

אש מן השמים
the heavenly fire

Qohelet
קהלת



David Colo

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ר' יהודה אומר המתרגם פסוק כצורתו הרי זה בדאי
והמוסיף עליו הרי זה מחרף ומגדף

Rabbi Judah says: “The one who translates a verse equivalent to its form—
that person is a liar. But the one who adds to it—
that person is a reviler and defiler.”
—*b. Kiddushin* 49a

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Sigla and Abbreviations

GENERAL

√	Verbal root
Bab ^{Ber}	Babylonian MS: Codex Berlin Or. Qu. 680
Ⲑ	Septuagint: Old Greek
Ⲑ ^N	Septuagint: Codex Sinaiticus
Ⲑ ^A	Septuagint: Codex Alexandrinus
Ⲑ ^B	Septuagint: Codex Vaticanus
ⲙ ^L	Masoretic Text: Leningrad Codex
Ⲥ	Syriac Peshitta
ⲡ	Targum of Qohelet (Paris manuscript 110)
Ⲫ	Vulgate (Stuttgart)
α'	Aquila
σ'	Symmachus
θ'	Theodotion
2MS	second-person masculine singular
3MS	third-person masculine singular
BH	Biblical Hebrew
CBH	Classical Biblical Hebrew
DSS	Dead Sea Scroll(s)
HB	Hebrew Bible
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
NH	Northern Hebrew (also called Israeli Hebrew)
Qoh	Qohelet
S-V	Subject-Verb
The Three	Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion
V-S	Verb-Subject

REFERENCE

AB	Anchor Bible
BHQ	<i>Biblia Hebraica Quinta</i>
CAD	Chicago Assyrian Dictionary
DUL	Del Olmo Lete and Sanmartin's <i>A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition</i>
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (28th edition)
GMH	Segal's <i>A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew</i>
HALOT	Koehler and Baumgartner's <i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
IBHS	Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor's <i>An Introduction To Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary series
Jastrow	Marcus Jastrow's <i>A Dictionary of the Targum, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature</i>
JM	Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka's <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i>
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i>
Kennicott	Benjamin Kennicott's <i>Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum cum Variis Lectionibus</i>
Spiro	Socrates Spiro's <i>An Arabic-English Vocabulary of the Colloquial Arabic of Egypt</i>
TAD	B. Porten and A. Yardeni's <i>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt</i> in 3 Volumes
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

TRANSLATIONS

AAT	J. M. Powis Smith's <i>The Old Testament: An American Translation</i> (1927)
Alter	Robert Alter's <i>The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes</i>
ASV	American Standard Version
ESV	English Standard Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version
ESV	English Standard Version
Fenton	Ferrar Fenton's <i>The Holy Bible In Modern English</i>
Geneva	Geneva Bible (1560)
GW	GOD'S WORD translation
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
ISV	International Standard Version
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Bible (1917)
KJV	King James Version
LEB	Lexham English Bible
Leeser	Isaac Leeser's translation of the Hebrew Bible (1853)
Moffatt	<i>The Bible: James Moffatt Translation</i>
NAB	New American Bible (3 rd Edition)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1997)
NET	New English Translation (NET Bible), 1 st Edition
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPST	New Jerusalem Publication Society Tanakh
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
Rotherham	Rotherham's <i>The Emphasized Bible</i> (1902)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SET	Stone Edition Tanach
YLT	Young's Literal Translation

Preface

No biblical text seems to have suffered more at the hands of English translators than Qohelet. This is due partly to the influence of authoritative versions like the Latin (Jerome's) and German (Luther's), which depart quite radically from the Hebrew. Though the KJV was a substantial improvement upon the bloated and arbitrary renderings in the Bishops' bible, it took great liberties with the text that subsequent translators and revisers have had to amend or replace. Many of those interpretive liberties are still, however, propagated today. Ultimately, it is the uniqueness of the Hebrew in Qoh (in comparison, at least, with Biblical Hebrew or Mishnaic Hebrew) and the way in which that language is employed that have proved most problematic. It is, after all, interpretation that fuels translation. And few biblical texts have proved more difficult to interpret. As it turns out, the author of Qohelet was right when he said “All that is spoken [is] deficient” (1:8α)—particularly when it comes to representing his own words in English! As an example of this deficiency, one may compare renderings of Qohelet's opening statement (1:2):

“Vanity of vanities,” saith the Preacher,
“vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” (KJV)

“Futility of futility,” says Koheleth,
“Futility of futilities, all is futility!” (AAT)

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.
“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless! (NIV)

“Merest breath,” said Qohelet,
“merest breath. All is mere breath.” (Alter)

“Utterly absurd,” said Qohelet,
“utterly absurd. Everything is absurd.” (Fox)

The Hebrew text contains only five different words. Yet almost every word and phrase is perceived differently. In the context of Qoh, does הַבַּל mean “vanity,” “futility,” “meaningless,” “breath,” “absurd,” or something else? How does one make sense of הַבַּל הַבָּלִים? The verb אָמַר is clearly a perfect and should, therefore, be rendered “he *said*,” yet translations usually render it “he *says*.” As for קֹהֵלֶת, is it a name to be spelled out or does it mean something? And if it means something, does it refer to a “preacher,” a “teacher,” or something else entirely? Now compare that with our rendering:

“Vaporous vapor!” proclaimed [the] gatherer.
“Vaporous vapor! The totality [is] vapor!” (THF)

Nothing in our translation is new. Scholars and translators have long said that הַבַּל literally refers to vapor, mist, or breath (that rendering goes back, at least, to the second century AD with the Greek translation attributed to Aquila), that קֹהֵלֶת must be a title referring to one

who gathers something together, and the construction הבל הבלים represents a superlative statement. And even though the perfective form of אמר has never been in doubt, it is only in recent times that anyone has bothered to represent it more accurately in English. So Qoh was right again to say “nothing at all is novel under the sun,” yet it has taken *half a millennium* for someone to put all these insights together into one English translation.

Issues like that above are the impetus for this and subsequent volumes. Each one is based around a brand-new English translation (אש מן-השמים, *the heavenly fire*), which attempts to capture aspects of the Hebