8). G.K. Beale. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. NSBT, 17 (Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 335-64.; cf. Jon Douglas Levenson. *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48*. (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 25-36, 51 n. 28, 102-03, 190-92.; also see note by Reimer on Eze 40.1-48.35, comment (3) in Lane T. Dennis, et al., eds. *The ESV Study Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1564.

<sup>167</sup>As one among many, Freedman shows how the Chronicler organised his book around Judah, Jerusalem, temple, and Davidic dynasty (Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible*, 91.). If Qohelet has indeed framed his prologue with an allusion that runs

Isaianic texts, is he poking fun at the prospect? Is this passage a veiled promise or a veiled polemic from this eccentric wisdom Prophet? Whatever the answer, if this is an allusion from within Qohelet's creation to Ezekiel's vision of a new temple, it increases the likelihood that he is indeed speaking to Israel's condition through that of creation, underscoring a fundamental nexus between the two.

Two other factors argue the cogency of this Ezekiel imprint on Qohelet's creation text. Firstly, Qohelet seems to allude to Ezekiel in the next verse, in 1.8. He has a penchant for the Prophet. Secondly, Ezekiel 42.15-20 is about renewal, something Qohelet spends the last section of his prologue denying, even decrying. In sum, in every verse which follows this section in 1.5-7, in 1.8-11, other inner-biblical allusions of similar theme and/or book may be present. If they are, the case for echo between Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 and Ezekiel 42.15-20 is stronger.<sup>168</sup>

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the length of Chronicles from David onward using a text that explicitly mentions Jerusalem and David, is it too much to imagine he might be tying into temple a few verses later within that same prologue?

<sup>168</sup>It so happens that the word כְּבָר follows both passages by three verses (Eccl 1.10, Eze 43.3). The consonants and pointing are identical, but the two are listed as different words in *DCH* ('already' in Eccl 1.10, 'Chebar' in Eze 43.3). Of course they mean different things. The point is not to equate them but to say that this is in line with what Qohelet seems to be doing: he takes from Ezekiel and other prophets to embed echoes in his work to give it deeper meaning, a polemical edge. In this case, each word is only used in its respective book, כְּבָר as 'already' only in Ecclesiastes and as 'Chebar' only in Ezekiel. Artistry seems more likely than coincidence.

## Conclusion of Chapter 5

Nature does act as a foil for man, accentuating his transience through her endurance.<sup>169</sup>

But she is pulled into the creational cycle herself, and her involvement in the movement is all the more surprising since we see her standing seemingly unaffected in verses 3 and 4. What is more, her pain and profitlessness seems to be a consequence of his, of man's.<sup>170</sup>

However, she seems to suffer for different reasons, owing to her endurance rather than to any ephemerality (as in man's case). The sun is fleet but not fleeting. Yet like man, she labours, and this labour seems profitless also and by turns exhausting (v. 5), disorienting (v. 6), and dissatisfying (v. 7). Like man, nature—and so all creation—is out of joint.<sup>171</sup>

Something is wrong, and it seems that man has started it, has introduced this out-of-joint-ness into creation, into *hakkol*. Verse 8 helps us see why. All of this interconnected pain and profitlessness within the whole of creation reflects הכל הכל in myriad ways, imitates it, and so helps us understand what it means. All things are wearying.

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<sup>169</sup>Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 7, quoting Zimmerli.

<sup>170</sup>Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 115.

<sup>171</sup>The perdurability of creation amounts to nothing; it simply reflects the static nature of a creation forever locked in the same wearying courses' (Brown, Ecclesiastes, 23.).

CHAPTER 6. ECCLESIASTES 1.8: ALL THINGS ARE WEARYING, AND IT IS MAN'S  
FAULT

*Broken dishes. Broken pots. Streets are filled with broken hearts. Broken words never meant to be spoken. Everything is broken.*<sup>1</sup>

<p>8a Everything is wearying: b man is not able to speak, c the eye is not satisfied to see, d and the ear is not filled from hearing.</p>	<p>8a כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים b לֹא־יִוָּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר c לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֵין לְרְאוֹת d וְלֹא־תִמְלֵא אָזֶן מִשְׁמָע:</p>
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**Introduction**

With the exception of **הכל הכל** in Ecclesiastes 1.2, Ecclesiastes 1.8 is both the greatest point of convergence and the greatest point of devastation in the prologue. This is particularly true of its first three words. In this chapter I argue that **כל־הדברים יגעים** speaks to all things but especially to man: his state is somehow central to the state of all things. Owing to the triplicate syntax, line two in verse 8 (v. 8b) ought to direct our reading of lines three and four (v. 8cd). Just as man cannot speak, neither can he see or hear. This verse gives us the image of man as idol. He has become like what he worshipped. This is the reason for the wearying of all things. The allusion to Ezekiel 7.19 that the three collocations of verse 8b-d seem to make reinforces this conclusion. Man's idolatry is the reason all things are wearying, the reason all things are becoming one thing. This dynamic that breaks down distinctions within creation is a further unfolding of **הכל הכל** and is unfolded consummately in Ecclesiastes 1.9-11. It points to death—not just of the human but of the whole—and is a discovery in line with the meanings of *hevel* as it is used in verse 2.

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<sup>1</sup>Bob Dylan, 'Everything is Broken'.

### The First Three Words Speak To All Creation, Not Just to Man

Verse 8 is the linchpin and pivot of the prologue.<sup>2</sup> If the preceding verse is a masterpiece of consummation, here is a masterpiece of coordination. All things meet in this first line (8a). In these first three words, we learn that all things are wearying.<sup>3</sup> Having just come from the cycle of streams and sea, we understand 8a to refer to them at least. But verse 7 consummates the elemental cycles that fill verses 5-7; so we understand 8a to speak to them as well, to הרוח and השמש. But the elements in verses 5-7 are interwoven in their movement and pain to the movement (4ab) and pain (v. 3) of man. The first word of verse 8, כל, suggests as much, as does a straightforward reading of the clause it begins: all things are wearying. But as we read on, the second line (8b) reforms our reading of the first and helps us see that כל-הדברים יגעים refers to man: all (his) words are wearying. Should we therefore discard our initial understanding of 8a? Before advancing to the rest of the verse, to 8b-d and its telling, treble-לא,<sup>4</sup> I will argue in this first section that הדברים in 8a should be understood as purposefully ambiguous,<sup>5</sup> as referring both to what directly

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<sup>2</sup>So Auffret, "Rien du Tout de Nouveau."

<sup>3</sup>On דברים here, Barton writes, 'The meaning then is that all things -- the sun, the winds, the streams and all natural objects -- are weary with their ceaseless round of activities' (Barton, Ecclesiastes, 74.).

<sup>4</sup>לא יוכל . . . לא תשבע . . . לא תמלא

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 66. Ingram writes, 'The ambiguity at this level is a literary device which enables a particularly close connection between the description of nature in vv. 4-7 and the human realm which is the subject of vv. 8-11: the two halves merge into each other at the centre . . .' (Ingram, Ambiguity, 70.).

precedes (things: the elements, largely) and to what directly follows (words: man and his speech) and as such should be translated ‘things’, not ‘words’.<sup>6</sup>

(1) *Ecclesiastes 1.8a is Ambiguous*. The first line in this verse is blatantly ambiguous: are all things or all words wearying, and are they weary themselves or do they weary those who encounter them?<sup>7</sup> These three short and simple words can be fairly read in any of these ways and in any combination of these ways.<sup>8</sup> The ambiguity provides a fullness of possible meaning that permeates the verse,<sup>9</sup> making it a sort of microcosm of

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<sup>6</sup>So, e.g., Podechard, *L'Ecclésiaste*, 241.; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 109.; Iain Provan. *The NIV Application Commentary: Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 49; ‘יגע’, *NIDOTTE* 2:401; Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, 41.; Frydrych, *Living under the Sun*, 116; Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Nicht im Menschen*, 23; Martin Rose. *Rien de nouveau: Nouvelles approches du livre de Qohéleth*. OBO, 168 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 155.; Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 67. Crenshaw’s comments are helpful: Crenshaw, “Nothing New,” 245. Also see Birnbaum, and Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 52-63. Schoors provides lists of scholars on both sides (Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 72-73.), and while admitting the likelihood of purposeful and playful authorial ambiguity, he settles on ‘words’. For Lohfink however, *יגע* here ‘must be understood as an encompassing signifier of everything in the cosmos’ (Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, 41.). Also Duane A. Garrett. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. NAC, 14 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1993), 288.

<sup>7</sup>Though, Ibn Ezra thought *יגע* here intransitive (and so not causing weariness) because *qal* (Mariano Gómez Aranda, “Grammatical Remarks in The Commentary of Ibn Ezra on Qohelet,” *Sef 56* (1996), 69.). But Rashi thinks *יגע* transitive here, wearying, as causing weariness (*Koheles*, 57.).

<sup>8</sup>(1) All words are (themselves) weary (2) All words are wearisome (wearying those who speak them) (3) All things are weary (4) All things are wearisome. See Ingram, *Ambiguity*, 65-66. Backhaus includes a reflexive understanding of *יגע* (weary themselves) as a possibility (citing Graetz, Zimmerli, Lauha) and reads *הדברים* as meaning facts (*Sachverhalte*), words, or things (Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 37.).

<sup>9</sup>Wilson, “Artful Ambiguity,” 364.

the prologue<sup>10</sup> and fitting it as a perfect junction where the other sections and subjects of the prologue meet. If all things are weary or wearisome we think of nature and the cycle that has just been described for us (vv. 5-7).<sup>11</sup> If all words are weary or wearisome we will likely think of man and in so doing reset the subject in our minds for the verses that lay ahead (vv. 9-11).<sup>12</sup> This second understanding of 8a ('all the words are wearying') also recalls the preceding elements, however, in that it could mean that all the words that have just described them are wearying.

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<sup>10</sup>Since the prologue is itself a microcosm, verse 8 is a microcosm of the microcosm, a meeting point for much of the prologue's content, a fused point into which the prologue is collapsed. It is the black hole of this proemical galaxy.

<sup>11</sup>Contra Kruger (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 51 n.18.). See my note below.

<sup>12</sup>These verses deal ostensibly but not necessarily exclusively with man.

(2) *Ecclesiastes 1.8b Seemingly Resolves the Ambiguity of 1.8a*. Many scholars note the ambiguity apparent in this opening line but soon assert that it is resolved by the line that follows (8b).<sup>13</sup> **הדברים** means ‘words’ here, not ‘things’. Some say that Qohelet never uses the word (**דבר**) in any other way: it always means ‘word’ (or say, speak), never ‘thing’.<sup>14</sup> This seems to seal the case. Of course, this could be the exception, but that is weak evidence for its ambiguity here. The facts are not so straightforward though.

Firstly, ‘straightforward’ is not Qohelet’s style.<sup>15</sup> The use of such a notoriously ambiguous word<sup>16</sup> at such a critical juncture,<sup>17</sup> with things (earth, sun, wind, water) directly preceding and words (in 8b) directly following urges caution. Secondly, Qohelet does use **דבר** at least ambiguously (if not to fairly clearly mean ‘things’) elsewhere, even in the same section (stanza) of this prologue. I am speaking of verse 10, which is one of the five instances in the book where Schoors reckons **דבר** not as ambiguous but as meaning ‘thing/affair’.<sup>18</sup> To say that none of Qohelet’s uses of **דבר** is ambiguous is presumptive, not

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<sup>13</sup>So Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 51 n. 18., who in the same note affirms that ‘vv. 4-7 contain no indication that they are “wearisome” or “exhausted”’; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 72-73.; Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 6.; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 109.; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 5-6.; Ellermeier, *Qohelet*, 201-08. But see Delitzsch’s perceptive comments in Keil, and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, vol. 6, 661.

<sup>14</sup>Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, 34; Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 167. But see Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 66.

<sup>15</sup>Ingram, *Ambiguity*.

<sup>16</sup>E.g. *Judg* 3.19.

<sup>17</sup>See my arguments below which present v. 8 and, more specifically, v. 8a, as the axis of the prologue.

<sup>18</sup>Schoors lists five uses (1.10; 7.8; 8.3, 5; 12.13) of **דבר** as ‘thing, affair’ in *Ecclesiastes* (of

definitive, and to assert that he never uses the word to mean ‘things’ is, consequently, an overreach.

However, Seow makes a more careful, nuanced claim, stating that the plural forms (דברי and דברים) ‘always mean “words”’ in Ecclesiastes.<sup>19</sup> This is also an overreach, though much less so. The first use of דבר in Ecclesiastes 12.10 does seem ambiguous, even playfully so:

בְּקֶשׁ קֹהֵלֶת לְמִצָּא דְבָרֵי־חֶפֶץ וְכָתוּב יֵשֶׁר דְּבָרֵי אֱמֶת:

The second instance of דברי here clearly means ‘words’—what else does one write?—but we should not therefore immediately assume that the first instance means the same thing simply because these lines are so clearly parallel.<sup>20</sup>

Now that we have seen that neither the Hebrew Bible’s nor Qohelet’s use of דבר elsewhere in the book (even in the plural) precludes the possibility of its ambiguity here, we need to consider the ample evidence suggesting its ambiguity here in 8a.

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24 total uses of the noun דבר in the book)(Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 268.).

<sup>19</sup>Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 109.

<sup>20</sup>I argued in ch. 2 for the first word of the book (דברי) as ambiguous, meaning not only ‘words of’ but acts of’. If valid, this is another example of an ambiguous plural use of דבר which supports דברים as possibly ambiguous here. The foundational position of דברי in 1.1 only strengthens the case.

(3) *Ecclesiastes 1.8a Means What It Meant (And What It Is Made to Mean)*. The fact that 8a is read, if even for a moment, as possibly meaning a multiplicity of things does not change. C.S. Lewis illustrates this truth in another context: 'Distant hills look blue. They still look blue even after you have discovered that this particular beauty disappears when you approach them. The fact that they look blue fifteen miles away is just as much a fact as anything else.'<sup>21</sup> The first three words as speaking to all things and not just to man and his words was our initial understanding, and it worked to link the movements of nature preceding 8a into what follows. Though 8b introduces new truth and may even change our understanding of 8a, our 'first-take' remains, and in that sense it remains true. It was so understood in the way in which its author laid it out, even if successive layouts change the landscape. The hills still looked blue, even if they now look green or brown.

Others reasons argue that *הדברים* in 8a speaks to 'things' and not only 'words', not least the strong connection between verses 7 and 8.<sup>22</sup>

(4) *Ecclesiastes 1.7 and 1.8 Coupled (Which Suggests 1.8a Speaks to Both Verses, Not Only to 1.8b-d)*. Verses 7 and 8 are coupled in a number of ways.<sup>23</sup> Firstly, the syntax and resulting rhythm of 8a and 7a align. Verses 7 and 8 both begin with *כל* and have the same metre in their opening lines, where the *כל* is stressed and followed by two words, the first

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<sup>21</sup>C. S. Lewis. *Present Concerns*. (London: Fount, 1986), 54.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 426. But see Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 73-74.

<sup>23</sup>See Frydrych, *Living under the Sun*, 117., who groups these verses to form their own stanza and points out a thematic connection between them I failed to notice.

word being four syllables and the second word being three, each word having a single stress on the final syllable. So, stress (כל); untress, unstress, unstress, stress (/הנחלים); unstress, unstress, stress (הדברים/יגעים). The syntax in 7a and 8a is the same: each כל is followed by a definite, masculine, plural noun which is followed by its corresponding verb. Both lines read, *kol ha\_\_im\_\_im*.<sup>24</sup> So the syntax connects verse 7 to verse 8, the end and consummation of the nature cycle to the beginning of the prologue's final word.

The layout of each verse may suggest their special connection to each other as well, since they are the first four-line verses in the prologue (verse 10 and 11 also have four lines each). Additionally, the rhythm of the last line in verse 7 seems to feed into the first line in verse 8, since both lines (7d and 8a) have three beats each (v7: 4:3||4:3, v8: 3:3||3:3). There are more obvious connections to make between the start of both verses.

This verse's opening phrase (כל־הדברים) is a construct-chain: the words are connected by more than proximity. Thus, the directness of הדברים transfers to כל. The best translation of כל would therefore convey 'the all'. 'The whole' is less awkward. 'The whole of words and things is wearying'. The comprehensiveness is staggering. Not only is every word and thing wearying, but all of every word and all of every thing. Qohelet is here speaking about creation in its totality and in its every, tiny part. This understanding,

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<sup>24</sup>In the case of 8a יגעים could be a participle or an adjective (attributive [weary words] or predicate [words are weary]). Its ambiguity follows from דברים and combines with it to set the pace for what follows (Even-Shoshan suggests a passive [adjectival] rendering, but the the context of line 8a is not decisive and offers up both passive and active readings as legitimate options. Even-Shoshan, *New Concordance [in Hebrew]*, 422.).

and the definiteness of כל itself, takes us back to the only other definite כל in the prologue: הכל הבל. Here (and in 7a) is a strong link to that blanket assessment. Simply in scrutinising the ה in הדברים, then, we see another way in which verse 8 acts as a linchpin of the prologue, by tying into the nature cycle in verses 5-7, serving as an entrée to what follows (vv. 9-11), and hooking back into the keynote verse that in many ways begins and characterises both prologue and book (1.2).

מלא also connects verses 7 and 8 and their respective subjects.<sup>25</sup> It is a signal word in both verses. It is the focus of verse 7, the final word of a three-word sentence into which the other parts of the verse pour. In verse 8, it (תמלא) is in the last line, connecting in construct to the third, final, consummate negative (לא). Its passivity (Niphal) here is doubly pronounced by way of its position, since it is the third and final negative clause in verse 8 and the book's first Niphal. This pronounced passivity combines with the word itself to recall and parallel the sea in verse 7, an entity which is nothing but passive, always receiving and never giving. This connection through מלא seems to argue that Qohelet is here saying that man and nature are in the same boat: both are wearying. In other words, 8d is a reiteration of 8a. This message readies us for verse 9, itself a reiteration of verse 3: there is nothing at all new under the sun.

The coordination between verses 7 and 8 argues a connection between their two subjects, between the consummation of the ennui of the natural elements and the complete weariness of man, his exhaustion and breakdown in every part. This strong connec-

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes, 110.

tion between both verses argues 8a as connection-point, as speaking to both nature and man, as looking both backward and forward. It is the link between both verses, the tie that binds nature and man, and as such the focus of the prologue, the pit into which the movements of man and nature fall, the essence or concentration of meaning of all that precedes (vv. 3-7) and of all that follows (vv. 8b-11).

The connections between verses 7 and 8 thus recommend הדברים in 1.8a as 'things' and not 'words'. Other connections do as well.

(5) *Connections Between Ecclesiastes 1.8 and 1.3-7.* In verses 5-7, each element is mentioned only anaphorically (is explicitly absent) in half of its respective verse. In verse 5, this occurs in the verse's second half.<sup>26</sup> In verse 6, it takes place in the first half;<sup>27</sup> and in verse 7, it occurs in the second half.<sup>28</sup> This syndrome occurs in verse 8 too. Man is named in the first half of the verse but not the second. He is referred to in the second half but only anaphorically, by way of synecdoche. Thus in verses 5, 6, 7, and 8, the primary subject is referred to explicitly in half of the verse and anaphorically in the other half. Contrasting features between nature in verses 5-7 and man in verse 8 notwithstanding, this shared phenomenon seems to connect rather than contrast its subjects. Not only this, but what connects them seems to be a certain diminishment, their apparent vigour (in the

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<sup>26</sup>Ecc1 1.5cd: ואל מקומו שואף זורח הוא שם.

<sup>27</sup>Ecc1 1.6abc: הולך אל דרום וסובב אל צפון סובב סבב.

<sup>28</sup>Ecc1 1.7efgh: אל מקום שהנחלים הלכים שם הם שבים ללכת. The streams are named here, but the sea is not. Neither is named in the final line (gh).

case of vv. 5-7) notwithstanding. Ecclesiastes 1.8a sums up this syndrome nicely. Still other features connect these verses.

Man is referred to in three ways in 8b-d; so are the elements in verses 5-7: there is an ostensible trio in each case.<sup>29</sup> In each case, the first of the trio seems representative. With the elements it is the sun; with man it is, well, man (אִישׁ). The following lines have him as an eye (עֵינַי) and an ear (אָזְנוֹ), respectively.

Four parts pertain to man and nature in each case as well, which also seems to bind them.<sup>30</sup> The elements are a trio but not only: including the earth (הָאָרֶץ), they are also a quartet. Similarly, verse 8 breaks down easily into four parts: ‘all things’ in 8a are the headwaters from which the triple-אֵל flows. The verse looks like this: כֹּל: לֵא, לֵא, לֵא—but also like this—all things>man, man (as part), man (as part). In each case, the verse starts with a (weary) fullness and tapers or diminishes. This concept connects man to the elements too. Verse 8 presents the whole man but broken down into his constituent parts. Verses 4-7 do the same with nature, featuring the four elements to present nature in its fullness (by way of merism, as we have seen), but doing so by describing each element in a certain isolation.<sup>31</sup> After reading through verses 4-7 we reach man in verse 8 and realise that he, like nature before him, has been stripped to his elements. As a sort of stanza, 4c-7 is all nature; but it is a standing earth, a tired sun, a frenzied wind, running

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Fredericks, and Estes, *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Solomon*, 73.

<sup>30</sup>Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*, 41.

<sup>31</sup>Even when two objects are joined in presenting one element, as in v. 7.

rivers, a voracious and dissatisfied sea.<sup>32</sup> Likewise in verse 8, man is presented in a sort of totality, but that is simply, almost pitifully, a solitary man who cannot speak, a dissatisfied eye, an ear ever un-full. The resonance with the preceding elements is hard to miss. It is a resonance that binds nature to man and man to nature. All meet in the middle, in 8a. At this point the prologue converges.<sup>33</sup>

My lineation of the prologue has verses 7 and 8 in its middle:

v. 3	2 lines
v. 4	2 lines
v. 5	2 lines
v. 6	3 lines
v. 7	4 lines
v. 8	4 lines
v. 9	3 lines
v. 10	2 lines
v. 11	2/4 lines

Rousseau's arrangement agrees.<sup>34</sup> These verses form multiple connections and chiasms,<sup>35</sup>

but one (irregular) chiasm puts 8a dead-center:

v. 1	A
v. 2	B
v. 3	C

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<sup>32</sup>Crenshaw calls the sea in v. 7 'insatiable' (Crenshaw, "Nothing New," 245.).

<sup>33</sup>See Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Nicht im Menschen*, 36.

<sup>34</sup>A fact I did not discover until I had done my own lineation. Rousseau, "Structure," 203.; so with Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 110.

<sup>35</sup>E.g. A: 1.1, B: 1.3, C: 1.5-7, C': 1.8, B': 1.9, A': 1.12.

v. 4 D  
v. 5 E  
v. 6 F  
v. 7 G  
v. 8 H, E'F'G'  
v. 9 C'  
v. 10 D'  
v. 11 B'  
v. 12 A'

This chiasm spotlights verse 8. It also segments it, much like man is segmented in the verse; and it isolates and highlights 8a,<sup>36</sup> the only portion in the prologue to lack a counterpart.

(6) *Other Features Set Ecclesiastes 1.8a Apart.* Three other features also isolate and accentuate 8a. Firstly, there is gender-matched parallelism (GMP). GMP parallels noun-pairs of opposite gender. In this verse, **הַדְּבָרִים** and **אִישׁ**, which are both masculine, anti-thetically parallel **עֵין** and **אֵזֶן**, which are both feminine:

כל הדברים (m) יגעים לא יוכל איש (m) לדבר לא תשבע עין (f) לראות ולא תמלא אذن (f) משמע

A few facts add cogency to this GMP construction, supporting it as a purposeful, textual reality rather than the fabrication of a fevered imagination. Firstly, the parallels divide

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<sup>36</sup>Nishimura also contends that 8a is the center of what he calls a well-structured prologue, though he does not include Eccl 1.1, and his '8a' is my '8ab'—the first half of v. 8 (Toshiaki Nishimura, "Un Mashal de Qohelet 1, 2-11," RHPR 1 (1979)).

the verse as it asks to be read, into bicolons, rather than into some awkward layout. Secondly, עין can be masculine or feminine; the fact that Qohelet treats it as feminine here argues for purposive artistry (rendering a balanced m:m::f:f rather than m:m:m:f). Thirdly, the chief function of GMP is the presentation of totality, or 'a global picture'.<sup>37</sup> Verse 8 does that, as the 'all things' of 8a and the way man and the elements speak to one another through it both illustrate. Another function of GMP is to 'heighten antithesis'.<sup>38</sup> Verse 8 does this as well, serving through its many connections to both compare and contrast man and the elements. Both are bound in a relationship characterised by contrast-through-connection. Verse 8 encapsulates this dynamic while also possibly indicating an antithesis that exists not only between man and nature but within man himself. Like the elements, he seems conflicted by what holds him together, by what constitutes him. More on this below. Fourthly, this is the only GMP in the prologue. Like so many other aspects of verse 8, it is outstanding, singular, exceptional. Fifthly and perhaps most interestingly, GMP distinguishes כל from the rest of the verse, separating it from what follows:

כל (m) הדברים (m) יגעים לא יוכל איש (m) לדבר לא תשבע עין (f) לראות ולא תמלא און (f)

משמע

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<sup>37</sup>Watson, Hebrew Poetry, 125.

<sup>38</sup>Watson, Hebrew Poetry, 125.

The כל is a masculine noun. It stands apart from the four, following nouns that constitute an instance of GMP. In construct to הדברים, however, it clearly belongs to that line and to what follows it as well. The fact is, this כל serves as a bridge that connects verses 7 and 8 and their respective stanzas and subjects, nature and man. Belonging wholly to neither (water nor man, nature nor man), it connects both. The straightforward meaning of 8a illustrates this fact: all things are weary. In this line, in this single, initial word, all things are concentrated, gathered, and expressed.

Not a few are unsure as to what exactly to do with this line (8a). Garrett goes so far as to say that '[t]he Masoretes erred in punctuating the line as the beginning of verse 8 instead of as the end of v. 7'.<sup>39</sup> Most others place it with 8b-d, but all appreciate its ambiguity. Does 8a in fact belong with verse 7 or with verse 8? Does it speak to the elements and their movements as 'things' (vv. 5-7) or to man and his inability to speak (8b)? The answer to both questions is, 'yes'. GMP links הדברים (m) in 8a to איש (m) in 8b and both of these lines to their antithetical parallel<sup>40</sup> in 8cd. So 8a belongs to verse 8: it is linked to it. כל is linked in construct to הדברים, and הדברים is the core of 8a, which is linked to 8b through GMP, chiasm, and in other ways, as we have seen. And 8b is linked to 8c and d through the triple-לא and parallel syntax, as we have also seen. And yet, כל does not wholly belong to 8a or to the rest of verse 8. Nor does it belong to verse 7. But it speaks to it and to what follows. Utterly alone and utterly connected, כל is a condensed, one-word

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<sup>39</sup>Garrett, Ecclesiastes, 286.

<sup>40</sup>In terms of GMP.

expression of the separation-through-connection of all things in Qohelet's creation. And it is no random word. Definite as it is,<sup>41</sup> it calls back to the הכל of הכל הבל in verse 2. That word, too, was utterly connected within the fabric of verse 2 yet unique amidst a host of *hevels* and in that sense, alone. This word, this כל in 8a, is utterly alone and utterly connected in a way that conceptually recalls its lexical twin in verse 2. As a bridge between nature and man, an entrée into what follows in verse 8, yet belonging wholly neither to verse 7 or verse 8, it and the line in which it resides are an expression and crystallisation of what הכל הבל looks like and means within creation.

So GMP illustrates the uniqueness of 8a. The second feature that illustrates its uniqueness is a facet of the chiasm I laid out above, where the trio of 8b-d speaks in some fashion to the trio in verses 5-7. The 'all things/words' of 8a is left alone in the middle. It is the stable center. The trios on either side of it connect to one-another.<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly, of the four lines in this verse, only 8a lacks a back-to-back stress:

כל הדברים יגעים  
לא יוכל איש לדבר  
לא תשבע עין לראות  
ולא תמלא אֶזְנוֹן משמע<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>It is articular, effectively הכל, through its construct-connection to the articular הדברים.

<sup>42</sup>I elaborate and nuance this aspect of the relationship between 8b-d and vv. 5-7 below.

<sup>43</sup>The stressed syllables are underlined.

This repeated stress occurs in the same place in each of the last three lines (8b-d), in every case binding the negative verbal collocation to its corresponding subject, thereby punctuating it. This shared accentual feature adds to the parallel syntax and subject matter of these lines, further connecting them and setting them apart from their distinct source, 8a.

Fourthly and finally, intertextuality argues for the distinction of 8a from 8b-d.

There is one other text in the Hebrew Bible that contains the triple-לא laid out here in Ecclesiastes 1.8. It is Ezekiel 7.19:

כספם בחוצות ישליכו וזהבם לנדה יהיה כספם וזהבם לא יוכל להצילם ביום עברת יהוה נפשם לא

ישבעו ומעיהם לא ימלאו כי מכשול עונם היה<sup>44</sup>

What is more, the triplet is in the same order in both texts. I will discuss the possible significance of these parallels below, but for our purposes here it is enough to point out the obvious fact that there is correspondence in Ezekiel 7.19 to Ecclesiastes 1.8b, c, and d but not to 8a. This seems one more way in which 8a is distinguished from what follows, 'set apart' and so in some way unique. It is clearly connected to 8b-d, but it is not wholly 'of

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<sup>44</sup>“They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing; their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD; they cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity’.

them'. It is also connected to verse 7 but is something else, something new. These three words (8a) are a bridge that connects nature to man. In so doing they speak to all creation, to 'all things' and not simply to 'all words' (and thus only to man), in a highly condensed expression that echoes and expounds הכל הבל.

We have seen that הדברים in 8a is initially understood ambiguously, if perhaps at first as things, matters, or affairs. Its straightforward use in 8b to mean say or speak tempts the reader to read this unambiguous meaning back over הדברים in 8a. We have argued that syntactical, metrical, and semantic cues in this and preceding verses militate against this rereading. For reasons that should become more clear, any resolution of the ambiguity here in 8a should be resisted in favour of a fuller, more opaque, less decisive reading. So much for הדברים. What about the rest of the line (8a)? It too is wearying.

Is יגעים an adjective (weary) or a participle (wearying)? The construction permits both; the context is ambiguous and the form is unique, so neither is of decisive help. Although the ambiguous positioning of the line (between 'things' in preceding verses and 'words' to follow) and the ambiguity of הדברים are of no decisive help in our interpreting יגעים, they are of help. Seow convincingly argues that 'wearying' is the best translation of יגעים since it preserves the ambiguity of יגעים in 8a, allowing הדברים to be both weary and wearisome.<sup>45</sup> Such a translation leaves יגעים ambiguous, just like הדברים which precedes it. This translation respects the context of יגעים and permits its meaning the farthest possible reach, which, again, is consistent with כל and הדברים before it and with the

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<sup>45</sup>Seow, Ecclesiastes, 109.

location of the line in the prologue. םיגע' as wearying here in 8a can thus speak to the fact that all words and things are weary (adj.) but that they are also in the process of wearying and, perhaps, of wearying things around them (ptc.). In this way, the word could be understood in stative (adj.), passive, and active senses (ptc.).<sup>46</sup>

As previously mentioned, the first line of verse 8 can be read in at least six different ways. The only decisive word in this three-word line is the first one, בל. Nevertheless, every possible meaning of the phrase applies, their cumulative effect at once poignant, evocative, and ironically disproportionate to the length of the line. These words have wearied us. They too seem weary, unable exactly to express what perhaps they want to. They are weary things, and so now are we. Indeed, all words and things weary and are weary. So the first line in its plain readings and applications is replete with ambiguity and meaning.

This first line tells us that all things, not only all words, are wearying. But out of this assertion a key, nuancing truth emerges: man's wearying is the focus of the wearying of all things.

### **The First Three Words Speak Primarily to Man**

(1) *A Casual Reading, and Chiasm.* Although 8a speaks to all things, that is to all creation, it speaks primarily to man. A cursory reading of the verse reveals as much. As every commentator acknowledges, the second line (8b) makes clear that the first (8a) is

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<sup>46</sup>Hasel understands םיגע' as adjectival here and thinks that as such it indicates a passive state, but he also sees it as signaling an active process ('גע', *TDOT* 5:389).

directed at man and, specifically, at his speech. The following lines (8cd) are an elaboration of this fact. The chiasm that frames the first two lines<sup>47</sup> reinforces this point: the wearying of all things is also the wearying of all words and speaks especially to man.

(2) *Resonance with Ezekiel 7.19.* The resonance with Ezekiel 7.19 just mentioned argues this fact as well. Ecclesiastes 1.8a can be read, ought to be read, as referring to all creation, both to nature and to man. But its last three lines speak of man alone.<sup>48</sup> And he alone is addressed in Ezekiel 7.19, the text which corresponds to 1.8b-d but not to 1.8a. In Ezekiel 7.19, man alone, Israel alone, is to blame for the departure of God from His Temple. Idolatry is one root cause (cf. Eze 6.1ff.). Could Qohelet be saying something similar here, blaming man for the (wearying) state of creation? If Ecclesiastes 1.8 spoke to idolatry, we might suspect he is. This is, in fact, exactly what we find.

(3) *Semantic Connection Between יגע and Not Speaking, Seeing, or Hearing (to Satisfaction).* The semantic link between the connotations of יגעִים in 8a and the three אֵל־collocations in 8b-d also singles out man as the special recipient of the opening line's (8a's) impact. As I point out at some length below, the wearying in 8a and the unspeaking man, dissatisfied eyes, and un-full ears in 8b-d have at least two things in common. Firstly, they are physical shortcomings, depletions (8a) or dysfunctions (8b-d) that

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<sup>47</sup>Again, A: בַּל־הַדְּבָרִים, B: יַגְעִים B': לֹא־יִוְכַל A': אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר.

<sup>48</sup>Though they seem to echo, and thus refer to, the elements.

initially seem surface-level. But they drive deeper. This is the second thing *ע* and muteness, blindness, and deafness have in common,<sup>49</sup> especially when used in combination as they are here. In the Hebrew Bible, they are often not simply physical limitations but used metaphorically to signal more serious, (im)moral deficiencies. This connotation strings 8a and 8b-d together and reinforces the notion that 8a speaks especially to unspeaking, unseeing, unhearing man.

(4) *'Man' Not Perfectly Parallel to the 'Eye' and 'Ear'*. Finally, although 8b-d clearly belong together—each line has the same beginning (*ל*-construct), they all speak to man's physical (in)capacities, and they share a syntax (particle, verb, noun, infinitive)<sup>50</sup>—they are not exactly parallel. That is, 8b is not exactly parallel with 8c and d. There is a dissonance.<sup>51</sup> *איש* is not exactly parallel to *עין* and *אזן*, both of which are exactly parallel to each other. The latter two are body parts, the former a body, and more than a body, a man. Something like *פה* (mouth) or *לשון* (tongue) would have served better than *איש* if

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<sup>49</sup>Granted, a dissatisfied eye is not tantamount to blindness, nor an un-full ear to deafness; however, following the lead of 8b as they do (owing to the triplicate syntax of 8b-d which ties them together), Qohelet seems to be urging his reader to think in these categories (blindness, deafness [since 8b describes muteness]) while wanting for some reason to also use the wording he has, namely, *לא-תשב* and *לא-תמלא*. That 'reason' may be Eze 7.19. Together with *לא-יוכל* in 8b, these collocations provide strong evidence of an allusion to that verse. For more on this intertextuality, see below.

<sup>50</sup>Garrett says it better: 'The lines in v. 8b, c, d form a tristich consisting of three coordinate clauses that are structurally parallel. All three lines are of approximately the same length, and each is composed of a negative followed by a main verb, subject, and infinitive complement to the verb' (Garrett, Ecclesiastes, 286.).

<sup>51</sup>His helpful, technical analysis notwithstanding, Garrett misses this nuance, writing, 'Since lines 8b, c, d are parallel, they should be translated as such' (Garrett, Ecclesiastes, 286.).

Qohelet had been about achieving a perfect parallel. But apparently he was not. His artistry heretofore assures this author that he could have achieved this had he wanted to. But he did not.

(a) *All of Man Tied to the Wearying of All Things.* What then is he seeking to say through this 'ripple in the pond', this slight deviation in 8b, by giving us **שׂא** and not **פה** or **לשון** or some other body part? One reason may be that **שׂא** returns the reader to the subject of man (having left that subject in the first half of verse 4) with greater force and clarity than would three body parts in quick succession. The triplicate in 8b-d connects back to nature in verses 5-7, but man here in 8b connects to the line that directly precedes him in a way a mouth would not. It is a man in whole, man as **שׂא**, not man in part, who is corralled in chiasm (8ab) with this all-pervasive wearying. It is all of man, not mouth or tongue alone, who faces this wearying and who is fundamentally connected to it in a way nature is not.

In the same vein, if 8b gave us **פה** rather than **שׂא**, three elements of man would flow out of 8a just as three elements of nature (in vv. 5-7) flowed into it. As it is, however, the wording of 8b integrates the condition of man into the condition of all things (8a) in a way nature is not integrated. Again, all of man is connected to the syndrome that characterises all things in a way all of nature is not.

Moving on, **איש** provides a parallelism within the verse in a way that **פה** or something else like it<sup>52</sup> could not. The seeing eye and hearing ear stand for man (more on this below), but they do not stand for his mouth. The parallelism that **איש** thus provides the verse allows for the totality of man in his wearying to be underscored. 8a and 8b say that man is weary, and 8c and 8d say the same thing in a different way. **פה** in place of **איש** would have simply provided a litany of man's composite parts, in which case the verse would have read like this: all things are wearying: man is wearying (in what his mouth cannot say and eyes and ears cannot take in). As it is, however, the verse reads like this: all things are wearying: man is wearying (his words do not work right); man is wearying (neither do his eyes and ears work right). The choice of **איש** over **פה** repeats man's wearying in one verse in a way that **פה** would not, and in this repetition other words and images are used in order to nuance and amplify the fact being put forward (that all things, including man in particular, are wearying). In other words, the choice of **איש** over **פה** provides an ambiguous syntax in which the verse reads as a textbook case of synthetic parallelism<sup>53</sup> while simultaneously stringing 8b, 8c, and 8d together with a triplicate syntax. In this way, and in more ways as we will see, **איש** allows for a fuller and at the same time a more nuanced and thus more rich and difficult reading.

In 8b, because of 8cd, we expect **פה** but get **איש** instead. However, Qohelet does include **פה**, just not in this verse. He includes it through Ecclesiastes 6.7, a verse lexically

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<sup>52</sup>Perhaps **לשון** or even **שפה**.

<sup>53</sup>Where 8cd repeats, adds to, and emphasises 8ab.

connected to 1.8. Ecclesiastes 6.7 is the only other verse in the book to include לא תמלא. It provides the פה that this verse (1.8) is missing, a פה that fits well with the איש לדבר of 8b and lines up seamlessly with the eye and ear of 8c and 8d.<sup>54</sup>

כָּל־עֵמֶל הָאָדָם לְפִיָּהוּ וְגַם־הַנֶּפֶשׁ לֹא תִמְלָא:<sup>55</sup>

Read with 1.8, this verse complements and compounds its message. With his speaking mouth, his seeing eyes, and his hearing ears, man is wearying in his soul, his life, his core—his נפש. Besides providing a hint that the same author wrote both prologue and body in this book,<sup>56</sup> this coordination also speaks to the comprehensiveness with which Qohelet seeks to convey the wearying of all things, especially in relation to man. It touches every part of him, visible and invisible—his life in its totality.<sup>57</sup> This intertextuality is further evidence that Qohelet knowingly chose not to פה in 8b and to use איש instead. Again, we must ask ‘why?’

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<sup>54</sup>Watson affirms this type of linking of separate passages through the same word, calling such words catchwords in Watson, Hebrew Poetry, 288.

<sup>55</sup>‘All man's toil is for his mouth, and still his soul is not full’.

<sup>56</sup>Contra Longman (Longman III, Ecclesiastes, 57.), et al.

<sup>57</sup>The fact that Eccl 6.7 speaks to man's עמל should not be missed. Eccl 6.7 is linked through לא תמלא and פה to Eccl 1.8. The collocation כל-עמל האדם links it to Eccl 1.3. Eccl 6.7 thus links Eccl 1.3 to 1.8 in one more way, since they are already linked conceptually and lexically because their key words (עמל and יגע) are synonymous. See section below (‘Full Circle’) for more on this connection between these two words and the verses (in the prologue) they inhabit.

(b) *This Tells Us How to Read the Last Three Lines.* I said above that it is not mouth or tongue 'alone' spoken of in 8b because man's speech is implicated here by way of לדבר (and הדברים in 8a). This brings us to a crucial point and, perhaps, to the biggest reason for this small dissonance in the parallel between 8b and 8cd. The fact that 8b is the first effect in verse 8 of the wearying we read of in 8a may point to its being the most significant. Being the first of three and broader than the following two (איש encompasses עין and און), 8b seems to encompass the two lines that follow. The dysfunctional faculty involved seems to support this distinction and representation of 8b. It speaks of speech (לדבר), the next two lines of sight (לראת) and hearing (משמע). In the same way that איש is parallel to but distinct from עין and און, so is לדבר parallel to but distinct from לראת and משמע. It is different from the other two faculties: it alone distinguishes man from the beasts. Beasts, fowl, and fish can see and hear (some anyway), but they cannot speak.<sup>58</sup>

Simply put, the slight incongruity between איש in 8b and עין and און in 8c and 8d signals the slight yet more subtle incongruity between their corresponding verbs, between לדבר in 8b and לראות and משמע in 8c and 8d. The first line of the triplicate (8b) 'sets the pace' for the second and third (8c and 8d). It tells us how to read them. In the same way 8b distinguishes man from nature (beasts) by pinpointing man's speech, so do the deficiencies of man depicted in 8c and 8d. These last two lines do not describe

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<sup>58</sup>Not like man can in any case.

man neither seeing nor hearing. They describe man being dissatisfied with what he sees and hears. The last half of verse 8 does not point out a physical incapacity but a moral deficiency, something that, like 8b, separates man from the rest of (material) creation. Beasts can be blind and deaf, but they cannot be dissatisfied with what they do see and hear. Man can.<sup>59</sup>

However, just as 8b informs 8c and 8d, so do these last lines inform 8b. They (8c and d) hint not at physical incapacity but at moral degeneracy; so does 8b. Read within this rubric, we return to 8b and see that its meaning may be more profound than we had thought. Does this line really speak to man's moral condition? It does, and that through another slight incongruity with the lines that follow, with 8c and 8d.

Because 8c and 8d say that man cannot see and hear enough, and because they are hitched to 8b in triplicate syntax, we may want to read 8b in the same way, as saying that man cannot say enough, 'cannot say it'. But this is not what the second line says. It literally reads, 'man is not able to speak'.

Speech heads the litany of dysfunction listed in the last three lines. It reflects *imago Dei* in a way sight (8c) and hearing (8d) do not. Beasts have eyes and ears—they even have mouths and tongues—but they cannot speak (cf. Gen 2.19-20, 23; 3.1-5). Thus, to lose the faculty of speech is in some way tantamount to losing God's image, or at least to having it marred. It is to lose what makes man 'man', what separates him from the

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<sup>59</sup>Ambrose touches on this truth (Ancient Christian Commentary, 198-99.); also Hengstenberg, Ecclesiastes, 54-55.

beasts.<sup>60</sup> And what does Qohelet go on to say throughout the book but that there is no essential difference between man and beast, for all go to one place (3.20; cf. 5.14; 6.6; 9.10-11; 12.7). In Qohelet's world, this loss of difference between man and beast, between man and the rest of creation, is linked to death. That connection begins here, in this unassuming second line in verse 8. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear what these words in verse 8 are telling us, we will understand them to say much more than that man is simply incapable of 'taking it all in',<sup>61</sup> or even that his words are weary (as he is weary) and so incapable of articulating everything or, indeed, anything new or profitable.<sup>62</sup> Rather, or in addition to all that, these lines are telling us that the wearying of all creation is tied to a deep degeneracy in the seat of man.

The literal reading of line two (8b) helps us begin to understand these things. This reading has at least two advantages over the gloss. Firstly, it is not a gloss: it adds nothing, taking the text as it is. Secondly, it respects the imperfect parallelism that we have already established exists between 8b and 8cd. As we have seen, 8b is connected in triplicate syntax to 8c and d; but it stands apart from these last two lines as well. The literal reading is more consistent with the ways in which 8b is slightly irregular in comparison to 8c and 8d. As **שׂא** parallels **עין** and **אזן** but not perfectly, so does muteness imper-

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<sup>60</sup>Gen 2.19; cf. Garrett, *Ecclesiastes*, 287.

<sup>61</sup>This or something like it is the position of Schoors (*Schoors, Ecclesiastes*, 73, also see n. 40.); he lists many others in his note. So Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 6.; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 51.

<sup>62</sup>Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 115-16. is among many who hold this position or something similar.

factly parallel not blindness or deafness but the incapacity to see or hear to satisfaction.

The gloss misses this: it attempts to smoothe the burr of 8b.

This is not to say that the gloss gives a wrong understanding of this second line.

The verses that follow (vv. 9-11) seem to endorse the idea that Qohelet is saying here that no one can say what needs to be said and that even if he did, someone else would have said it before, someone else will say it after, and the words will be forgotten in any case.<sup>63</sup>

It is to say, however, that this gloss may miss everything the second line, and indeed the entire verse, is telling us. A literal reading of 8b pushes us toward this understanding and helps make sense of signals the surrounding lines and verses provide.

The great lesson that 8b as a deviation in the triplicate parallel of 8b-d has to teach us is that 8b directs 8c and 8d. It provides the hermeneutic for what follows, acting as a lens through which we are to read the latter half of verse 8. It begins the trio; it encompasses the trio (since 'man' encompasses/has 'eye' and 'ear'; and 'speech', not 'sight' or 'hearing', is in some way man's defining characteristic, the sense-faculty that separates him from the rest of material creation); and as such it directs the trio: it tells us how to read what follows it and what is closely connected to it through same syntax (negative particle, verb, noun, infinitive) and start (כִּי). 8b reads 'man cannot speak'. Although the others are not exactly parallel—they read, respectively, 'eye is not satisfied with seeing' (8c) and 'ear is not full with hearing' (8d)—they are to be read in-line with 8b; they are to be read as 8b directs. We are to understand them as saying, 'eye cannot see' and 'ear can-

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<sup>63</sup>So Seow, Ecclesiastes, 115-16.

not hear'. Once we do, we read the last three lines in verse 8 as saying, 'man cannot speak, cannot see, and cannot hear'. It is a familiar image. It is the image of an idol.

Psalm 115.5-6 reads, 'They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses but do not smell'. This is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible that contains שמע, אָזַן, רָאָה, עֵינַי, דְּבַר, פֶּה.<sup>64</sup> As we have seen, Ecclesiastes 1.8 contains all of them but פֶּה, yet Qohelet creates a unique link between Ecclesiastes 1.8 and Ecclesiastes 6.7, and Ecclesiastes 6.7 provides פֶּה to complete the picture. Ps 115.8 tells us what happens to those who worship idols: they become like them. That is, they have mouths that cannot speak (what needs to be spoken), eyes that cannot see (to satisfaction), and ears that cannot hear (to capacity). If this diagnosis of an idolatrous people sounds familiar, it is because Qohelet uses it in his prologue, here in verse 8, to diagnose man directly following his diagnosis of nature. Here is the reason for the complete, pervasive exhaustion of all creation. It is moral. It is man's rebellion.<sup>65</sup>

Questions, however, spring to mind. Why if Qohelet wants to express man's rebellion as at the center of the wearying of all things does he not say so clearly? If he is saying that man is like an idol—dumb, blind, and deaf—why not say that he cannot

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<sup>64</sup> Ps 135.16-17 is a parallel passage that uses the verb אָזַן for 'hear' rather than שמע but which, unlike Ps 115.5-6, includes the breath (רוּחַ) of man's mouth in its litany. Also cf. Ex 4.11.

<sup>65</sup>In his commentary on this section of Eccl 1.8 Luther quotes Jer 17.9, 'the heart of man is depraved and inscrutable' (Martin Luther. Notes on Ecclesiastes, Lectures on the Song of Solomon, Treatise on the Last Words of David. Luther's Works, Vol. 15 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1972), 19.). Also cf. Hengstenberg, Ecclesiastes, 55-56., who connects this verse to man's idolatry.

cannot speak, cannot see, and cannot hear rather than merely saying what he does in 8c and 8d, which is that man's eye is not satisfied with seeing nor his ear with hearing? Put assertively, Qohelet is not saying that man cannot speak, see, or hear but that he cannot speak, see, or hear to satisfaction.<sup>66</sup>

The fact is, Qohelet does give us the syntagmatic signals through this complex, near-perfect but slightly deviated parallelism that indicate idolatry, but they are somewhat obscure, even esconced. Why? Firstly, if speech and sight and hearing are faculties of man which truly are in disrepair, then he will not speak or see or hear what Qohelet is saying, the truth Qohelet has hidden away in these words. Obscuring the full, moral payload of these lines may be a form of mimesis: as most of us read these words, we do not see or hear their full meaning. In this way the truth of these words is confirmed in our reading of them. Another mimetic effect may be operating here. Perhaps Qohelet has partially hidden the payload of this verse because he has had to work to discover this truth, and he wants his reader to work to discover it as well. And as we work to understand this verse, we weary, and in so doing we once again confirm the truth this words (8a) convey. Also, simply put, plain-speak is not always Qohelet's way. His style often tends toward obfuscation, or at least toward toward cryptic, dense truth content. If nothing else, the beginning (1.2) and the end (12.1-8) of the book confirm this. Couched as it is, slightly erratic and enigmatic as it is, verse 8 tempts the reader to look for easy explanation in what follows, in verses 9-11. These verses seemingly provide that easy explanation

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<sup>66</sup>Though as we have seen, he does actually say that man cannot speak.

and satisfy most readers. The trap thus snaps shut. Another reader has unwittingly proved the apparent truth verse 8 purports by being unable to see and hear enough. Another reason, however, and one which seems more certain, takes us out of this text and out of Ecclesiastes altogether. It takes us back to Ezekiel.

(c) *Corroborating Evidence*

(i) *Ecclesiastes 1.8 and Ezekiel 7.19*

There are only two verses in the Hebrew Bible that contain the three collocations, לא יוכל, לא מלא and לא שבע. Ecclesiastes 1.8 is one of them. Ezekiel 7.19 is the other. Not only that, but we have seen, this verse contains all three collocations in the exact order in which Ecclesiastes 1.8 presents them.

כספם בחוצות ישליכו וזהבם לנדה יהיה כספם וזהבם לא יוכל להצילם ביום עברת יהוה נפשם לא  
ישבעו ומעיהם לא ימלאו כי מכשול עונם היה<sup>67</sup>

Having established the correspondence between these verses, we need to consider the context of Ezekiel 7.19 more carefully. In Ezekiel 7, Israel's corruption has reached its apogee; as a consequence, God is about to depart from his Temple in Jerusalem (Eze

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<sup>67</sup>“They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing; their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD; they cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity’.

10.18ff.). In this text, Israel is to blame for her own sorry state and for God's departure. The problem is idolatry (Eze 6.4, 6, 9, 13). This is the very thing to which all three collocations that correspond to Ecclesiastes 1.8 speak. Their idols are not able (לא יוכל) to satisfy them (לא ישבעו) or to fill them (לא ימלאו). The portion of Ecclesiastes 1.8 which corresponds to Ezekiel 7.19 also speaks solely to man (not to nature), to Israel in fact (Eccl 1.1, 12). Is this verse, like its allusive correspondent, placing the blame for the wearying of all things on man, on Israel? It is more than a little curious that idolatry is so germane to the meaning of Ezekiel 7.19 and that in the only Hebrew Bible text that shares its three negative collocations, Ecclesiastes 1.8, the language of idolatry threads through, even constitutes, the verse. Is Qohelet saying that idolatry is somehow integrally related to the syndrome that grips, binds, and wearies creation? I think he is. Other aspects of verse 8 support this contention.

*(ii) Eyes That Do Not See and Ears That Do Not Hear*

The imperfect parallel of שׂאִי with עֵין and אָזן also isolates and thus couples עֵין and אָזן: only they are perfectly parallel. Do these two nouns (עֵין and אָזן) tell us something together that they might not tell us alone? Is this pairing used throughout the Hebrew Bible? If so, how? Perhaps more importantly, are עֵין and אָזן used with their corresponding verbs (infinitives here: לִרְאוֹת and מִשְׁמַעַת) and paired in collocation elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible?

The eye/ear pairing is often used in a sense that carries strong moral and spiritual (even creational or new-creational)<sup>68</sup> connotations.<sup>69</sup> In a representative verse, Moses tells the second-generation Israelites on the verge of entering Canaan,

וְלֹא־נָתַן יְהוָה לְכֶם לֵב לְדַעַת וְעֵינַיִם לִרְאוֹת וְאָזְנִים לִשְׁמָע עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:<sup>70</sup>

God commissions Isaiah with similar, chilling words:

הַשְׁמֹן לַבַּהֶעָם הַזֶּה וְאָזְנָיו תִּכְבֵּד וְעֵינָיו הִשַׁע פֶּן־יִרְאֶה בְּעֵינָיו וּבְאָזְנָיו יִשְׁמָע וּלְבָבוֹ יִבִּין וְשָׁב וּרְפָא לוֹ:<sup>71</sup>

In both cases, the eyes and ears are aligned with the heart, which is the 'primary locus of divine evaluation of people's spiritual state' in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>72</sup> This suggests that the eye/ear pair serves a similar function, at least in some contexts.

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<sup>68</sup>As in the case of some of the Isaianic occurrences (see below).

<sup>69</sup>See, e.g., Ex 15.26; Isa 11.3, 30.20-1, 32.3, 33.15, 35.5, 43.8; Jer 5.21; Eze 8.18, 12.2, 44.5; Ps 94.9, 115.5-6, 135.17; Job 42.5; Prov 4.20-1, 15.30-1, 20.12 (following v. 11); Dan 9.18; Neh 1.6; 1 Chr 29.8.

<sup>70</sup>'but to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear' (Deut 29.4).

<sup>71</sup>'Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed' (Isa 6.10); cf. Isa 42.18-20, Jer 5.21; Eze 8.18, 12.2.

<sup>72</sup>לֵב, *NIDOTTE* 2:751.

Together with ‘a heart to understand’, ‘eyes to see’ and ‘ears to hear’ are mentioned in combination in Isaiah 6.9-10 as a synecdoche for the whole of man and his ability to respond to stimuli, to commands, as a sentient and spiritual being (cf. also *2 Kin 19.16*; Isa 32.3-4, 33.15, 37.17, 64.3; Eze 40.4, 44.5; *Job 13.1, 29.11*; *Dan 9.18*, where the italicised include references that mention ראה, עין, שמע, אזן and not לבב). While Ecclesiastes 1.8 lacks ‘heart’ the text supplies it a few verses later (v. 13).<sup>73</sup> Some of the passages also involving eyes and ears in combination are a call to action (*2 Kin 19.16/Isa 37.17, Dan 9.18*), sometimes from man to God (*2 Kin 19.16/Isa 37.17, Dan 9.18*). At times, the action required (or expected) is one of obedience or attention to God’s word; sometimes it is a call to do right, at other times to avoid wrong (Isa 33.15; Eze 40.4, 44.5). The fact that Qohelet uses these familiar Hebrew Bible pairings to express the fatigue and listlessness of man—and through him of creation—is highly significant. Those receptacles in man which ought to receive and transmit life have broken down into a wearying dissatisfaction. What is worse, man seems here to be characterised as dumb, deaf, and blind to the life-giving, life-sustaining words of God.

Idols and wicked, foreign nations are also described as having eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, the righteous are described as having open eyes and ears, and in similar fashion God’s eyes and ears are said to be open to the righteous<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>A fact which again links the prologue to what follows and so advocates one author for Eccl 1.1-11 and Eccl 1.12ff.

<sup>74</sup>See respectively Ps 115.5-7 and Isa 43.8.

<sup>75</sup>Ex 15.26; Isa 30.19, 32.3-4, 33.15; Ps 34.15; 2 Chr 6.40, 7.15.

(but not, it is assumed, to the wicked). Israel is even described as having open eyes and ears but prophetically so, as a renewed people under the coming, new covenant.<sup>76</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible, to have eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear is never good, hardly if ever literal, and often a metaphor for spiritual deadness that is a consequence of moral rebellion before the living God.<sup>77</sup>

This reading of eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear in the Hebrew Bible is not an injection of alien meaning into Ecclesiastes 1.8. It is consonant with a literal reading of the verse's second line (where a man who cannot speak images an idol and a loss of *imago Dei*) and with the way in which the second line directs a reading of the last two lines. It also agrees with the way Qohelet ends the verse, with ears that do not hear (שמע). In Hebrew Bible-speak, this is close to if not synonymous with disobedience. This reading is also consonant with the way the verse begins, namely with connotations of יגעים. Perhaps most importantly, as we saw in chapter 2, it is also consistent with a major use of *hevel* in the Hebrew Bible which speaks to idolatry.

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<sup>76</sup>Isa 30.20-21, 32.3-4.

<sup>77</sup>On a related note, dissatisfaction (לא תשבע) here in Eccl 1.8 may also be a sign of curse. In the HB, to die 'satisfied' (שבוע) or full of days is a sign, in death (the clearest, universal sign of curse), of a life blessed by God (e.g. Gen 25.8, 35.29). In the context of death that this prologue provides (Eccl 1.4a, 11), man described as 'not satisfied' may carry with it the implication, not of God's blessing in death, but of God's curse. This would be consistent with the other signals we seem to have detected throughout verse 8, in itself, in its immediate context, and allusively. Furthermore, to be satisfied in life seems to often be a Hebraism for 'blessed'; cf. Lev 25.19, Deut 8.10; Deut 33.23 parallels 'sated with favour' with 'full of the LORD's blessing'; conversely, 'not satisfied' [לא תשבעו] is a sign of curse [Lev 26.26]).

In the sections that follow, we will first consider the end of verse 8 and then move to its beginning, returning full circle to 8a and יגעִים, a word that characterises the verse, prologue, and book by conveying a malaise more profound than physical fatigue.

*(iii) The Last Line and the Languidness of Man*

The last line is an exclamation-point on the thorough weariness and moral torpor of man. It also further connects this torpor to the ailing state of nature. Working through the trio (8b-d), we see that the one active sense—speech—is inactive, inoperable. The next two senses, sight and smell (8cd), are receptive and so passive. This last sense and final line (8d) underscores man's passivity, which underscores his weariness, by being the only Niphal stem not only in this triad in verse 8 but in the prologue. As the start of the last line, the final component in the triad, and the only Niphal in the prologue, ולא־תמלא stands out in its passivity.<sup>78</sup> In 8b-d, there is a verbal progression from active/intensive (Piel: לְדַבֵּר) to neutral (Qal: תִּשְׁבַּע) to passive (Niphal: תִּמְלֵא). It may indicate regression, which may indicate wearying. In any case, there is here a progression (or regression) from active to receptive senses, from active speech (8b) to partly active (in that it searches) but partly receptive (in that it receives light and impressions) sight (8c) to 'truly passive' or re-

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<sup>78</sup>Strong describes תמלא here as 'truly passive', which he says owes to the completely receptive function of the ear, as compared to the perceived active, searching capacity of the eye (James Strong. *A Complete Hermeneutical Manual on the Book of Ecclesiastes*. Logos Bible Software, 48.).

ceptive hearing (8d).<sup>79</sup> The wearying we are told of in 8a progresses through the verse and culminates in 8d.

The fact that מלא is the focal word of verse 7 accentuates ולא-תמלא at the end of verse 8 even more, and this accentuation again underscores the passivity of man in this verse. This lexical connection to verse 7 and to the passive sea (מלא in v. 7 modifies הים) reminds the reader of the connection 8a made: all things are wearying. In light of what we have uncovered, 8d seems to reiterate the fact that it is man's fault.

The last word in this last line may also speak to this reality. Qohelet selects and places his words with precision. His decision to end the prologue proper's key verse with שמע rather than with דבר or ראה is significant. The word clearly means 'hearing' here; but like so much of what precedes, it may also have a deeper meaning. It is a *leitwort* in Deuteronomy, where it occurs as a percentage of total words double that of the next highest book in the Torah.<sup>80</sup> Nowhere is it more prominent than in Deuteronomy 6.3-4, where it opens each verse. The word is so prominent here that verse 4 is commonly referred to simply as the *Shema* (שמע) by Jews. It was and remains prominent in the collective Israelite consciousness. The call is one to hear and to obey the law of the Lord. As a verse embedded in the cultural memory of Israel, it also recalls the history surrounding the injunction: Israel failed, egregiously and repeatedly, to keep the law and was eventually exiled because of it. The book itself opens and closes with this acknowledgement (Deut

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<sup>79</sup>Strong, *A Complete Hermeneutical Manual on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, 48.

<sup>80</sup>3.98 hits per thousand words (92x), compared to 1.96 hits per thousand words in Genesis (63x). Leviticus has but seven occurrences. Accordance Bible Software.

1.26-46, 32.5-47).<sup>81</sup> שמע speaks thus to hearing but also to obedience and to the lack thereof in Israel's sordid history. The word שמע at the end of verse 8 seems to call these truths to mind.

Put simply, the Hebrew word for 'hear' can also mean 'obey'.<sup>82</sup> This double meaning is often exploited, and thus of course understood, in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>83</sup> It is the same today. I tell my kids that their problem is that they do not listen to me; what I mean is that they do not obey.

The fact that Qohelet places שמע last here in his key verse, at the end of a trio of negative clauses—as a sort of inverse (or perverse) consummation—may point not only to man's lack of hearing but to his lack of obedience.<sup>84</sup> Barbour has shown how the book draws on Israel's historical memory for deeper meaning, and we have begun to see how the prologue alone does the same thing.<sup>85</sup> Could Qohelet be drawing on prominent uses of שמע like the ones in Deuteronomy to underscore to the Israelite mind and memory the profundity of its failure to keep the law, only to outline the anthropological and cosmic

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<sup>81</sup>Dempster, *Dominion*, 120-21.

<sup>82</sup>'שמע', *DCH* 8:456, 461.

<sup>83</sup>Examples abound. The supreme example may be in Deut 6.4-5: what Israel is to hear (v. 4) they are to obey (v. 5).

<sup>84</sup>The שמע that starts Deut 6.4 is followed by a well-known triplicate (in v. 5): heart (לבב), soul (נפש), and strength (מאד). That שמע ends Eccl 1.8 as the last word in a prominent triplicate within the prologue may be one detail which argues for a resonance between these verses. If so, its use here in verse 8 would point to Israel's failure to fully hear (and obey) the law of God given to it.

<sup>85</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*.

consequences that have resulted? This sort of question cannot be answered conclusively. If it were true, it would be consistent with other evidence the verse provides.<sup>86</sup> Man is the reason for this wearying. His failures are moral, not just mechanical, and they have affected everything. שמע here at the tail-end of verse 8 makes this connection, at least, fairly clear.

In sum, man's hearing is significantly related to receptivity to God's word.<sup>87</sup> To hear is to obey,<sup>88</sup> or ought to be anyway. The fact that the verse begins with the wearying of all things, moves to the failure of man's words, and ends with the failure of man's hearing is significant.<sup>89</sup> Obliquely, discretely, Qohelet is giving us the reason for the wearying

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<sup>86</sup>Not to mention the prologue, book, and book's position in some canonical renderings. The probable late date relative to the other books that were to comprise the HB allows for this possibility. In some canonical orderings of the HB, Eccl (Qohelet) is followed by the exilic/post-exilic Dan—Chron. The liturgical ordering of the hagiographa places Eccl directly before Lam (Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism*, 207.); the *NJPS* presents Eccl after Lam and directly before Esther; cf. too Dempster, *Dominion*, 51.; Timothy H. Lim. *The Formation of the Jewish Canon*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 189-92.

<sup>87</sup>E.g. Deut 4.1, 5.1, 6.4.

<sup>88</sup>שמע of course meaning both to hear and to obey in biblical Hebrew. In Isa 50.4-5, it is said of the Servant that the Lord opens his ear to obey.

<sup>89</sup>The verse's 'last word' (lexeme) is literally and figuratively שמע.

of all things. It is man's rebellion, encapsulated in his failure to speak, see, and hear.<sup>90</sup>

This returns us to the first line and to יגע׳ים in particular.

### **Full Circle: The First Three Words and the Wearing of All Things**

(1) *A Wearing That is More Than Mechanical.* We have seen that the moral connotations that often accompany the eye/ear pairing in the Hebrew Bible seem present in the language of the last two lines of verse 8. The beginning (8b) and ending (8d) of the triplicate argue in this direction, as does the beginning of the verse.

Returning to the opening line, we recall יגע׳ים as the last word in that line (8a). יגע׳ may not just speak to physical depletion because it is suggestive and so, like so many words in this prologue, not apparent but profound. The word speaks on the surface to physical wearing but drives deeper into a more total exhaustion of soul. This agrees with a typical use of יגע׳ in the Latter Prophets, especially in Isaiah. Speaking of יגע׳, David Thompson writes, 'Exhaustion beyond physical depletion is usually denoted . . .'<sup>91</sup> He goes on to cite Isaiah 57.10, where a depraved Israel is worn out by her adulterous ways.<sup>92</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup>As mentioned above, Qoh does not use שׂא׳ often (10x, and only here in the prologue), normally opting for the more generic ׀א׳ instead (49x). This proportion of שׂא׳ to ׀א׳ is unequalled in any other book of the HB (Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 44-45.). There is one HB section, however, that not only matches but surpasses the ratio created by Qoh. It is Gen 1-3 (Eccl ratio is 4.9 to 1; Gen 1-3 ratio is 6.5 to 1). Considering our analysis of Eccl 1.8 and its speaking to man's rebellion as the cause of cosmic weariness, it is perhaps at least worthy of note that שׂא׳ appears for only the third time in Gen 3.6, the verse that presents man's rebellion, after which creation begins to fall into disrepair and death.

<sup>91</sup>'יגע׳', *NIDOTTE* 2:400; also see 'יגע׳', *TDOT* 5:391-92. See also Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 71.

<sup>92</sup>The word occurs in Isaiah far more than in any other book (twelve times, compared to the next highest, two). It is often in the context of Israel's disobedience (e.g. Isa

sense is nothing if not moral. Although it is mainly the Prophets who use the term in this way,<sup>93</sup> this prologue has been cast in something of a prophetic mould.<sup>94</sup> Qohelet speaks with prophetic authority here, seems to echo the Prophets, and proclaims a message largely consistent with them,<sup>95</sup> if not also corrective of them.<sup>96</sup> It would therefore not be unnatural for him to use a term central to the prologue as it is used by the Prophets. A preponderance of evidence preceding יגעים in 8a and subsequent to it in 8d supports this understanding of יגעים as it is used here in verse 8.

In sum, the lexeme יגע alone creates a suspicion of spiritual torpor. The first line's strong link to man and his muteness in 8b only strengthens the suspicion. The exposition of this second line (man cannot speak) by two latter lines (8cd) whose semantic content points to spiritual deadness and rebellion agrees with what the first half of the verse seemed to be speaking. The unique correspondence of the triple-negative in 8b-d to Ezekiel 7.19 confirms our suspicions. 'Not . . . hearing' (לֹא . . . מִשְׁמַע) as a frame for the verse's final line is added fuel to the fire of this argument. Once we see and feel the flame,

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43.22-24; 47.12, 15; 57.10). When it is not, her disobedience often seems relevant, as in Isa 40.28, 30, 31 for instance, where God's promise of renewal intrudes in the face of and as a remedy to Israel's apostasy and wickedness (so 'גע', *NIDOTTE* 2:400). Similar things can be said for instances of יגע in new creation contexts (e.g. Isa 62.8, 65.23). Cf. also Lam 5.5, also cited and quoted by Thompson ('גע', *NIDOTTE* 2:400).

<sup>93</sup>Isa (12x), Jer (45.3, 51.58), Hab (2.13), Mal (2.17). However, see Deut 28.33; Ps 78.46, 109.11; Jer 20.5; Hag 1.11, all of which speak to labour/the fruit of labour (יגיע) being wiped away in judgment ('גע', *TDOT* 5:392).

<sup>94</sup>Cf. chs. 1 and 7.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. chs. 1, 2, and my conclusion at the end of this paper.

<sup>96</sup>Cf. ch. 7.

we see it burning not only in this verse but at key points in what we have read so far. It traces back to verses 3 and 2 in particular.

(2) *The Connection Between יגע and עמל*. The moral roots of the wearying of all things touches every verse in the prologue and every subject within it, not just verse 8 and man. The semantic connection between the signal words in verses 8 and 3, יגע and עמל respectively, shows this. יגעים in Ecclesiastes 1.8 is an adjective or a participle and means 'wearying', both weary and wearisome. The related lexeme יגיע is a noun that means 'labour' or 'toil'.<sup>97</sup> The connection between it and יגעים is clear enough: toil is wearying. Furthermore, the verb יגע can mean 'to labour or toil' as well as 'to weary'.<sup>98</sup> These semantic connections recall both instances of עמל as noun and verb in 1.3 and indicate a strong conceptual link between both verses, between 1.3 and 1.8 and all between them.<sup>99</sup> Both words (עמל and יגעים) dominate both verses, respectively. עמל characterises 1.3: it holds the verse together, and it casts forward into the verses that follow by posing a question the rest of the prologue answers.<sup>100</sup> יגעים characterises Ecclesiastes 1.8: 8b-d flows from it, and it casts backward into the verses that precede it. Thus, עמל and יגעים

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<sup>97</sup>Gen 31.42; Deut 28.33; Isa 41.15, 55.2; Jer 3.24, 20.5; Eze 23.29; Hos 12.9; Hag 1.11; Ps 78.46, 109.11, 128.2; Job 10.3, 39.11, 39.16; Neh 5.13.

<sup>98</sup>יגיע, DCH 4:81. KJV translates both עמל in Eccl 1.3 and יגע in Eccl 1.8 as 'labour'.

<sup>99</sup>Midrash Rabbah renders Eccl 1.8a 'All things toil to weariness' (*H. Freedman, and Maurice Simon, eds. Midrash Rabbah: Ecclesiastes (London: Socino Press, 1939), 25.*).

<sup>100</sup>Fox, Ecclesiastes, 4.

speak to each other semantically but also contextually.

Since 1.3 is the first exposition of 1.2, a verse that speaks to the entire prologue and book, the connection between its key word (עמל) and the key word in 1.8 (יגע) underscores the comprehensiveness of verse eight's message. It speaks not only to the entire prologue but to the entire book.<sup>101</sup> If we extrapolate, this means that Qohelet's obsession with death and its leveling effects as seen throughout the book is rooted in his understanding of man's disobedience to God's word. The much-debated epilogue to the book would thus not be a sanitizing of the book that at least partly conflicts with its message<sup>102</sup> but in full agreement with one of the book's key thrusts.<sup>103</sup>

### (3) *Hevel*

(a) *Ecclesiastes 1.2*. What does verse 8 tell us about *hevel*? Its first three words say that man and nature are merging as one, wearying thing. The majority line is that this prologue tells us that despite all the energy expended, there is no profit within

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<sup>101</sup>With regard to the connection between הבל and עמל and יגע, in his treatment of יגע, Thompson shows how ריק is used in collocation with עמל in Isa 49.4, where the Servant laments that his 'toil' has been in 'vain'. תהו and הבל are paired in the following line, in synthetic parallel to עמל and ריק, respectively. The same collocation (עמל and ריק) is used in Isa 65.23, wherein a new heavens and earth void of 'vain toil' is foretold. Thompson connects these two uses, stating that Isa 65.23 is the reversal of the Servant's lament in 49.4 ('יגע', *NIDOTTE* 2:400).

<sup>102</sup>So, e.g., Fox, *Contradictions*.

<sup>103</sup>Gerald H. Wilson, "'The Words of the Wise': The Intent and Significance of Qohelet 12.9-14," *JBL* 103.2 (1984).

creation, by man (vv. 3-4) or by nature (vv. 5-7).<sup>104</sup> This must be true, but it is not all the text affirms.

A great moral problem is being pointed to here. Again, the wearying stated in 8a and explicated in the surrounding lines may be mechanical in so far as it affects all things, but it has moral roots. This is the main message of verse 8, its burden, its apocalypse. And in this way it speaks to what precedes and follows. This is especially apparent in the anthropomorphism of the elements in the preceding verses. We know they cannot speak, see, or hear, but they seem to do so in this prologue. In this way, the elements become like man. And man, unable to speak and unable to see or to hear (enough), has become like the elements. Each looks like the other. The parts that compose 'the all' are losing their distinctions. הַבֵּל has come to look like הַכֵּל. These verses are unfolding that phrase for us, showing us what it looks like, and thereby showing us what it means.

(b) *Hevel: Resonances with Ecclesiastes 1.8*. The collocation הַכֵּל הַבֵּל is highly parallel. Few two words could be more so. They look like each other, sound like each other, and are even made to 'mean like' each other. Verse 8 is also characterised by parallelism. It is synthetically parallel (a:b//c:d), and its last three lines parallel one another in an exact syntactical correspondence (a: b/c/d). Within the larger context, in various ways, verse 8 is also parallel with both the three and the four preceding verses

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<sup>104</sup>Barton's first comment on Eccl 1.8 is 'The whole universe groans with man because of its useless and monotonous activity' (Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 71.).

(three: vv. 5, 6, 7—8a—8b, 8c, 8d; four: vv. 4, 5, 6, 7//8a, b, c, d); it also parallels verse 7 in numerous ways.

הכל הכל is also a merism, a 'totality expressed in abbreviated form'.<sup>105</sup> So is 1.8a. In both, too, there is alliteration<sup>106</sup> and assonance,<sup>107</sup> ambiguity<sup>108</sup> and personification.<sup>109</sup> There is separation<sup>110</sup> and isolation,<sup>111</sup> yet connection<sup>112</sup> and recapitulation.<sup>113</sup> In other words, there is a tremendous separation-through-connection in this verse, particularly in 8a, a line which is simultaneously *sui generis*—as alone as an island and utterly unique—

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<sup>105</sup>Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 321.

<sup>106</sup>v. 8: כל...לא...יובל...לדבר...לא...לראת...לא-תמלא

<sup>107</sup>v. 8: יגעים/תשבע עין/משמע; לא...איש/לא...לראות/ולא-תמלא און משמע

<sup>108</sup>v. 8a, and to a degree 8b-d

<sup>109</sup>In v. 2, הכל as breath, הכל as every material thing, with and without breath; in v. 8, 8a, which underscores the anthropomorphism and anthropopathism of the elements in vv. 4-7.

<sup>110</sup>Verse 2: הכל from הכל and these two words from the rest of the verse. In verse 8, 8a from b, c, d; and 8b from c, d. Furthermore, verse 8 separates man within himself, into his constituent parts.

<sup>111</sup>Again, הכל הכל from what precedes it, and הכל from the *hevels* that surround it. In v. 8, 8a (see lineation above).

<sup>112</sup>Though separated from what precedes, הכל הכל summarises and it thus strongly connected to what precedes it. Similarly, הכל is so forcefully connected to הכל that it becomes like it; this while being clearly distinct from הכל. Verse 8 is likewise connected in its every part to man, making up his parts into his whole as it does. The verse is also connected to every other verse in the prologue, whether clearly or obliquely (clearly to vv. 3-7; vv. 9-11 expounding it).

<sup>113</sup>לכל turns out to be another way of saying הכל. In some ways, v. 8a is a recapitulation of vv. 3-7, and v. 8b-d of 8a (while being an elaboration as well; just as הכל recapitulates הכל but adds significant meaning and structure to it, so does v. 8b-d to 8a).

yet also an isthmus of sorts, the point in the prologue at which all things meet. This eccentric, oxymoronic quality is the offspring of הכל הכל, evidence that verse 8 is at once its progeny and its exposition within creation, in particular within the dark heart of man.

Finally, verse 8 is the crux of the prologue: everything under creation, man and elements, meets here.<sup>114</sup> It all meets in the verse's first three, simple, ambiguous words; the rest of the verse unfolds that laconic statement. It is here that all in creation converges to become one thing: wearying. This convergence mirrors and so recalls הכל הכל in verse 2 through the way in which 'everything' (הכל) is made to look like and to 'mean like'—in essence to become like—הכל. Verse 8 is the prologue's densest and finest unfolding of that phrase, the phrase which controls and encapsulates the entire book, and it tells us in subtle but certain terms that הכל הכל is man's fault.

### Conclusion of Chapter 6

All things, not just all words, are wearying. This verse tells us that the connection between man and nature which characterizes creation, which wearies creation, and which holds creation together is not simply the fact that all things within it—man, element, and everything in between—expend masses of energy but make no progress (move lots, profit little).<sup>115</sup> Rather, the cohesive element that binds different elements within creation together, that makes different things one thing, is due to something more fundamental and

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<sup>114</sup>Cf. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Nicht im Menschen*, 36.

<sup>115</sup>Fox, "Qohelet 1.4." to list but one of many.

more sinister. It is due to man's disobedience. And it means the death of all things. Verses 9-11 unfold this consummately.

The tension or pain that characterises all creation centers on man. Why? His dysfunction is a result of his disobedience. It is moral, not just mechanical. As Ecclesiastes 1.1 hinted and Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 will reveal more clearly, this moral failure resulting in universal breakdown has to do with Israel and Israel's king, Israel's exile, and the disobedience that led to it.



CHAPTER 7. ECCLESIASTES 1.9-11: ALL THINGS BECOME ONE THING—THE DEATH OF CREATION, OF A NATION, OF A MAN

*Ecclesiastes sees death as the power that takes away the power of the whole creation.*

-W. Zimmerli<sup>1</sup>

*But Ecclesiastes thinks entirely without any reference to history.*

-G. Von Rad<sup>2</sup>

*double or treble vision is part of the pleasure . . . part of the profit, too.*

-C. S. Lewis<sup>3</sup>

9a What was, it <sup>4</sup> will be;	מה־שְׁהִיָּה הוּא שְׁיִהְיֶה 9a
b and what has been done, it will be done.	וּמַה־שְׁנַעֲשֶׂה הוּא שְׁיַעֲשֶׂה b
c And there is nothing at all new under the sun.	וְאֵין כָּל־חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ: c
10a There is a word which says,	יֵשׁ דְּבַר שֶׁיֹּאמֵר 10a
b 'See this: it <i>is</i> <sup>5</sup> new'.	רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא b
c <i>It</i> <sup>6</sup> already was from ages	כִּבְרַר הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים c
d which were <sup>7</sup> before us.	אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ: d
11a There is not remembrance of former things,	אֵין זְכוֹרֹן לְרֵאשִׁינִים 11a
b and also of after-things which will be,	וְגַם לְאַחֲרָיִם שְׁיִהְיוּ b
c there will not be of them remembrance	לְאִי־הֵיָה לָהֶם זְכוֹרֹן c
d by those who will be after.	עִם שְׁיִהְיוּ לְאַחֲרָנָה: d

<sup>1</sup>Zimmerli, "Wisdom in OT Theology," 156.

<sup>2</sup>Gerhard von Rad. *Old Testament Theology*. vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 455.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by Ward in Michael Ward. *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 148, see n. 37.

<sup>4</sup>*Pace* Schoors (Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 87.).

<sup>5</sup>The word is italicised because added for readability.

<sup>6</sup>See above note.

<sup>7</sup>'Was': the verb is singular. Regarding the textual difficulty presented in this pairing of singular verb with plural subject (לְעֹלָמִים), G, T, and V have plural readings. *BHS* suggests texts provided by other Masoretic mss. which render a plural verb. *BHQ* comments on the lateness and paucity of these mss. (this ms.: there is only one, and Kennicott dates it mid-13th c.) and suggests a possible theological motivation. Schoors' explanation is

## Introduction

In this chapter I argue that verses 9-11 are an exposition of verse 2 and especially of its final two words, הכל הבל. In addition to answering verse 3, these verses unfold verse 8, showing death to be the consummation of 'all things are wearying'. Finally, 1.9-11 shows the scope of 1.2 and 1.8, of *hakkol* (v. 2d) and *kol* (v. 8a), to be total, including all time and space. These verses also develop the reason 1.8 gives for this total death. Verse 8 connects this to the disobedience (false worship) of man. Largely through allusions to passages in Isaiah, Kings, and Chronicles, Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 connects this cosmic death to the disobedience of Israel, suggesting that the estate of creation is linked to that of Israel and of Qohelet, its representative, collective king.

## An Exposition of Ecclesiastes 1.2

(1) *A simple message: there is nothing new.* Like verses 3-8, verses 9-11 are ostensibly simple, summed up in the first four words of verse 9—what has been will be<sup>8</sup>—and stated explicitly in that verse's final line: there is nothing at all new under the sun. These final three verses of the prologue, simplified, read something like this: there is nothing new (v. 9); people think there is, but there is not (v. 10); we think there are new things be-

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grammatical. He is satisfied with היה as neuter (Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 79.).

<sup>8</sup>*Pace* Ellermeier, Qohelet, 208.

cause we forget<sup>9</sup> about those who have come before and who have done what is being done now (v. 11).

(2) *Complex artistry reinforces this simple message.* Complex artistry—namely parallelism,<sup>10</sup> terseness, and wordplay—strengthens the simple message of these verses that there is nothing new, and in so doing it suggests that these verses are, like verses 3-8, an exposition of הכל הכל in verse 2.

(a) *Ecclesiastes 1.9, 10, 11.* Parallelism joins the wording of verses 9-11 to reinforce the fact that there is nothing new. As Kugel has demonstrated, much parallelism does not simply repeat but advances, carrying the idea presented in the first hemistich, line, or colon forward by developing it in the second.<sup>11</sup> Not so in this stanza. The second line of verse 9 essentially repeats the first, while its third line states ‘there is nothing at all new’ with an old phrase—תחת השמש—to end that assertion. A claim for newness in verse 10 follows but is followed in the verse’s latter half by the affirmation that perceived newness is old. And verse 11 closes by recycling words and thus showing what it states,<sup>12</sup> that the last is like the first. This truth takes us back to the beginning of verse 9

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 88.

<sup>10</sup>Contra Oswald Loretz, “Poetry and Prose in the Book of Qoheleth (1:1-3:22; 7:23-8:1; 9:6-10; 12:8-14),” in *Verse in Ancient Near Eastern Prose*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor, and Wilfred G. E. Watson Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1993), 166.

<sup>11</sup>Kugel, *The Idea*, 13, 16, 29.

<sup>12</sup>An instance of mimesis. As mentioned in my Introduction, vv. 9-11 have the same

(what was will be) and thus makes that point in another way.<sup>13</sup> In these three verses, in each verse, the new textual unit's<sup>14</sup> new information, 'advance', or 'development' is the affirmation that there is nothing new. Parallelistically, the apparently new (v. 10ab) is actually old (v. 10cd) and thus no advance at all. Here is a parallelism that does not advance thought but recycles it by recycling words, thus proving the message stated by showing it. The artistry of each of these verses matches its message that 'there is nothing at all new'. In this way, Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 recalls הכל הכל because it is an outflow of that short sentence and, as its progeny, bears its mark. In both, in הכל הכל and this stanza, there is antithetical parallelism without advance (syntactically, *hevel* is an advance on *hakkol* but semantically is no advance but rather regression: how can nothing [*hevel*] be an advance on everything [*hakkol*]?), there is antithesis and synthesis (where opposite things become the same thing), and there is abounding wordplay, including but not limited to irony, mimesis, ambiguity, terseness, alliteration and assonance.

(b) *Ecclesiastes 1.9*. Like the verses before them (vv. 2-8), these last three verses of the prologue do what they say. They repeat themselves through parallelism and lexical recycling to make the point expressly put in the last line of verse 9: there is nothing

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number of words, fourteen in each case. This is a subtle underscoring of his affirmation that there is nothing new, a numerical way of saying, 'same (v. 9), same (v. 10), same (v. 11)'.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Showing what was (v. 9) to be what will be (v. 11), the first things (v. 9) to be like the last (v. 11).

<sup>14</sup>Whether half-line (hemistich), line, or half-verse (colon).

at all new under the sun.<sup>15</sup> This is to say that there is no progress, and if there is no progress there is no profit, no יתרון. This conclusion, along with the verse's lexicon and syntax, takes us back to the question posed in verse 3.<sup>16</sup> Verse 9 is its answer.<sup>17</sup> Verses 3 and 9 begin (מה) and end (תחת השמש) the same, and their core's correspond semantically (repeated עמל in v. 3 to repeated היה and עשה in v. 9). Verse 9 echoes the central word of verse 3, the word that holds that verse together, עמל, with a pair of semantically similar verbs. This doubling adds emphasis to the answer (to verse 3) that is verse 9: there is certainly no profit to all man's toil under the sun. But the repetition<sup>18</sup> does something else too. It adds monotony to the reading, which conveys, and creates, weariness, which recalls verse 8 and reminds that these verses flow from that bitter spring. This mimetic effect is one of many instances of wordplay in this stanza. The fact that the active עמל of verse 3 is 'replaced' by the being verb היה at the start of verse 9 contributes to this sense of weariness, as does the passivity created by the corresponding Niphal conjugations that follow in שנעשה and שיעשה. Man's toil in which he toils has

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<sup>15</sup>The use of אין כל elsewhere in the HB means 'nothing at all' or something to that effect (Num 11.6, 'there is nothing at all but manna'; 2 Sam 12.3, 'he had nothing at all but one ewe lamb'; Prov 13.7, 'the poor man may pretend to possess but has nothing at all'. Mic 7.2 may be another instance, but the כלם likely starts the next clause. If the אין כלם reads as one collocation it read this way: 'there is no one at all who is upright'). See Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 83., citing Mazzinghi for support.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 84.; Barton, Ecclesiastes, 72.

<sup>17</sup>Vv. 3 and 9 both begin with מה, but only v. 3 is a question. The 'cascade of negativity' in vv. 9-11 are likely a negative reply to the question raised in v. 3 (Salyer, Vain Rhetoric, 266-67.).

<sup>18</sup>Of the clause מה + particle and verb + הוא + same particle and verb

given way to what was, what will be, that which has been done, and that which will be done. There is no active agent here. Things just happen. The past, the future, and the passive sense of all four verbs have eliminated that agent; and they have eliminated the present, the only time-period over which man has any control and, thus, the only time-period in which he may effect profit.<sup>19</sup> The passivity combines with the squeezing out of the present to create a sense of fatedness, of loss of control, that helps provide an answer to the question posed in verse 3. Is there any profit for man under the sun? No, there is no profit because there is no progress. This passivity and exclusion of the present extend not just through the inclusio end-piece that is verse 9 but through verses 10 and 11 as well. This fated feel creates a sense of resignation that shadows the stanza and calls back to the wearying of verse 8 as an expression of that verse. And the past and future merging into the same thing recalls הכל הכל, where opposites are made the same, where the all (*hakkol*) is made to mean nil (*hevel*).

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<sup>19</sup>Vv. 9-11 are almost exclusively concerned with past and future. The present is effectively eliminated.

(c) *Ecclesiastes 1.10*. This verse begins as an apparent attempt at refuting the preceding line (v. 9c). The whole verse can be summed up simply. Someone says 'This is new'. The narrator<sup>20</sup> responds 'No it is not'. The simple message notwithstanding, this is a playful verse, laced with irony, wordplay, and a complexity which drives home its simple message.

Interplay within the assertion of verse 10b buttresses its refutation in 10cd. The assertion reads, 'See this? It is new' (ראה זה חדש הוא). The word זה is new: this is its first appearance in the book. But הוא is not new (cf. 1.5, 9), and 'it' is exactly what is being claimed is new. 'It' is said to be new but is in fact old. As in the case of the 'old' word 'new' (חדש), the irony these facts create adds force to the claim's refutation in the following lines. What is claiming newness is actually old.

But זה is new. What of that? The short answer is that זה and הוא refer to the same 'new' thing. הוא is the final word of this pair and in this assertion and is thus decisive because determinative. זה makes a claim to newness; הוא refutes it (but only implicitly, since it appears to agree).

A more involved answer requires a pulling back from these verses and from the line they inhabit so that 10b can be viewed in its context. The interaction of זה with הוא within the context of 10b mirrors the interplay between the first and last halves of the verse and so again agrees with the verse's conclusion. The first half of 10b (ראה זה) is new (זה is new); its second half (חדש הוא) is old. This line is thus a microcosm of the larger

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<sup>20</sup>For our purposes, Qohelet. See front matter preceding thesis introduction, and ch. 1.

verse, whose first half claims newness and whose second half states that what was thought new is old.

The last word of the verse's first half, אָהוּ, underscores this duality by serving as a pivot. Read as the end of the first half of the verse, אָהוּ agrees with it and thus speaks to the supposed truth of its claim: 'see this? It (אָהוּ) is new'. However, אָהוּ can also be read as the first word of the verse's second half: 'it (אָהוּ) already was . . .' Line 10b thus ends, with אָהוּ, in enjambment, looking forward to the following line(s) and speaking to them as well. In so doing, אָהוּ is a case not only of enjambment but also of a Janus-like double-*entendre*: its first face looks back and agrees with 10ab, while its second face looks forward and agrees with 10cd. So not only does this second line (10b) mimic the larger verse (an instance of mimesis); so does its last word, אָהוּ (also mimetic). Both line and line's last word are encapsulations of the dynamic verse 10 expresses, that of apparently new things actually being old. Line 10b and its final word are thus instances of terse artistry, joining with the entire verse to confirm the truth of verse 9, proving the first half of verse 10 only apparently 'outside' the scope and power of its claim but actually wholly beholden to the truth of the words which directly precede it: 'there is nothing at all new under the sun'.

The placement of verses 10 and 11 within the prologue makes an ironic point. These final two verses in the prologue are the only creational verses to fall outside the inclusio of verses 3 and 9. Their situation is a wordless way of saying what the words of the first half of verse 10 say: here is something new (mimesis). Here, perhaps, is something that falls not under the sun but outside it, outside the wearying, toiling circumscription

bound by verses 3 and 9. The lexical connections in 10ab contest previous, proximate verses (vv. 7-9) and thus support this reading. And, indeed, verses 10-11 do present new things to us. The word **הַ** is new; the intruding speaker in 10ab is new, as is the first-person inclusion in the last word of 10d; and the nebulous, non-concrete subject matter is new: toiling man and whirling nature as recounted in their discrete elements are absent in a new way, for they were present in verses 3-8 and even, at last, in verse 9 through the phrase **תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם**. Have these verses brought us out from under the sun into a new world, a new creation? The plain (and more profound) message of these verses is 'no'. They (vv. 10-11) are consonant with what has come before, with the final assertion of verse 9. In fact, they cast the net wider by including past and future within the scope of creation covered 'under the sun'. In so doing they unfold this phrase and all of verse 9c (**וְאֵין כָּל חַדָּשׁ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם**), revealing the devastating broadness of its reach. The effects of *hevel*, of this wearying, of this toiling, touch not only all things in space but all things in time: past, present, and future. Verses 10 and 11 do not refute verse 9c. On the contrary, they confirm and strengthen it by showing its total ambit. Incidentally, in this way verses 9-11 also support our reading of verse 8a as fundamentally meaning 'all things (and not just all 'words') are wearying' where the 'all' includes all creation. This final stanza of the prologue proves the reach of *hevel*, the scope of *hakkol* in verse 2, to be utterly comprehensive.

*(i) Opposite Things Become the Same*

Verse 10 showcases a dynamic we have seen throughout this prologue. Opposite things are shown to be the same things, one thing. As we have just seen, this occurs on multiple

levels here. It occurs in the entire verse, as its first half touts newness only to be debunked by the second half which tells us that perceived newness is actually old. Line 10b encapsulates this dynamic, as does the single word **הוא** at the end of line 10b. In each of these three cases—in the entire verse, in line b, and in the final word in line b—opposite things (new and old) are shown or made to be the same thing (old). This recalls **הכל הכל** in verse 2, where opposite things (everything [*hakkol*] and nothing [*hevel*]) are shown or made to be the same thing (nothing). In this way, verse 10 shows itself an emanation and exposition of that short sentence, of **הכל הכל**.

Furthermore, the two things in verse 10 (new and old) shown to be one thing (old) become one thing as they pass into verse 11—forgotten. The exposition by these verses of **הכל הכל** seems easy enough to discern: everything becomes nothing by being forgotten, or perhaps better, because it is forgotten.

In any case, we have seen in this stanza the process of homogenisation, of fusion, of opposite things becoming or being the same thing. In verse 9, the future is (as) the past; in verse 10, the new is (as) the old; and in verse 11, as we will see, those after are (as) those before, again, forgotten.

(ii) *Transition, Encapsulation:* **מלפננו**

If verse 10 is conceptually riveted to verse 9 and thus to all that lay within its inclusio (vv. 3-9), so is verse 11, since verse 11 elucidates 10cd and connects conceptually with the last word of verse 10 (**מלפננו**). As the last word of verse 10, **מלפננו** acts as an enjambment

through double *entendre* and through the way it speaks to key words in verse 11 (ראשונים) and to the last word of verse 11 (אחרונה) in particular.

Verse 10 ends in enjambment. Meaning 'before us', מלפננו is both temporal and spacial. The former meaning is clear and required by the context: it speaks to those who have come before us in time, who were born before us. But the word is also spacial: it speaks to that which is physically in front of something else.<sup>21</sup> As such, מלפננו looks ahead to the words that follow, to verse 11. Ambiguous, it looks ahead (spatially) but also behind (temporally), forward and backward. This verse's enjambment makes sense within the context, joining those who have come before us (v. 10) with the former things/people that immediately follow (v. 11). The connection starkens the contrast between those the word connects and stands between, between those living before (v. 10) and after (v. 11) the author and audience. The spatial meaning also creates irony: the refutation of newness is before us, in front of our faces, in front of this word מלפננו, in verse 11.

This last word of verse 10 also connects to the last word of verse 11 and thus of the prologue. Just as מלפננו can mean 'before the face/presence of', so can אחרונה refer to that which is behind our backs. Like מלפננו, it too has both temporal and spatial referents. Within the context of verse 11, אחרונה clearly refers to the future, to that which comes 'after' in time. But within the ancient near-eastern milieu, the future was at one's back, behind, because it was unknown and thus essentially unseen.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, the past is what

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. Gen 27.7 where לפני occurs twice within the space of three words, first used spatially, next temporally.

<sup>22</sup>“אחר”; *NIDOTTE* 1:360-61.

has been and is thus known and so faced or 'before us', and seen.<sup>23</sup> In this way, the last words of verses 10 and 11, verses already connected through temporal meaning,<sup>24</sup> connect spatially. 'Before' (מלפננו)<sup>25</sup> and 'behind' (אחרונה), they present a subtle merism that renders a totality of un-newness, capturing every generation (first and last things and people) in a creation still 'under the sun' in which 'there is nothing at all new' (v. 9).

And, again, מלפננו and אחרונה connect not only spatially but also temporally. Speaking to the past and the future respectively, they hedge in all encompassed in verse 11 in another way. The irony of the connection through both ambiguous, verse-ending words is exquisite artistry with a devastating message. In מלפננו, that which looks back to the past looks ahead to the next verse; meaning 'before us', it refers to that which is behind us temporally (the past). In אחרונה, that which looks forward to the future looks behind to מלפננו in verse 10; meaning 'after' (or 'forward'), it refers to that which is behind our backs in the Hebrew mindset. In these ending words of the final two verses of his prologue, Qohelet again creates a mechanism which achieves the internal opposition and adhesion, the connection-in-contrast, that pervades and holds together his proemic creation complex. It is another exposition of that all-controlling, oxymoronically antithetical yet monolithic assertion, הכל הבל.

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<sup>23</sup>This makes sense of the last word of v. 10 (מלפננו) as double-*entendre*: those who have come 'before' us in time are in our past; so we face them, and in this way they are spatially 'before' us as well.

<sup>24</sup>Before (מלפננו) and after (לאחרונה).

<sup>25</sup>Or 'in front of'.

מלפננו and אחרונה understood as speaking to one another express in two words what the entire prologue and especially its final stanza (vv. 9-11) express, that all of space and time are affected by this 'thing' that ails creation. It wearies. It draws different things together, eventually into one thing, and in so doing creates tension. It means that nothing is new and all is forgotten. It breaks down and erases. It causes all to become as breath, as wind, as nothing.<sup>26</sup> This force that affects הכל is of course הבל. It is an emptiness that pervades all, characterises all, and consumes all until all (הכל) that is left is *hevel* (הבל).

In fact, מלפננו is alone an encapsulation of the message of the stanza in which it is encased (vv. 9-11). In it, time and space are expressed, merged, and made one. In the process, different things covering every thing (space and time) are homogenised by forgetting and being forgotten because of death. The terseness, irony, and profundity expressed therein recall הכל הבל, reminding that this branch shoots from that root.

(d) *Ecclesiastes 1.11*. Verse 11 also spills over with wordplay, including but not limited to paradox, ambiguity, mimesis, irony, enjambment, parallelism, and chiasm. Qohelet marshalls these devices to make one point; it is the point he made in two words at the end of verse 2; it is הכל הבל. Although ראשנים and אחרנים are ambiguous<sup>27</sup> and the

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<sup>26</sup>I am allowing myself some interpretive liberties (regarding *hevel*) since we have read through the prologue and can thus begin to discern some of its meaning.

<sup>27</sup>Both words can refer to people or to things more generally. Everyone notes this ambiguity, but opinions on what these words mean here differ. The fact is, they obviously refer to people—only people can remember (and forget)—but technically (lexically) encompass other things (first and last) too. The ambiguity provided in this final stanza admits both meanings for both terms. Cf. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 90.; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*,

language throughout non-descript, the message is clear and simple: we forget (and so will be forgotten). The lexical haze, recycling, and layout reinforce the message by being easily forgettable: like the subjects they describe, these words will be forgotten. This is one example of mimesis. Another is in verse-layout, which is chiasmic. ‘Those after (A) which will be’ (B) in 11b is reflected by the ‘which will be (B’) after (A’) of 11d. Those of 11c who will be forgotten (לֹא יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זְכוּרֹון) are erased, or forgotten, in the process.<sup>28</sup>

Another layout elicits irony. The forgotten (A) first (B) of 11a are answered by the last (B’) forgotten (A’) of 11bc.<sup>29</sup> This construction ‘forgets’ the last line (11d) by leaving it out of the chiasm. This is an ironic reversal, since the verse tells us plainly that those described in 11d forget those described in 11bc. Like the mimesis, this irony also reinforces the plain point of the verse but in a different way.

The apparent advance of the verse also provides irony since it is no advance at all. The verse begins with ‘first things’ (11a), moves to a second line (11b) which shoots forward into the following line (11c) through enjambment and ends with the word ‘after/last’ (אַחֲרָנָה, in 11d). It looks like this: first, line 2 > line 3, last. The movement appears linear, as does the progress; but it only appears so. Read in context, the words tell us that progress (i.e. newness, renewal, cf. vv. 9-10) is not actual but illusory because we forget what has happened.<sup>30</sup>

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6.; Krüger, Qoheleth, 48.; Koheles, 59.

<sup>28</sup>That it, the chiasm effectively ignores them.

<sup>29</sup>זְכוּרֹון (A): לֹא יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זְכוּרֹון (B): לֹא יִהְיֶה לָהֶם זְכוּרֹון (B’): זְכוּרֹון (A’). Cf. Backhaus, *Denn Zeit und Zufall*, 9.

<sup>30</sup>If we remembered it, we would realise that what we are doing, saying, or thinking has

The synthetic parallelism of verse 11 also underlines the lack of advance of its subjects. זכרון in 11a/c and the root אהרון in 11b/d<sup>31</sup> make clear the verse's parallel (ab//cd) layout. The first (11a) is followed by what is after (11b) which is followed by what is after that (11d). In both verse-halves, an entity is followed by a later entity, and the same thing happens to both (both are forgotten, the first by those after [11ab] and those after them by those after them [11cd]). The layout invites advance. The second bicolon has repeated the first but added to it. But what has it added? Nothing, in fact, lexically or semantically. And that is the point; it is a point that takes us back to the question raised in verse 3 and back to our analysis of הכל הבל in verse 2. The message is ever the same and shot through this prologue. There is no profit to any word or thing. Even if there were progress, the fact that it will be forgotten renders it, and all perceived profit, void. The profitlessness that began with man in verse 3 has by this point in the prologue spread to all creation, to all space and even to all time. It reaches backward and forward in every direction, spacially and temporally. And 'it' is *hevel*. The question remains, 'what does *hevel* mean?' We must finish our analysis before drawing conclusions.

The parallelistic layout is one way to read verse 11, but it is not the only way. Like so much in this verse, its layout is ambiguous. The words (their lexical character) tell us it can be read ab//cd, but the sense of the words tells us the verse can be read this way as well, a:b, c, d. The first line (11a) says that first things are forgotten; everything (11b-d) fol-

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been done, said, or thought and is thus not new but old, and is thus not progress.

<sup>31</sup>M.p. in 11b (אהרנים) and f.s. in 11d (אהרנה).

lows from this and is merely an elaboration of this fact. This ambiguous, dual-structure recalls verse 8 and seems reflective of it. That verse asks to be read in the same two ways.<sup>32</sup> This similarity between both verse structures recalls both the simple fact that verse 11 follows verse 8 and the related but slightly more complex notion that the syndrome being described in verse 11 stems from, is an outgrowth of, verse 8 and all it entails.<sup>33</sup> Forgetting and being forgotten (v. 11) are symptoms of a wearying creational complex (v. 8a), of a falseness, an emptiness which verse 8 suggests has been brought about by man's false, empty worship.

Qohelet asserts plainly that we all forget and will thus be forgotten and details this final stanza so as to make it forgettable. In so doing he drives the point home that the fate of all things is to be forgotten. The question is, why? Why go to such trouble to make this simple point? And what does the point suggest?

Taking these questions in reverse order, the last first, the point suggests we die. Death is everywhere assumed in this stanza but nowhere stated, and it alone makes sense of these three verses. It makes sense of the words: we forget about those who precede us because they are dead and no longer here to remind us of what they have done. It also makes sense of the character of the words in these three verses: they sound and look alike and come to mean the same thing and in so doing imitate the process of death: different

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<sup>32</sup>Cf. Auffret, "Rien du Tout de Nouveau," 161.

<sup>33</sup>This verse shows there are limits to human memory, and thus picks up again the epistemological critical line of vs. 8' (Schoors, Ecclesiastes, 91.).

things decomposing become the same thing. A man buried grows into a flower which is eaten by a horse which is emitted as waste which enters the earth and grows into a flower.

But why go to the trouble such artistry requires to say the end of all things is death? The first answer to this question we have already established: the way in which Qohelet speaks of death in this stanza mirrors and thus recalls **הכל הכל**. It is thus an implicit way of saying that death tells us about what *hevel* means, about what it is doing to *hakkol*.

As I will demonstrate below, the nature of the language in this stanza also speaks to verse 8a, telling us more about what it means. Verse 8a tells us that all things and words are wearying. Verses 9-11 lay out what that looks like in greater detail.

This final stanza thus speaks to death but uses certain words in such a way that this death—the death of all things—ties back into verses 2 and 8, the two verses that seem most obviously to be morally charged,<sup>34</sup> telling us about each in the process.

### **An Exposition of Ecclesiastes 1.8a**

Verse 8 begins ‘all things are wearying’. Verses 9-11 follow verse 8 and unfold the densely packed assertion that begins it. Both verse 8a and verses 9-11 bear the same marks. The three words of verse 8a tell us that all things/words are wearying and in so doing bring together the elements of creation into one, condensed thing—a terse, three-word state-

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<sup>34</sup>*Hevel* is often associated with false worship in the HB; when repeated (as it is in Eccl 1.2) it always is (cf. ch. 2). And the language in every line of verse 8 indicates spiritual lethargy, even idolatry (cf. ch. 5).

ment. The three verses that follow show us that all things/words are wearying, and they do so by imitating the style of verse 8a, by bringing together the elements of creation into one homogenous, hazy thing.

(1) *All Words Are Wearying*. The language of these last three verses bears the stamp of having passed through the smelter of verse 8a. The words (of vv. 9-11) seem to be wearying.<sup>35</sup> They weary us as we read them; the subjects themselves seem weary. The verbal passivity, lexical redundancy, absence of concrete objects (unlike those of vv. 3-8), absence of rare words,<sup>36</sup> and absence of present time combine to create this sense.<sup>37</sup> In so doing they unfold 8a, which tells us that all words, and all things, are wearying (כל־הדברים יגעים). These three verses are an extended expression of those three words.

The dissolution felt with increasing strength in verses 3-7 and stated in verse 8 is pervasive here. It characterises the stanza. Indistinctness is chiefly to blame. Unlike verses 3-8, excepting *השמש* at the end of verse 9, these last three verses lack concrete elements, something that swirls through almost every part of what precedes. In those previous stanzas, man toils, generations come and go, the earth stands, the sun pants, the wind

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<sup>35</sup>The 'medium becomes the message' (Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 26.).

<sup>36</sup>*כבר* in 1.10 is not rare but unique, used only here (to mean something like 'already': 1.10; 2.12, 16; 3.15 [2]; 4.2; 6.10; 9.6, 7) in the HB. Besides, it is an adverb and so not exactly an attention-grabber. In other words, it too is forgettable. In a memorable turn of phrase, Brown calls this forgettable passage a 'derogation of language' (Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 26.).

<sup>37</sup>The character of vv. 9-11 is so different from what precedes that Schoors thinks they (vv. 4-8 and 9-11) are written by different people (Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 93.).

screeches, streams run into a devouring sea, and man caps all this activity off with (insufficiently) seeing eyes and hearing ears. By contrast, verses 9-11 are stuffed with particles, impersonal pronouns, and participial phrases,<sup>38</sup> passive and being-verbs,<sup>39</sup> and abstract and general nouns/subjects.<sup>40</sup> The only discrete, concrete object is the sun (v. 9c). And one gets the feeling that it is only here because it has to be (as an inclusio-cap with v. 3b). What is the point? All this is forgettable (v. 11). It is hard to forget the image of a sprinting sun, but hard to remember (v. 11) those which have been and will be (v. 9), a new thing (v. 10), first and last things (v. 11). The words tell us that creation will be forgotten. They show us that too by being forgettable. These verses are the end-game of all that precedes them, of sun and wind and humanity: despite their exertions, they will be forgotten. The continuity between verses 9-11 and verses 3-8 is thus easy to understand. But so is the difference between them. In fact, it is the difference of this stanza, its soupy indistinctness, that provides continuity with what comes before. All the eclecticism and activity in creation will morph into an amorphous, homogenous, forgettable mass and will ultimately be forgotten. This process is a picture of הכל הבל, of all things (הכל) becoming one thing, namely הבל.

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<sup>38</sup>That which (מה־ש), it (הוא), there is not (אין), there is (יש), this (זה), which (ש).

<sup>39</sup>Passive: Niphal עשה (bis); being: היה (ter), יהיה (bis), יהיו (bis).

<sup>40</sup>1.9, what, it, what, it, there; 1.10, thing, this, it; 1.11, first things, later things.

(2) *All Things Are Wearying*. So all words are wearying. The language of verses 9-11 bears this out. But in so doing it bears out the more fundamental meaning of verse 8a: all things are wearying.

(a) *All Space*. Verse 9 helps us see that verse 3 is questioning the profit not only of man but of all creation. The inclusio of verses 3 and 9 speaks to this fact. The question of verse 3 and its answer in verse 9 speak to all that lay between them, not only to man but to the elements as well. A fast, straightforward reading through these verses makes this plain. It is not only man who does not seem to profit (v. 3); neither does nature—each toils but does not advance. It is not only man for whom nothing is new (v. 9); nothing is new for nature either. As we have seen, man and nature are bound in a system that is profitless and which, therefore, yields nothing new. Generations come and go; so does the sun, and the wind, and the streams. And it is not enough to claim that the elements are a foil for man, as many do.<sup>41</sup> Nature is not pictured to show how bad off man is. She in her endurance would need to be exempt from what ails man. But our reading has shown that she is not. The inclusio that frames these verses, namely verses 3 and 9, makes this clear. The inclusio speaks to (or includes) all the subjects and activity within its borders.<sup>42</sup> This, that which is both profitless and never new, is all creation, both man and nature, and not only man as verse 3 would initially have us to believe.

The inclusio of verses 3 and 9 speaks to this reality, but so does the language-shift between these two verses. The change in language from verse 3 to verse 9 supports the idea that both verses speak to the profitlessness of all creation and not only of man. As

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<sup>41</sup>See ch. 5.

<sup>42</sup>But see Loretz, “Poetry and Prose in the Book of Qoheleth,” 166., who makes the astounding comment that 1.9-11 is ‘not to be connected with the sequence of strophes in vv. 4-8 in terms of either text or content’.

we have seen, the language of verse 9 is much more indistinct than that of verse 3. Man's (אדם) toil (עמל) turns to that which was and will be and to that which has been done and will be done (v. 9). Man disappears, giving way to 'that which' (מה־ש), a subject broad and hazy enough to include the elements as well. The verbs that follow aid this interpretation. Man does not 'toil' (as in v. 3); rather, the faceless 'that which' simply 'was' (היה), 'will be' (יהיה), 'has been done' (נעשה), and 'will be done' (יעשה). Even if the 'that which' of verse 9 did 'toil', verses 5-7 supply enough information to support this reading as applying to the elements.<sup>43</sup> But 'that which' does not 'toil'; it merely 'is' and 'is done', actions easily enacted by any of the elements described in previous verses. In short, the move from verse 3 with its toiling man to verse 9 with 'that which was, will be, has been done, and will be done' broadens the scope of the question in verse 3 from man alone to allow for all creation by verse 9, even if man is the most obvious subject.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Since the elements seem to toil, labour, or work in some sort of pain in these verses (vv. 5-7).

<sup>44</sup>עשה in 9b is an advance on היה in 9a and more obviously refers to man (the verb seems only ever in the HB to refer to the work of God or man; this is certainly the case in Eccl. In the Niphal stem, as it is here conjugated, it occurs 93x in the HB (14x in Eccl) but yields no 'new meanings', is not used in new ways [‘עשה’, *NIDOTTE* 3:550]), especially through its closer semantic link to עמל in v. 3, a noun and verb that describe the lot that is man's alone. Still, the fact that 9a and 9b are so closely linked through syntax and lexical repetition forges the link between man and nature: their courses, their actions, their pasts and futures, are so intertwined as to become much less distinguishable than they were in this verse's sister, v. 3. With regard to verse 11, although ראשנים and אחרנים can refer to things, even events, or people, the mention of memory (זכרון) seems to single out 'people' as the intended subject, for only people can really 'remember' the past. However, it is not remembering but not-remembering that is in view. And that is the purview of any thing. Again, the subject (man, not animals or wind or water) is clear enough; but the line dividing discrete things within creation seems purposefully blurred (to make a point: הכל הבל).

In summary, man is not the only thing in this creation unable to progress or profit. The less-descript language of verse 9 leaves room for a profitlessness among other things as well. All things in creation, and not just man, fit within the rubric of ‘what was and will be’ and ‘what has been done and what will be done’. This inclusio-end here in verse 9 supports our understanding of those previous verses: man’s profitlessness touches nature too. The final phrase in verse 9 (ואין כל־חדש תחת השמש) is not circumscribed to this terrestrial ball: its reach is cosmic, including the sun itself, as we have seen (v. 5). As verse 8 tells us, ‘all things are wearying’, not only (to) man or man in his toil but (to) every part of him (8b-d) and every part of nature too (vv. 4c-7).

As an exposition of verse 8a, verses 9-11 suggest that the final line of verse 9 (‘there is nothing at all new’) does not simply mean that what we do has been done before (as v. 9ab might have us think). Rather, or perhaps additionally, read in light of the wearying rubric of verse 8a, ‘there is nothing new’ speaks to a sort of withering of creation, a lack of newness or renewal that signals a creation which is winding down. The fact that verse 9 eventuates in verse 11 which closes the prologue with talk of being forgotten (in death) supports this reading.

Finally, the exposition of verse 8a by verses 9-11 also supports our reading of that sentence (v. 8a), where we understood it to mean that all things and not only all words are wearying but also that, due to what follows (v. 8b, also v. 8c-d), there is an emphasis on the wearying of words, or speech, of man.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>The word לעלמים in Eccl 1.10 may suggest something else about the reach of this wearying under the sun. It means something like ‘ages’ here (cf. Isa 51.9, Ps 77.6) and

In verses 3-8, man and nature were distinct, so distinct as to seem at odds, at first anyway (vv. 3-4). Then we witnessed the elements swept into man's pain, yet displaying that pain their own way, and still quite distinct. Then verse 8a seems to bring all things together, to at once bridge and collapse nature and man in a highly ambiguous and terse assertion. But man emerges from this first line, still within this verse (v. 8), distinct, even down to being represented by his various, discrete parts and faculties. As I have said, what follows, verses 9-11, is really an unfolding of 8a, not least through the quality of ambiguity or indistinctiveness. As in 8a, in verses 9-11, the subject could be either man or nature or both. Again, this applies especially to verses 9 and 11, where the 'what was and will be and what has been done and will be done' of verse 9 could speak to people or to

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clearly speaks to past people but also, perhaps, though less clearly to things (in addition to people) in general—things like the earth. The lexeme (עלם) recalls the earth in verse 4, the only other place in the prologue this word occurs, and in so doing connects itself, if slightly, to that earth which 'forever stands or remains'. Through this connection, the sharp contrast the earth cut with the passing generations is blunted, since Eccl 1.10 combines with 1.11 to show that all ages (לעלמים), whether past or future, will become as one, forgotten thing. We have already seen that though verses 9-11 speak most obviously to man, they seem to encompass all created things. What is 'under the sun' (תחת השמש) is not just man and his toil but nature and hers. לעלמים here in verse 10 seems to include the standing earth within this circumference. Here, though subtly, it seems to be sucked into the wearying (יגעים in v. 8) vortex that flattens all things into one thing that will be forgotten because of death. The fact that in their talk of 'ages' and 'things' that have gone and will come, verses 10 and 11 very much recall the going and coming generations of verse 4 only strengthens the possibility that the 'ages' (לעלמים) of this verse are a purposeful recollection and roping in of the seemingly impervious earth in verse 4. We thought it stood aloof from whatever ailed human generations and those elements that followed them (in vv. 5-7). We may have been wrong. This word (לעלמים), and this verse (Eccl 1.10), urge reconsideration and in so doing again convince us of the utter comprehensiveness of *hevel* within creation. Apparently, not even הארץ is exempt from the impressive influence of *hevel* (Eccl 12.7 notwithstanding). So Choon-Leong Seow, "Beyond Mortal Grasp: the Usage of *hevel* in Ecclesiastes," ABR 48 (2000), 16.

'things' more generally; the same can be said of first and last 'things' of verse 11. In verse 10, a man (not an element or any other part of the natural realm apart from man) must be speaking (10ab), but he could be speaking (10b-d, specifically 'this', זה) of anything in all creation, animate or inanimate, past, present by implication, or future. And in verses 9 and 11, while it is clear that man, not the elements or other creatures, is being spoken of,<sup>46</sup> it is also clear that Qohelet has shifted in this stanza into an ambiguity with regard to subject-matter<sup>47</sup> that has not been previously present.<sup>48</sup>

In these three verses (vv. 9-11), different things (past and future [v. 9], new and old [v. 10], first and last [v. 11]) are made to look alike, to sound alike, and to 'mean' alike. We have seen this process before: it is nothing at all new. It occurs between human generations and the sun in verses 4-5, between the sun and wind via enjambment and elision in verses 5-6, between streams and sea in verse 7, and consummately in verse 8a. What is this if not an exposition of הכל הבל?

This final stanza marks an advance in the fusional dynamic which seems to be an expression of הכל הבל. This can be seen in at least two ways. The first has to do with the fusion of material, of space. There is a progression of interaction and interconnectedness between man and nature from verse 3 onward. Verses 3 and 4 picture man and nature as within the same frame and slightly bound but standing in opposition, bound in or by that

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<sup>46</sup>See above notes. Again, עשה never has an inanimate object as its subject (v. 9); likewise, men forget (v. 11).

<sup>47</sup>Cf. 9a, c; 10b-d; and all of v. 11.

<sup>48</sup>Excepting 8a, and 2d.

opposition. There seems to be an undercurrent of slight antagonism, even hostility. Verses 5-8 render nature and man as broken down into composite parts, connected to one another more strongly than they were in verses 3-4 but still separate, from each other and even from themselves (nature from nature, vv. 5-7, and man from man, from himself as it were, v. 8b-d). Here in this final stanza we have the last 'progression' (which we might do better to call a regression). Man and nature are spoken of in the same breath, with the same words. Images are gone. There is only what was and what will be. The language is nebulous and broad enough to include man and nature together. The fusion is almost complete. We are getting closer in this creational multi-verse to a uni-verse, and it is הכל הכל that is drawing all things together, הכל that הכל seems to be becoming like, to be becoming. This progression or regression from antithesis of man and nature (vv. 3-4) to connection of man and nature (vv. 5-8) to man and nature as seemingly one, hazy thing (vv. 9-11) is one way of looking at the advance of this fusional dynamic. The other is in a consideration of the next dimension.

(b) *All Time*. Verses 3-8 concern creation in space. Verses 9-11 focus largely, and for the first time in the prologue, on time.<sup>49</sup> In this final stanza, past and future are flattened: we are told they are the same. Thus are two 'entities' (past and future) which might be conceived of as opposite poles fused. This 'breakdown' of language in verse 9 thus marks an ideological advance in the outworking of הכל הכל in creation: different

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<sup>49</sup>Lohfink, "alles ist Windhauch," 215.

things were connected and eventually compressed into one thing (v. 8a) in the preceding verses. In this final stanza, this process continues but includes past and future as well. Space was compressed into one thing (vv. 3-8). Now time is (vv. 9-11).<sup>50</sup>

This final stanza gives us a *hevel* whose reach is wider than we may have thought possible. Verses 3-8 have it reaching out over all material creation, but here we are made to understand that its reach extends back into the past and forward into the future. Its force flattens all by homogenising all. Qohelet's creation is like foil figurines crushed into a single, foil ball. Man becomes like nature and nature like man, and the past becomes like the future will be. We have seen this process both described and textually imaged in these last three verses.<sup>51</sup>

In this crush, in this final stanza, the homogenisation of past and future leaves no room for the present. It is erased. Viewed within the context of the prologue, this facet takes on even greater significance than it would if the stanza had stood alone. Previous verses are presented in what is essentially a present tense. Verses 3 and 8 house finite verbs which can be read as unfinished or future but which are most naturally understood as presenting a present tense. They frame and thus bleed into a more vigorous present tense presented by way of an almost unbroken train of participles in verses 4-8a.<sup>52</sup> In

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<sup>50</sup>Bartholomew puts this another way, referring to the ambit of what precedes as 'nature' and to that of these verses as 'history' (Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 112.). In so doing, he touches (perhaps unwittingly) on the echoes of Israel's history disclosed in earlier HB texts which seems to be embedded in verses 9-11. On this subject, see below.

<sup>51</sup>Via mimesis, where the words describing sameness look and sound the same.

<sup>52</sup>See esp. ch. 5.

short, verses 9-11 are preceded by creational subjects set within the present. Then these verses (vv. 9-11) mention only past and future, effectively eliminating the present. Even through the hazy, ambiguous language that comprises this last stanza, the commentary on what comes before is clear: it—the subjects of previous verses, that is, man and nature—is erased. It has been. It will be. It might as well not have been mentioned, for all the actors and activity in it will soon be forgotten (v. 11).

(c) כל *Encapsulates This Wearying Process*. Every instance of כל in the prologue encapsulates this wearying process, and the instances seem to stem from הכל הכל in verse 2.

This indistinctness of language that suffuses and characterises these last three verses is an elaboration of the fact verse 8a expresses, that all things, words included, are wearying. As such it is like that line (v. 8a) a fusing of creational elements, of man and nature. Before (vv. 3-7) and after (v. 8b-d) that line, man and nature are bound, connected, but distinct entities. In verse 8a, they are bound to the point of fusion. The verses that follow (vv. 9-11) unfold this phenomenon. This is nothing more and nothing less than the exposition of הכל הכל in verse 2.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>This fusional process advances not only in the prologue but in the book. The final creational episode in Eccl 12.1-8 is one metaphor where man and nature seem so inextricably linked as to end up indistinguishable. All things have become one thing, where decrepit man and decrepit village and decrepit cosmos are expressed together in one evocative scene. This prologue is thus not only a microcosm and a microcanon but a microbook, a miniature version of what it introduces and initiates. Cf. Janzen, "Qohelet," 482.

Throughout the prologue, this binding is a binding of unlike and even seemingly oppositional entities. The binding seems to involve resistance, a resistance that both the positioning and meaning of the words suggests. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the push-and-pull characteristic (we have referred to this characteristic as a ‘separation-in-connection’) first seen in הכל הבל and which I am arguing emanates, as it were, from that phrase, is strongest in the three places in the prologue where כל appears. Its first appearance is in verse 7. This is the only verse wherein an element (water) displays this push-and-pull dynamic within itself: the streams constantly run into the sea and are removed from it. The first line of verse 8 houses the second occurrence. It is flanked on one side by natural elements (vv. 5-7) and on the other side by man reduced to his elements (vv. 8b-d). Both sides are distinct and separate (if connected), but they meet in the middle, are fused into one thing (or ‘things’: הדברים), in verse 8a. Thirdly and finally, the last כל (in the prologue) is in verse 9. The different things here are not sea and stream or nature and man but past and future. Here are two things that are, or at least may be, very different. But verse 9 makes them the same. It both tells us and shows us this through its use of language. What has been and what will be look and sound the same (הוא like מה שהיה, and שיעשה like מה שנעשה); this sharpens the impact of what is stated: past and future are just the same (9ab); there are no advances (9c).

In all three instances of כל this intrinsically positive, comprehensive, one might even say ‘full’ word (meaning ‘all’, ‘every’, or ‘each’) is ‘turned’ into a negative. It is as if the word is evacuated of its essence and made something opposite, made antonymous—to it-

self! Verse 7 reads 'all rivers run to the sea'; but this fullness empties into a perennial unfullness, a forever unfull sea. **אִנְנוּ** at the end of line two essentially receives the **כֹּל** that began the verse, depleting it in the process. **כֹּל** appears next in verse 8. It is modified by **לֹא** and followed by three clauses, each of which begins with the negative particle **לֹא**. The 'fullness' of **כֹּל** is thus characterised by a physically and often morally negative word and elaborated by a triplicate and therefore resounding 'no' (or 'not'). 'All' is made to mean 'none'. The syndrome is the same in verse 9, if more compactly accomplished. 'All' is transformed into 'nothing at all' through its clausal connection to **אִין** in the collocation **כֹּל וְאִין כֹּל**. Each case exemplifies the dynamic at work in **הַכֹּל הַבֹּל**: opposite things are made to mean one thing, and in each case the meaning that remains or 'wins' is the negating or substance-less word, in the first case (v. 2) **הַבֹּל** and in the three following (vv. 7, 8, 9), **אִין**. What is more, in all four instances (vv. 2, 7, 8, 9) the **כֹּל** is not only negated or overpowered by the negative substantive or particle; it is actually made to strengthen the force of its antonym. The case of **כֹּל** in verse 9 illustrates this facet well, where **כֹּל** converts what would read 'there is not' (**אִין** alone) to 'there is not at all' (**אִין כֹּל**).

Seen together, these three instances of **כֹּל** image **הַכֹּל הַבֹּל** in another way. It is through chiasm.

A: 7: **כֹּל . . . אִנְנוּ**

B: 8: **כֹּל . . . לֹא, לֹא, לֹא**

A': 9: **אִין כֹּל**

The כּל in verse 8 is the focus of the chiasm. The phrase it begins, the three words of v. 8a, also happen to form the centerpoint of the prologue, as we have seen. The phrase holds the surrounding verses together. Better, the surrounding verses sink into it by being summarised by it. It essentially devours them, just like the sea before it.<sup>54</sup> This center כּל is flanked by the only other כּלs in the prologue proper (vv. 3-11), each housed in verses that flank verse 8, each reflecting one another through their partnership with the opposing word אִין, a word both are in conversation with from different distances.<sup>55</sup>

From verse 7 to verse 9, the order of כּל and אִין is flipped, making a chiasm of its own with אִין in the middle.<sup>56</sup> As with verse 7 and our analysis of its second line in particular, so here: ‘nothing’ is central.

If we include הַכּל הַבּל in verse 2, the set-up changes:

A: 2: הַכּל הַבּל

B: 7: אִינּוּ . . . כּל

A': 8: כּל . . . לֹא, לֹא, לֹא

B': 9: אִין כּל

The arrangement is no longer chiastic but parallelistic. As before, verses 7 and 9 are grouped, but from this perspective, so are verses 2 and 8, if by default. This should not

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<sup>54</sup>Thus again, this time ideationally, are nature and man bound (since 7cd certainly speaks of nature, and 8a certainly speaks of man).

<sup>55</sup>In verse 9 the two words are directly proximate and form an idiom, whereas in verse 7 they stand at opposite ends of the verse's first half, ‘pulling’ at each other as it were. As always in the prologue, the negative word wins (v.2: הַכּל; v. 7: אִינּוּ; v. 8: לֹא; v. 9: אִין).

<sup>56</sup>A: כּל B: אִינּוּ B': אִין A': כּל

surprise, as **הכל הכל** is the key collocation of the book, and verse 8 is the key verse of the creational proem, the **כל** that begins that verse (v. 8) the first word of three that form the crux on which all the surrounding elements of man and nature hang, or, into which they are absorbed. The dynamic within creation whereby nothing at all new was or will be produced emerges from **הכל הכל**, is an explanation of it, a consequence of it. It an explanation of the wearying of all things.

This process of all things becoming one thing tells us about what *hevel* is, what it means, what it does to *hakkol*, to the all, to creation. But what does it tell us?

(3) *The Stated Points to What is Everywhere Unsaid but Assumed and Inevitable.*

Why does man not profit (v. 3)? Why do generations go into the eternal earth (v. 4)? Why does nature not progress (vv. 5-7)? Why is all wearying (v. 8)? Why is there nothing at all new (vv. 9-10)? What flattens all within time and space? Why do we all forget and will thus all be forgotten (v. 11)? Why is every occurrence of the intrinsically full and positive word meaning 'all' or 'everything' (**כל**) made to mean 'nothing', even to the degree that 'nothing' is made structurally and semantically central in what it seems ought to be the fullness of creation? Death.<sup>57</sup> It is the one word that makes sense of all these questions;

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<sup>57</sup>Cf. Zimmerli, "Wisdom in OT Theology," 156.; Forman, "Use of Genesis," 262.; also Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography," 387. Schüle argues that for Qohelet, death is an evil, and man's heart is full of evil. He follows this with a section entitled 'Qoheleth's Reference to the Primeval History (Gen 6-8)'. This gets close to suggesting that Qohelet connects death and the evil in man's heart to divine judgement and creational curse (Andreas Schüle, "Evil from the Heart. Qoheleth's Negative Anthropology and Its Canonical Context," in *The Language of Qohelet in Its Context*, ed. A. Berlejung, and P. Van Hecke (Leuven:

it is certainly the reason for the syndrome described in this last verse; and it must be a key to understanding הכל הכל, the two words which the verses that follow it unfold.<sup>58</sup>

### An Exposition of Ecclesiastes 1.8b-d

We have seen how verses 9-11 unfold verse 8a. It follows that these verses should also unfold verse 8b-d, since 8a and 8b-d are integrally related, the latter unfolding the former, and since verses 9-11 follow from all of verse 8 and not only its first three words. The first line of verse 8 speaks to the wearying of all things. The next three lines seem to connect this wearying to man's disobedience, specifically to Israel's disobedience.

Verses 9-11 seem to explain the wearying of all things as ending in death, as being death (the force that makes all things the same thing, that homogenises all words and space and time). Since these three verses unfold and develop 8a in this way, it seems reasonable to expect that they might also unfold and develop 8b-d (since 8a and 8b-d are integrally related; since 8b-d explains 8a) and thus also connect the wearying of all things (ending in death) to Israel's disobedience. They do.

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Peeters, 2007), 163-65.).

<sup>58</sup>Verses 9-11 do not explicitly say that the homogenisation of language, space, and time speaks of death. They do not state that death is the reason nothing is new. Rather, they say that death is the reason we think things are new when they are not. But other things suggest this last stanza is pointing to death as an indication that nothing is new. Firstly, a textual point: verse 9 leads to verse 11, which speaks of death. Secondly, a conceptual point: where more than in death do different things become the same thing, one thing (cf. Eccl 1.4, 3.20, 12.7)? Thirdly, a contextual point: death seems a logical extension of, a consummation of, the toil of verse 3 and the wearying of verse 8. It is what they lead to.

In short, verses 9-11 unfold and develop not only 8a but all of verse 8. In so doing they, like verse 8, connect Israel's disobedience to the wearying of all things.<sup>59</sup>

(1) *The Wearying of All Things and Israel's Exile*. Like verse 8, like verses 1-2 when read together in light of what follows and in light of the wider context of the Hebrew Bible in which they are set, verses 9-11 reveal what seems to be an integral relationship between the condition of Israel and that of creation. Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 may constitute, among other things, a polemic against the hope of a new creation found in passages in *deutero* and *trito*-Isaiah.<sup>60</sup> These Isaianic passages connect a renewed creation to a renewed Israel, an Israel returned from exile. Thus, to polemicise against these passages by saying that there will be no renewed creation ('nothing at all new') is tantamount to saying that there will be no renewed Israel, that Israel will not return from exile.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>As we saw in the last chapter, the two are not as unrelated as they might seem. Wearying (יגעוּם) carries strong moral connotations; so the fact that it unfolds into the morally charged language of idolatry and spiritual deadness of v. 8b-d should not surprise.

<sup>60</sup>Among others (e.g. Jer 31.31, Eze 36.26). Cf. Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 50 n.54.; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 54, esp. n. 33.; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 116-17.; Francesco Bianchi, "Il metodo del Qohelet: il poema iniziale (1,1-18)," *Parole di vita* 48 (2003), 21.; Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 27; Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, 91, citing Mazzinghi. Towner offers an insight of similar ilk in relation to Eccl 1.3: 'the psalmist had construed Israel's own history as . . . a reversal of fortune: "He gave them the lands of the nations,/and they took possession of the wealth [עַמְלֵי . . .] of the peoples" (Ps 105:44 NRSV). Qohelet's observation that toil gains nothing confounds all notions of distributive justice' (W. Sibley Towner. *The Book of Ecclesiastes. The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, 5 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 293.).

<sup>61</sup>And that, perhaps, even if she does, she and creation will remain as they are, in a state of degeneracy leading to death.

(a) *Prophetic Polemic: Nothing New.* In Ecclesiastes 1.9-11, Qohelet asserts that there is nothing new (חדש) and never will be and that there will be no remembrance (זכרון) of former things (ראשנים) or of those after (אחרנים/אחרונה). In saying this he levels all things: supposedly new things and later things are the same as past things (or 'former things': ראשנים) because they will all be forgotten. This seems to be a polemic against passages in *deutero* and *trito*-Isaiah which use the same words (or roots)<sup>62</sup> in a different way. Isaiah 42.9 reads, 'Behold, the former things (הראשנות) have come to pass, and new things (חדשות) I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them'. In Isaiah 43.18-19 God enjoins Israel, 'Remember (תזכרו) not the former things (ראשנות), nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing (חדשה); now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert'. And in Isaiah 65.17 God assures Israel, 'For behold, I create new (חדשים) heavens and a new (חדשה) earth; and the former things (הראשנות) shall not be remembered (תזכרנה) or come into mind'. Isaiah 42.9 uses ראשנות and חדש and Isaiah 43.18-19 and 65.17 use זכר and ראשנות and חדש to make the same essential point: former things will not be remembered, because God will do something new. These prophetic texts set former things against new things, asserting or at least implying a vast difference between them.<sup>63</sup> On the contrary, Qohelet says there is no difference between former things and later things and flatly contradicts the Isaianic texts in saying that there will be nothing at all

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<sup>62</sup>Isa 43.18 and 65.17 use the verb זכר rather than the noun זכרון.

<sup>63</sup>So Isa 48.3-6, 61.4 (though ראשון and חדש are used slightly differently).

new.<sup>64</sup>

Two of these three Isaianic texts house a phrase found only one other place in the Hebrew Bible, in Ecclesiastes 1.11. The phrase is a statement to the effect that the ‘former things will not be remembered’ because of the new thing God will do. In Isaiah 43.18 it is an injunction to, ‘Remember not the former things’ (אל תזכרו ראשנות). Isaiah 65.17 reads similarly: ‘and the former things shall not be remembered’ (ולא תזכרנה הראשנות). In both cases there is negative particle/adverb plus a form of the verb זכר plus ראשנות. This is how Ecclesiastes 1.11 begins: ‘There is no remembrance of former things’ (אין זכרון לראשנים).<sup>65</sup> The fact that these two texts also house חדש, a word integrally tied to the argument initiated by this phrase in Ecclesiastes 1.11, strengthens the connection this collocation (neg. part. + זכר + ראשון) seems to establish. Additionally, Isaiah 65.17 presents three of the four key terms we have been studying in the same order and number in which they are presented in Ecclesiastes 1.9-11.

Isaiah 65.17	Ecclesiastes 1.9-11
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<sup>64</sup>In Isaiah 42.9, ‘former things’ (הראשנות) are contrasted with ‘new things’ (חדשות), the two being connected through antithetical parallel. In Ecclesiastes 1.11, ‘former things’ (ראשנים) are contrasted with ‘after things’. The ‘new things’ of Isaiah 42.9 are absent, perhaps conspicuously so, especially since ‘newness’ is present (2x) and prominent in this stanza (Eccl 1.9-10); but it is rejected rather than affirmed. In this final stanza of the prologue, then, newness is not only conspicuously absent but both replaced by a future (אחרנים and אחרנה) that we are told will be just like the past (ראשנים) and emphatically denied as a future reality (in Eccl 1.9-10).

<sup>65</sup>זכרון shares a root with זכר, but the two are different words. I address this point below.

For behold, I create new (חדשים) heavens	there is nothing at all new (חדש)(v. 9)
and a new (חדשה) earth;	'See, this is new (חדש)(v. 10)
and the former things shall not be remem-	There is no remembrance of former things
bered (ולא תזכרנה הראשונות) or come into	(אין זכרון לראשנים)(v. 11)
mind	

So of these three Isaianic texts (42.9, 43.18-19, 65.17), the latter two use three of the four key terms that occur in Ecclesiastes 1.9-11. They are also the only texts in the Hebrew Bible that also house the collocation which begins Ecclesiastes 1.11 (neg. part. + זכר + ראשון).

And Isaiah 65.17 uses the terms in the same order and number as Qohelet does.

Although no one verse contains the four terms used in Ecclesiastes 1.9-11, one text does. It is Isaiah 43. This passage houses all four key terms housed in Ecclesiastes 1.9-11, and it is the only other text in the Hebrew Bible to do so. Isaiah 43.10 reads, “You are my witnesses,” says the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after (אחרי) me”. Isaiah 43.18-19 follows, ‘Remember not the former things (אל תזכרו ראשונות), nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing (חדשה); now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert’. Again, this is the only text other than Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 that houses all four words, or roots, we have been considering.<sup>66</sup> But the similarity seems to stretch beyond

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<sup>66</sup>אחר, זכר, ראשון, חדש

these four roots. More of the prologue than its final stanza seems to mirror, and thus perhaps polemicise, Isaiah 43, and in fact chapter 42 as well.

A comparison of Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 and Isaiah 43.10, 18-19 already seemed to suggest that the final three verses of the prologue may be a polemic against the promise of God that he will restore His people and creation with it. Why should the larger contexts of both passages not suggest something similar? They may. Isaiah 43.5-6 reads, 'Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east (מִזְרַח), and from the west (מִמְעַרְב) I will gather you; I will say to the north (צִפּוֹן), Give up, and to the south (תִּימֵן), Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth'. Ecclesiastes 1.5-6 speaks of sun and wind and lists זָרַח (rising) then בָּא (setting) then דָּרוּם (south) then צִפּוֹן (north), in that order. Isaiah 43.8 continues, 'Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes (עֵינַיִם), who are deaf, yet have ears (אָזְנַיִם)!'<sup>67</sup> This sounds something like the second half of Ecclesiastes 1.8, 'the eye (עֵין) is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear (אָזֶן) filled with hearing'. Then the last sentence of Isaiah 43.10: 'Before me (לְפָנַי) no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me (אַחֲרָי)'. The same two words end Ecclesiastes 1.10-11, respectively, and are consequently also paired (מִלְפָּנַי and לְאַחֲרָי). The sea (יָם) is mentioned in Isaiah 43.16 (also in 42.10), so in Ecclesiastes 1.7; then comes Isaiah 42.18-19 which we have studied. It contains a collocation (neg. part. + זָכַר + רָאוּן) occurring only also in the Hebrew Bible in Isaiah 65.17 and Ecclesiastes 1.11. Both Isaianic passages contrast this phrase with the word חָדַשׁ. Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 makes the same con-

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<sup>67</sup>See also Isa 42.18-20.

trast but only to debunk it, to show that it is no contrast at all. Isaiah 43 goes on to speak of Israel's sins and in that context uses the term יגע thrice (43.22-4) and שבע once (43.24). Both of these words occur in Ecclesiastes 1.8. זכר is then used twice more (43.25-6) before the chapter closes. The related זכרון is a *leitwort* in Ecclesiastes 1.11.<sup>68</sup> Finally, Isaiah 42.14 includes the word שאף,<sup>69</sup> a word used only seven times in the Hebrew Bible, one of which is in Ecclesiastes 1.5.<sup>70</sup>

This larger comparison between the contexts of Isaiah 43.18-19 and Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 suggests that Qohelet may be comparing more of his prologue to more of Isaiah 43 than Isaiah 43.18-19. At least, it supports the notion that Qohelet may be echoing these two verses (Isaiah 43.18-9) to polemicise them.<sup>71</sup> This evidence, along with that provided by Isaiah 42.9 and 65.17 and other texts, suggests what we have been saying: Qohelet is speaking against the hope of a new creation in this prologue, and he is doing it by seeming to allude to texts that promise a new Israel, to texts that link a restored creation to a

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<sup>68</sup>See my study of זכרון below.

<sup>69</sup>'For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant' (אשאף).

<sup>70</sup>And the sun rises, and the sun sets, and to its place, panting (שאוף), it is rising there. The same lexeme also occurs 7x in the HB and means 'crush'. Cf. Even-Shoshan, *New Concordance [in Hebrew]*, 1101.

<sup>71</sup>See Katharine J. Dell. *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 109-58. where Dell argues that the author of the book of Job does something similar throughout that book, taking texts elsewhere in the Hebrew biblical literature and using them for his own purposes, often with parodic effect. As one might suppose with such a title, Ecclesiastes plays into Dell's analysis. Also see Katharine Dell, and Will Kynes, eds. *Reading Job Intertextually* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013).

restored Israel. In short then, by rejecting the hope of a renewed creation, Qohelet is rejecting the hope of a renewed Israel, of an Israel returned from exile.<sup>72</sup>

Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 as polemic therefore essentially 'leaves' Israel in a state of exile<sup>73</sup> and does that within a context of a withering, decomposing, dying creation. Her exile was a consequence of her idolatry. This connection between Israel's exiled and creation's wearying state is thus a connection between Israel's idolatry and creation's wearying unto death. This is the same connection Ecclesiastes 1.8 makes, and since verses 9-11 are an exposition of that verse, this connection should not surprise.

The tie Qohelet signals in the prologue between a corrupted creation and a corrupted nation (Israel), both seemingly void of God's presence, may help make sense of the allusions to Ezekiel in the prologue. The allusion in Ecclesiastes 1.8 to Ezekiel 7.19 points to a text (Eze 7.19) where God's Spirit (רוח) is about to evacuate Israel's temple, which is equivalent to leaving Israel and creation.<sup>74</sup> The allusion to the text in Ezekiel (42.15-20) which delineates the new-creational temple occurs in Ecclesiastes 1.5-7, the verses that picture a total creation seemingly bereft of God's presence. The רוח blows through this landscape, but it is the howling wind, nothing more.

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. Schüle, "Evil from the Heart," 170-71.

<sup>73</sup>Hengstenberg opines, "This book is unintelligible except on the historical presupposition that the people of God was in a very miserable condition at the time of its composition' (Hengstenberg, Ecclesiastes, 45.).

<sup>74</sup>Since it is through a blessed Israel that the nations, and creation through them, will be blessed (Gen 12.1-4 et al.). A cursed Israel thus spells a cursed creation.

Through these allusions at this point in the prologue, it is as if Qohelet has sketched in light pencil Ezekiel's picture of a new creation and a new Israel flush with God's presence (or רוח)<sup>75</sup> and superimposed a heavy, ink drawing of his הכל הבל creation where the רוח whirls around in every direction (Eccl 1.6) but with God's רוח nowhere in sight. It is a creation full of activity and void of hope, a creation whose final word is not the prophetic promise of new creation and return from exile where later things will replace former; it is instead the word 'there is nothing at all new', 'the later will be just like the former', and 'nothing will be remembered' because of death. The fact that this text in Ezekiel 42.15-20, like those in *deutero* and *trito*-Isaiah, has to do with the restoration of Israel and, seemingly, of creation, strengthens the case that Qohelet is indeed making reference to both Israel and creation here in the prologue. And it strengthens the case that he is using these prophetic texts to build a polemic against them.

Still, one thing nags. The Isaianic passages that Qohelet seems to be polemicising at the end of his prologue call Israel not to remember the things of old, and in so doing they employ the verb זכר. But Qohelet uses another, albeit related word, the noun זכרון (meaning 'memorial' or 'remembrance'). If he is comparing his text to prophetic texts, why use this different word? Why use זכרון and not זכר?

(2) *The Wearying of All Things and Israel's Idolatry*

(a) *Being Forgotten.* In the Hebrew Bible, in general, sins remembered is bad news for someone; sins forgotten is good news; people remembered is good news for

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<sup>75</sup>God's Spirit (רוח) returns to this new-creational temple in the next passage (Eze 43).

someone (the righteous are remembered); people forgotten is bad news (the wicked are forgotten).<sup>76</sup> Then there is Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes, the righteous and the wicked, the wise and foolish, are alike forgotten.<sup>77</sup> Even the beasts are forgotten. The reason is given: 'everything (הכל) walks to one place' (Eccl 3.20). All must die.<sup>78</sup>

(b) זכרון. The word used in Ecclesiastes 1.11 is זכרון, meaning 'memorial' or 'remembrance'. It occurs twenty-two times in the Hebrew Bible, often in cultic contexts. Exodus 12.14 is the first occurrence in the Torah and fairly typical. God's salvation is to be celebrated by Israel through an annual feast. This memorial is to be enforced by law and thus becomes part of the nation's cultus. To thus bring to remembrance or memorialise God's salvation of and word to Israel is blessing to Israel.

In short, זכרון works two ways. It speaks to Israel's remembering God and to God's remembering Israel. They remember He has saved and saves them, and He remembers them so they will be saved. Job 13.12 and Esther 6.1 are exceptional. And in light of the word's general use in the Hebrew Bible, instances like Numbers 5.15, 18 and Isaiah 57.8 where sins (Num 5.15, 18) and false gods (Isa 57.8) are remembered only underscore the gravity of offense against a God who calls his people to memorialise his saving acts and words.

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<sup>76</sup>Tuv Ta'am betrays this understanding in his eisegesis of Eccl 1.11: 'It is the *wicked* who perish from the earth. The *righteous*, however, are remembered eternally . . .' (Koheles, 59.).

<sup>77</sup>Eccl 2.16. The momentous impact of this implication within the biblical Hebrew worldview is not lost on Enns in his comments on Eccl 1.11 (Enns, Ecclesiastes, 35-36.).

<sup>78</sup>NIDOTTE 1:1104.

All three instances of זכרון in Ecclesiastes are negatives; that is, they are clausally connected either to אִין (Eccl 1.11, 2.16) or to לֹא (Eccl 1.11). I will return to these instances and their implications below. The only other place in the Hebrew Bible where the word is modified by a negative particle is Nehemiah 2.20, where Sanballat and his henchmen are told, 'The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim (זכרון) in Jerusalem'. Similarly, Exodus 17.14 reads, 'Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial (זכרון) in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory (זכר) of Amalek from under heaven."'. To have no memorial or remembrance within the context of Israel, her laws, her cultus, and her story is equivalent to being excluded from the covenant of God, from the blessings that a relationship with Him, of being remembered by Him, entails.

In Malachi 3.16 the scroll or book of remembrance (זכרון) is kept for and filled with the names of those who fear God. Can being left out of this book, being un-remembered, be anything less than eternally devastating? More to the point, can it be anything less than a sign of disobedience and Divine disfavour?

In the final verse of this opening section of Ecclesiastes, we are told that there will be no memorial or remembrance (זכרון) of anything. From first to last, from persons to things, all within space and time will be forgotten. The compass of non-remembrance is total, a fact that the context of the entirety of the prologue leading up to this verse establishes.

The fact that this final verse flows from the bitter spring of verse 8, strung through with an allusion to disobedience as it seems to be—and more distantly but seminally from *hevel*, a word not infrequently associated with false worship—combines with the normal usage of זכרון elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to strongly suggest that not only death but disobedience is being pointed to here. Why is there no remembrance of any created thing? Death. The answer is tacit and presents itself easily enough. But why is there death? The face-value of the words in the prologue combines with possible allusion and word-choice to suggest that the answer may be the disobedience of man, and not of any man but of Israel. Death explains verses 9-11, but disobedience, particularly the disobedience of God's people, helps to connect the semantic dots and intertextual echoes scattered throughout these eleven verses and to suggest that Qohelet is speaking not just to the state of creation but to the state of Israel, as Barbour has argued. She has argued that the book speaks to the history of Israel leading to exile. I am arguing that the prologue alone does this.<sup>79</sup> As such, it is a microcosm, not only of creation but of the book, and thus of Israel's history from Davidic/Solomonic monarchy to Babylonian exile.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike the hopeful Isaianic passages, Qohelet is not calling Israel to not remember the things of old (disobedience, punishment, exile) but saying that there is no remem-

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<sup>79</sup>I am also arguing that it speaks to the resulting condition of creation, tacitly linking the condition of Israel to the condition of creation.

<sup>80</sup>In truth, from Adam to Babylonian exile; and so, these eleven verses are a boiled-down version of the Hebrew Bible, with one exception: there is no Messianic hope, for the Messianic figure is Qohelet, and his enterprise has failed, as verses that proceed from the prologue clearly show (Eccl 1.12ff.). I elaborate on this assertion below.

brance, no memorial, for any Israelite, for any human, for any thing in creation. He is saying that all within space and time—all words, all things that were, are, or will be—are wearying and will be forgotten in death. This wearying and death come from the idolatry of Israel and affect all things.<sup>81</sup> This may be why Qohelet chose to use זכרון rather than זכר: it is more often associated with remembering God's saving words and acts.<sup>82</sup> זכרון seems more morally charged. To be denied memorial (אין זכרון) and not simply denied memory (אין זכר), therefore, seems a more severe sentence. And in this context, in the context the prologue provides, the sentence is one placed not only upon Israel but upon all things and, importantly, upon all things through Israel and her collective-king.

This connection gives rise to a conclusion which is so basic as to be axiomatic in the Hebrew Bible: Israel is a conduit of blessing or curse to creation.<sup>83</sup> In this case, she is a conduit of curse. Is there other evidence within the prologue to support this conclusion? There is, and it is at the beginning.

I have contended that verses 9-11 are an exposition of הכל הכל in verse 2, an exposition which says that all things—all within space and time—are becoming one thing,

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<sup>81</sup>As the Isaianic theme of no-remembrance is interlaced with the promise of restoration ('I will not remember the former things but will do a new thing'), so Qohelet may be playing off that relationship to reverse the affirmation ('former things will not be remembered but there will be nothing new'), producing an ironic twist that thrusts the dagger of the reality of un-remembrance in more deeply still.

<sup>82</sup>Bianchi speaks to the lack of remembrance in Eccl 1.11 within this context, that of Israel being called to remember God's saving acts and faithfulness toward them (Bianchi, "Il metodo del Qohelet: il poema iniziale (1,1-18)," 21-22.).

<sup>83</sup>Gen 12.3.

that all creation is dying. Verses 9-11 thus unpack verse 2. What leads to verse 2? Verse 1 does. As I argued in chapters one and two, this verse presents the words of Israel's king, a Davidic, Messianic figure and as such an embodiment and representative of the nation of Israel. So the prologue begins with Israel and her king and immediately proceeds to what seems to be a curse over all creation, a statement to the effect that all things are wearying, are dying, are breath, are transient, and are therefore pointless, profitless, futile. The message we have seen unfolded in verses 8-11 is packed into verses 1-2. This stands to reason, since every signal we have studied in verses 3-11 has told us that these verses (with vv. 8-11 as their consummation) unfold verse 2. Why should they not also unfold verse 1? It seems they do.

*(3) More Evidence That the State of Creation is Linked to the Condition of Israel, That Its Decay Is a Consequence of Hers*

*(a) Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.11 as Allusions to Israel's Monarchic History.* In chapter 2 we considered the possibility that what lay between Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 1.11 is the chronicle of the reign of King Qohelet, the Every-King of Israel who represents and embodies Israel. If this is true, if the verses that follow Ecclesiastes 1.1 are not only the words of Qohelet but his acts or deeds,<sup>84</sup> then the account of creation given in Ecclesiastes 1.2-11 is not only an account of creation but an account of Israel as well. This

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<sup>84</sup>The collocation דברי קהלת which begins Ecclesiastes could be understood to mean not only 'The words of Qohelet' but also 'The deeds of Qohelet', since this is the meaning of דברי when it is linked in collocation to מלך בירושלם in Kings and Chronicles, passages Qohelet may be echoing here to frame his prologue.

fits the message of the polemic in verses 9-11 and verses 1 and 2: the state of Israel and the state of creation are inextricably linked.<sup>85</sup> Consequently, the exiled state of Israel (and that which led to exile) means the state of creation in which there is nothing at all new, in which all things are wearying, in which all space and time converge into one thing, into one end—into death.<sup>86</sup>

Like the polemic embedded in verses 9-11, the layout of the prologue suggests an integral relationship between the state of Israel and the state of creation. Through the blessing of Israel, creation will be blessed. Her renewal means creation's, her fruitfulness creation's (Ex 1.7, Gen 1.28), her ruin creation's too.

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<sup>85</sup>See Postell, relying heavily on Koorevaar and his work in Chronicles, who shows how the Chronicler weaves together Israel's story and the story of creation through the themes of 'beginning and end' ('thereby sealing the OT into a single meta-narrative by means of the principle of "beginning and end" [Seth D. Postell. *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 156-62, 159.]). Postell goes on to write, 'Adam is the type set for this coming conquering king. The "king" of the ראשית ("beginning") provides the job description for the king of the אחרית ("end")' (Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 163.). Postell emphasises here the 'ongoing importance' for the Chronicler in the part the 'house of David' must play in the 'God's plan for the people of Israel' (Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 159.). In this prologue in Ecclesiastes that seems to intertwine the estates of Israel and creation, is it any wonder that it begins with the house of David and ends with talk of first and last, of beginning and end?

<sup>86</sup>Dell records that the Targumist, thinking Solomon was the author, concluded that Solomon must have been transported in a spirit of prophecy 'into the distant future whose history he depicts'. Dell continues, 'Hence [Eccl 1.2] is paraphrased: "The words of prophecy which Qoheleth, the son of David the King, who was in Jerusalem, prophesied. When Solomon, the King of Israel, saw by the spirit of prophecy the kingdom of Rehoboam his son, that it will be divided with Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and that Jerusalem and the holy temple will be destroyed, and that the people of Israel will be carried away into captivity, he said, by His word, Vanity of vanities is this world, vanity of vanities is all for which I and my father David have laboured, all is vanity!"' (Katharine J. Dell, "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom: Consulting Early Interpreters," VT 44.3 (1994), 322.).

### An Integrated Reading: The Story of the King, Israel, and Creation

Prophecies in *deutero* and *trito*-Isaiah speak of hope for Israel and for creation, but not only that. They speak of a hope for Israel and for creation through God's servant. He is the conduit of blessing to both Israel and all things. It is no accident that the prologue of Ecclesiastes is framed by mention of the King of Israel and David's son, who is also to be God's servant.<sup>87</sup> Qohelet is Israel, his story hers. The meaning of the word 'Qohelet' speaks to this truth. So do the texts to which Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 11 point. They point to the whole history of Israel (and later Judah)<sup>88</sup> from David and Solomon to exile, with reference to that span through Israel's (and then Judah's) kings. The kings' disobedience led to Israel's,<sup>89</sup> which led to exile, which leaves us with a hopeless, cursed creation.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Deut 17.18-20; 2 Sam 7.4-5, 8, 19, 21, 25-28.

<sup>88</sup>The Chronicler uses the name Israel for Judah (Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 27-28., citing H. G. M. Williamson, et al.)

<sup>89</sup>Targum Qohelet understands 1.12-13 as suggesting Solomon lost his throne through sin (Madeleine Taradach, and Joan Ferrer. *Un Targum de Qohéleth: Editio Princeps du LMS. M-2 de Salamanca; Texte araméen, traduction et commentaire critique. Le Monde de la Bible*, 37 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1998); cf. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, liii-liv.).

<sup>90</sup>Manfredi discerns three HB strands Qohelet picks up on and negativizes: they involve king, the idea of prophesied renewal, and cultic memory (Silvana Manfredi, "Qohelet in Dialogo: Una Sfida Intertestuale," in *Il libro del Qohelet: Tradizione, redazione, teologia*, ed. Giuseppe Bellia, and Angelo Passaro (Milano: Paoline, 2001).). Independent of her study, and using the same texts (she utilises others also), we have noted similar strands and pull them together to make a point in this conclusion. Beale is even closer to the mark and sees the same convergence when he refers to 'the general future hope typical of Israel's worldview in which the following are included as the objects of that hope: resurrection, *renewal of the cosmos, vindication of Israel, return from captivity . . .*' (Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 178., emphasis mine). His next sentence crystallises the triplicate I have detected of creation/Israel/collective-king (Qohelet): 'I am using the phrase "new-creational reign" broadly with all three senses and thus refer to the entire network of

This makes sense of Qohelet as a cipher, as a 'composite king' who in himself represents all the kings of Israel from Solomon onward and in so doing represents Israel.<sup>91</sup> His words and deeds are those of Israel. Again, Qohelet is Israel. His story is Her story.<sup>92</sup> What the prologue tells us is that Qohelet's story as Israel's story is integrally related to creation's story.<sup>93</sup> Is this not what the new creation passages told to Israel by Isaiah and others amount to? And it does not originate with the prophets but in Genesis, with God's message to Abraham. Through him, the nations will be blessed, or cursed (Gen 12.3). Israel is to be the purveyor of this Abrahamic blessing to the nations and to all creation.<sup>94</sup>

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ideas that belong to renewal of the whole world, of Israel, and of the individual' (Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 178.). Beale goes on to point out these same three categories dealt with by Wright (in N. T. Wright. *The New Testament and the People of God*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 259-60.) in his understanding of biblical election: '(1) a cosmic or worldwide level, in which Israel's role was to be an agent in restoring the fallen creation; (2) a national level, in which Israel suffered because of its own sin and needed its own restoration; (3) the individual level, in which an Israelite received forgiveness and restoration symbolically through the sacrificial system . . .' (Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 178-79.).

<sup>91</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 10.

<sup>92</sup>Solomon regards himself as a representative of the whole nation . . . by being an *'ebed* he is a representative of Yahweh and at the same time a representative of Israel' (Leonidas Kalugila. *The Wise King: Studies in Royal Wisdom as Divine Revelation in the Old Testament and Its Environment*. OTS, 15 (Uppsala: Coniectanea Biblica, 1980), 113.).

<sup>93</sup>Y. V. Koh and Longman III, among many, view the book as royal autobiography (Yee-Von Koh. *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qohelet*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006); Tremper Longman III. *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991) and Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*). My reading fits this understanding. Only, in my reading, the autobiography begins not in Eccl 1.12 but in Eccl 1.1.

<sup>94</sup>Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 45-52. Cf., e.g., Ps 72, where Solomon as Davidic king, as a sort of David (Ps 72.20), will bless creation. This king is the conduit of the Abrahamic blessing to all nations and to creation (Ps 72.17 in light of Gen 22.18).

Of course, this promise of blessing and curse to Abraham through Abraham harks back to the mandate God gave the first man in the garden.<sup>95</sup> His obedience would mean the blessing of creation, his disobedience its demise (Gen 1.28, 3.17-19).<sup>96</sup> These connections help make sense of the many allusions in Ecclesiastes to the early chapters of Genesis.<sup>97</sup> Adam is Israel.<sup>98</sup> So is Qohelet. Qohelet is thus Adam, or Adamic, as well. As an Every-king, he is an Every-man, *the* man, the **אדם**. Through his words and deeds, the story of creation and of Israel is told.<sup>99</sup> And they are one and the same story, sharing one end. The disobedience of man, of Adam, of Israel, of Qohelet, has led to the wearying, the corruption, of

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<sup>95</sup>See Wright, *Climax*, 21-26.

<sup>96</sup>Cf. Luther, *Notes on Ecclesiastes, Lectures on the Song of Solomon, Treatise on the Last Words of David*, 21; Hengstenberg, *Ecclesiastes*, 51, 54, 56-7.

<sup>97</sup>See esp. Maurer, "The Book of Ecclesiastes as a Derash of Genesis 1-4: A Study in Old Testament Literary Dependency." Also cf. Anderson, "The Curse of Work in Qoheleth.;" Forman, "Use of Genesis"; Webb, *Festal Garments*, 103-04.; Kruger sees Qohelet drawing heavily from Gen 1-11 (Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 25.). Rendtorff writes, 'One can even say that most of the books of the canon of the HB could not be fully understood without knowledge of the Pentateuch to which they frequently directly or indirectly refer' (Rolf Rendtorff. *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*. (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2005), 6.). In his comments on Eccl 1.2-3, Coleman opens, 'Man, by the fall, hath subjected himself and all things under the sun to vanity' (John Noble Coleman. *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Notes Explanatory, Illustrative, and Critical*. Logos Bible Software 4, ).

<sup>98</sup>Postell, *Adam as Israel*; see Sharp's note on Midrashic connections between Qohelet, Adam/Eden, Israel, lawbreaking, and death in Sharp, "Ironic Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet," 56 n. 38.

<sup>99</sup>Wright's words resonate: 'On the other hand—and this is the important point in the context of this chapter—the identification of wisdom and Torah means, yet again, that the world is made for the sake of Israel, and that Israel is taking on the role marked out for Adam. Finally, this idealized wisdom, in particular, of David's heir, Solomon. By identifying him with the wisdom tradition, the royal claim to be the true Israelite and hence the true Man is further enhanced' (Wright, *Climax*, 26.).

all things.<sup>100</sup> Man's, Qohelet's, disobedience has led to creational death.<sup>101</sup> This is what הכל הבל in the context of King Qohelet means.<sup>102</sup>

Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 11 seem to frame the prologue in that they may serve together as allusions to the same group of texts in Kings and Chronicles. These verses in Kings and Chronicles convey the monarchical history of Israel from David to exile. One thing they show us is that as goes the king of Israel (later Judah), so goes Israel. If Ecclesiastes is alluding to these texts in the first and last verses of its prologue (1.1, 11), it adds to this message: as goes the king of Israel (later Judah), so goes Israel, so goes creation. The sinful slide and ruin of Israel's king means the ruin of Israel, means the ruin of creation. This is one of the payloads of the prologue and of the book and is one of its contributions to the Hebrew Bible.<sup>103</sup> If this is right, it may help explain the book's place within the Hebrew

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<sup>100</sup>Cf. Postell, Adam as Israel, 161.

<sup>101</sup>Gen 2.17, Rom 5.12.

<sup>102</sup>Shields gets it almost right and therefore exactly wrong when he writes, 'Qoheleth perceives a complete lack of purpose in history' and goes on to speak about the covenants God established with Israel and the house of David 'to achieve his ends' (Martin A. Shields. *The End of Wisdom: A Reappraisal of the Historical and Canonical Function of Ecclesiastes*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 128.). It is not that Qoheleth perceives a lack of purpose in history but that, on the contrary, he perceives that purpose clearly. He sees that because God has covenanted 'to achieve his ends' through Israel, David, and David's line and because Israel and David's line have failed, God's ends in history must also fail. Therefore creation must fail. So it seems to Qohelet. For insight and error similar to that of Shields, see Loretz, "Poetry and Prose in the Book of Qoheleth," 167. Perdue puts it most bluntly: 'Ultimately, for Qoheleth, history has no value' (Leo G. Perdue. *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 211.).

<sup>103</sup>And it helps make sense of the book's ending, Eccl 12.1-8, a passage rife with Edenic, tabernacle/temple, and creational language which seems to simultaneously describe the death of a man, a nation, a world. The medium is the message. The lives, and deaths, of

Bible, in some ancient orderings a bridge between the wisdom books and the exilic and post-exilic literature.<sup>104</sup> But that is a world other theses need explore, an opening of portals through which we cannot now advance.

Yet we dare extrapolate, and theologise, a bit more. If this allusive-inclusio exists, it helps hitch creation's story to Israel's lodestar; it helps link their stories: an account of Israel is also an account of creation, and vice versa. As it goes with Israel, so with creation. And the king, the Son of David, is Israel (Ex 4.22, 2 Sam 7.14, Hos 11.1), embodies Israel, and as such represents her.<sup>105</sup> If he recreates, if he obeys, there is newness, hope, redemption (from death). If not, there is none—not for Israel, not for creation. What follows the prologue shows the reader right away that King Qohelet, this 'composite-king' (Barbour)—a cipher<sup>106</sup> for the assembly of Israel and her collective kings—failed to make of earth a paradise, failed to find knowledge, wisdom, satisfaction (e. g., Eccl 1.8, 13-2.11).

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all these entities are intertwined.

<sup>104</sup>As noted above, in some orderings, Lamentations follows Ecclesiastes. It is perhaps more than curious that the two books dovetail nicely, Ecclesiastes ending with what seems to be the ruin of a city and of a people, Lamentations beginning with that very thing. Perhaps it should not surprise, then, that the end of both books resemble one another too. In the talk in Lamentations 5 of 1. grinding at the mill, of staggering under loads (v. 13), 2. of old men and music having left the city gate (v. 14), 3. of mourning and of eyes growing dim (vv. 15, 17), do we not hear resonances from Ecclesiastes 12, with its 1. grinders ceasing and low grinding and the grasshopper dragging itself along/bearing its burden (vv. 3-4, 5), its 2. doors on the street being shut and its daughters of song being brought low (v. 4), and with those who 3. look through windows being dimmed and mourners going about in the streets (vv. 3, 5)?

<sup>105</sup>See Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 192-93.

<sup>106</sup>Barbour, *The Story of Israel*, 28.

Because of this, the king begins with a summary of what his failed exploits have led to and locked in—a cursed creation (Eccl 1.2-11).<sup>107</sup> He then moves on to give his story (1.12ff.), because the two stories are related: his story is creation's. Qohelet is Adam, the federal head of God's people. Israel is Adam(ic). And Israel, like Adam was, is God's conduit of blessing (or curse) to creation.

The first eleven verses of Ecclesiastes contain the story of creation, of Israel, and of Israel's king. His disobedience curses Israel which curses creation. Verse 1 presents Qohelet as king and as an encapsulation (viz. representative ergo embodiment) of Israel. Verse 2 presents the curse his words and deeds bring on his nation and on creation. These are words of judgment he owns and imparts to all things. Verses 3-11 first unfold this curse over creation, and in so doing they reveal and thereby reinforce the connection between it, Israel, and Israel's king. Man in his disobedience—and so Adam, corporate Adam (that is, Israel),<sup>108</sup> and Israel's collective King (that is King Qohelet) in theirs—has introduced death to creation. All things have thus become one thing.<sup>109</sup> This is what הכל הבל means. It is a curse Qohelet, as Messianic figure,<sup>110</sup> should have reversed. He did not. Adamic son

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<sup>107</sup>Brown touches, even if tangentially, on this textual phenomenon in his comments which conclude his treatment of the prologue: "There is no "salvation history" here, no divine warrior redeeming and leading a people, let alone all creation, to some momentous consummation' (Brown, Ecclesiastes, 28.).

<sup>108</sup>Cf. Wright, *Climax*, 21-26.; Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 142.; Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 3.

<sup>109</sup>Cf. Sharp, "Ironic Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet," 55-56. where Sharp sees the fusion of Qohelet's and creation's demise.

<sup>110</sup>Cf. Nicolas Perrin, "Messianism in the Narrative Frame of Ecclesiastes?," *RB* 108 (2001).

and sinful man (Eccl 7.20), he could not (Eccl 2.4-11). Represented through him, Israel thus conveys curse rather than blessing to creation. If Israel will not bless creation, creation will not be blessed, for Israel is to be the conduit of blessing to creation (Gen 12.1-4 et al.).<sup>111</sup> This book thus crystallises the need for a Messianic king who will reverse the curse that wracks creation and who will bless it instead.<sup>112</sup> This is the only hope for something 'new under the sun' (Eccl 1.9), a hope Qohelet never presents but simply creates the need for. Since this prologue and book establish that there is nothing new under the sun, this Messiah, if such Messiah there be, must come from elsewhere, from 'outside the sun',<sup>113</sup> that is from outside creation and must enter it to take its corruption inside himself and renew it from within. Ecclesiastes thus creates but does not fulfill the need for a Messiah in the line of Adam and David (and Solomon) who will do what they did not, who will embody Israel and through her convey renewal to the worlds. Read within the context in which it has been set, within the Hebrew Bible,<sup>114</sup> the prologue conveys all of this.

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<sup>111</sup>Again, see Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 45-52., who shows how God's promise to bless creation through Adam passes to Abraham and thus to Israel (through David, cf. 2 Sam 7); also, again, Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 130 et al.. Postell writes, 'Not only is Adam depicted as prototypical Israel, he is also the embodiment of Israel's future kings, a prototypical king' (Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 130.). So is Qohelet. Adam is Israel is Qohelet. Thus is the story of creation and Israel mashed into one beginning in this book, in Eccl 1.1-11.

<sup>112</sup>'Indeed, Koheleth's sayings do not have an independent status' (Childs, *Introduction*, 588.).

<sup>113</sup>Cf. Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 27-28.

<sup>114</sup>Cf. Parsons, "Guidelines," 301-04.

It is thus much more than a circular account of creation pointing to profitlessness alone.

It is a book, and a Bible, writ small. And it is all expressed in two, short words: הכל הבל.

### Conclusion of Chapter 7

The overt message of Ecclesiastes 1.9-11 is conveyed in verse 9: it is that there is no profit or real advance under the sun because what is done has been done before. The wordplay and other instances of literary artistry in these three verses reinforce this message in dozens of ways. It is in large part through this artistry that a more profound message is discovered. Verses 9-11 do not send their own message but are the continuation and consummation of a process begun in Ecclesiastes 1.1-2. The judgment הכל הבל is given final expression, at least within the prologue, here. The chief semantic characteristic of that phrase, of הכל הבל, is also its chief literary characteristic. It is that of making antonyms synonyms, that of making opposite words that speak to opposite realities into one thing. In their interaction, in this phrase, הכל becomes הבל. Everything becomes emptiness, breath, wind, a vapour. Everything becomes nothing. So it is in Ecclesiastes 1.9-11. Semantically and literarily, opposite things become, or are shown to be, the same thing. What was is what will be (v. 9). The new is actually old (v. 10). And former things are the same as those which follow—forgotten (v. 11). This process of opposite realities becoming one reality ends in verse 11 which speaks of, and ends in, death. Death explains everything; it explains the homogenisation spoken of in this stanza. And it is the consummation of the wearying of all things detailed in verse 8. Verses 9-11 unfold this verse, and this process, as well. Even in the nature of their language, these last three verses express a

wearying not only of all space but of all time. The wearing, the process of everything becoming (as) nothing, is total. This is the ambit of 'under the sun' spoken of in verses 3 and 9. It applies not only to men but to all creation, not only to all space but to all time. As an outflow of verse 8, this final stanza in the prologue points to what verse 8 does: all four verses (Eccl 1.8-11) point to the source of this wearing. It is moral. The mechanical failure and fusion of all things is due to the idolatry of man. Joining Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 12 to frame the prologue, verses 9-11 seem to lay this blame not upon the shoulders of any man but on Adam, on Israel (the corporate Adam), and on Israel's embodiment, the son of David, Qohelet King. In conversation with the verses before them and with other books in the Hebrew Bible, books like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Kings, and Chronicles, these verses link the decay of creation to the moral decay of Israel owing to her idolatry. Her exile means the effectual 'exile' of all things ending in corruption, futility, breath, and death. This must be a fundamental expression of what *hevel* means.

**CONCLUSION. EVERYTHING IS (BECOMING) NOTHING: HOW SPACE, TIME,  
ISRAEL'S HISTORY, AND THE CHRONICLE OF HER COLLECTIVE KING CONVERGE  
IN ECCLESIASTES 1.1-11**

Most agree that the prologue is a statement about man's profitlessness; but it is much more. It has to do with creation and all the promises and curses attendant to it—to creation and to the new creation—as it relates to Israel. Here is a book that starts like Genesis 1, moves into a section that resembles Genesis 2,<sup>1</sup> and ends with something of an apocalypse—with the death of all things.<sup>2</sup> As such, Ecclesiastes is a microcanon (of the HB).<sup>3</sup> It is also a microhistory from creation to cosmic destruction which interlaces the rise and fall of Israel ending in exile. But so is the prologue. It too is a microcosm and microcanon. And as such it is a microbiblos, a minature version of itself. As Barbour has shown, Ecclesiastes is a chronicle of Israel's rise and fall, a retelling of Her march toward exile through a wisdom lens. What she fails to show with the same force or focus is what part creation plays in this retelling. My thesis aims to help reveal the integration of these two themes, of the demise of Israel and the demise of creation. What has one to do with the other? The prologue tells us.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Verheij, "Paradise Retried."

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Sharp, "Ironic Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet," 55.

<sup>3</sup>And it brings us back to the beginning, back to itself (as 12.8 returns us to 1.2) but also back to the head of the Tanakh. What else are we to make of a book that begins with creation, moves to a god-like king in a garden, and ends with the three words 'good and . . . evil' (טוב ואם רע: Eccl 12.14)?

This thesis also contends and has supplied ample evidence for the notion that Ecclesiastes 1.3-11 is an exposition of הכל הבל, the last two words of Ecclesiastes 1.2, and that these two words are an integral summary of that verse, verse 2.

One of the major dynamics we traced which emanates from הכל הבל in verse 2 into the nine verse creation-matrix following is a connection in contrast which binds creation in antipathy and pain. Creation within Qohelet's prologue seems held together by a strong force that binds elements (the sun, wind, man) opposed to one another. What does this dynamic tell us about creation in Ecclesiastes 1.3-11 and thus about *hevel*? I think the progression among man and the elements from major separation to lack of separation (so from distinctness to homogenisation) in verses 3-11 offers an answer. This creation shows us the power of *hevel* by showing all things become one thing. What is that one thing? It is *hevel*. What is *hevel*? It seems to be what we have just said: all space, time, nations, and men in history become one thing, the same thing, in death. Why? The language of verse 8 suggests man's idolatry. Worshipping worthless things, man has become worthless, and after him all things. This is why all things are (becoming) one thing. It is why הכל is הבל. These two words speak to the demise of creation in death but,<sup>4</sup> framed by Ecclesiastes 1.1 and 11 as they are, lay the blame for this cosmic death on the doorstep of Qohelet, the collective-king of Israel. Death is the one end of all things because of one man who represents Israel and through Israel all men. הכל הבל is this man's, Qohelet's,

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<sup>4</sup>Brown writes, 'at worst, Qoheleth's cosmos marks the "death" of creation proper' (Brown, Ecclesiastes, 28.).

two-word judgment over creation. It comes from him. Creation (is) in Qohelet. This cosmic judgment is because of him, because of his words and deeds (דברי, Eccl 1.1). His decisions and resulting condition drive creation and determine its condition. This is his judgment, and it is part of what הכל הבל means.

Why are man and nature connected through contrast in Ecclesiastes 1.3-8 especially? They are resisting the homogenisation that takes over by verses 9-11. They are resisting death. But death wins. And their resistance to one another highlights *hevel's* power to conform all (within creation) to its image. But the tension that the connection-in-contrast provides also points to a fundamental animosity within creation, something that characterises relationships between every element, among the elements, among men, and between man and nature. This contrast gives rise to a tension which presses on an almost unutterable cry at the heart of all things in this life. We know there is more to life than we experience, and this disparity between what is and what ought to be produces an angst and rage that rarely find expression. Articulate it or no, we are all well familiar with it, with this lack, this void at the center of ourselves and of the creation of which we are a part. This void is a sadness, a secret we refuse to speak, even to ourselves. And it is not limited to man. Even elephants mourn their dead. Death is not just something we bewail. We fight against. We push and pull. We, and all creation with us, resist this disintegration. But it wins. It integrates, pulling all—inescapably—into its event horizon. When we sense the need to express our ennui and anger at all of this, we often find we do not have the words. But Qohelet does. הכל הבל. These are the ultimate curse-words, and

the curse is the event to which they return us. It is from this point that they cast out over all with which the Hebrew Bible has to do, over creation, king, *adam*, and Israel—over all space and all time—only to assure us that there will be nothing at all new because of the disobedience of *adam*, of Israel, of Israel's representative and collective-king, Qohelet.

In our reading we also discerned a certain isolation of elements that make up creation. This probably does speak to the existential isolation we mentioned above, to that which has throughout history proven such a powerful muse for searching words written, among whose host this book of Qohelet is a distinguished member. But there may be more. The isolation that pervades Qohelet's cosmos may also owe to the physical fact that death separates items one from another: flesh falls off bone; a great uncle's passing leaves his loved ones that much more alone; even the universe is moving outward, its red shift meaning that elements are constantly moving away from one another. This is the world we live in, and die in. And that—death—is empirical evidence of the problem. These verses show and tell us that creation is both isolated, somehow alone, yet being pulled into one thing. Only death can do this. **הכל הכל** is its perfect verbal expression. In fact, physically, death separates first; then it fuses. Muscle, ligaments, hair and teeth fall from one another, and then, in the ground, all things become one. This order is repeated in Ecclesiastes 1.3-11, where a separation seemingly resisting fusion (vv. 3-7) is overcome by a force (*hevel*) that makes all things (*hakkol*) one (vv. 8-11).

Additionally, I am arguing that Qohelet gathers not only all kings into himself but all Israel and, indeed, all creation. This is also part of what **הכל הכל** means. This is part of

its all-embracing collection, homogenisation. Tom Wright's words in another context are perhaps surprisingly germane: 'Paul is telling . . . the whole story of God, Israel and the world now compressed into the story of Jesus . . .'<sup>5</sup> Qohelet is doing something similar. Messianic, he is telling 'the whole story of God, Israel and the world now compressed into' his own story. This is no new message. Dempster shows how from Deuteronomy 18 onward, this has been the message which helps the Hebrew Bible cohere, one of the chief ways in which the Prophets and Writings look back to Torah to inspect the delineations of the promised deliverer of Israel and of all creation.<sup>6</sup> In so doing they realise that this one who will be like Moses has not come. Moses is not the one, neither is he Joshua, nor Elijah, nor Daniel, nor David, nor Solomon. The Prophets, Former and Latter, therefore combine with the Writings to cast forward to a day when he will come. Their message is one wherein the hope of Israel and of creation are intertwined. This will be a new thing God will do. Both in the clear wording of his prologue and in the message more richly conveyed through inner-biblical echo within that prologue, Qohelet joins the chorus sung throughout the Hebrew Bible by essentially proclaiming, 'neither am I Messiah!' In so speaking, as a Solomonic, collective-king gathering in himself the kings of Israel from David onward, he is also saying, 'neither is any king of Israel who has yet reigned the Messiah. We are still waiting. There does not seem to be much hope. Still, obey the law' (12.13).

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<sup>5</sup>Wright, *People of God*, 79.

<sup>6</sup>Dempster, "The Prophets, the Canon, and a Canonical Approach," 306-07.

But recall the possible allusion through the elemental swirl of 1.5-7 to the outer delineations of Ezekiel's renewed temple in Ezekiel 42.15-20. As we asked earlier, is Qohelet here, almost against his better judgment, against what he sees and seems to know, whispering to himself and to those who have ears to hear of the hope broadcast by the prophets, allowing this inbreaking of light to act as an almost invisible backdrop to the sorry state of creation? In weaving a new Israel into the midst of a dying creation, is Qohelet holding forth the veiled hope of national and cosmic renewal, despite what he explicitly says (1.9-10) and shows (1.2-11)? Perhaps. Or perhaps he is only polemicising, as he seems to do verses later in 1.9-11.

In reply to the question, 'what is wrong with the world?' G. K. Chesterton once famously quipped, 'I am'. This is essentially what Qohelet is saying in the prologue of his book. To the query, 'what is wrong with the world?' he offers this four-fold response: 'Adam is. Israel is. I am. All is: **הכל הבל**'. This is creation in Qohelet. The book thus plays its part within the received text of the Hebrew Bible by advancing a consistent message: Israel's sin spells Her ruin and the ruin of all things. The one identified with Israel who will bring Her salvation and creational restoration has not come. Eyes open and looking ahead, readers of the Hebrew Bible, then and now, live in the hope that he will.

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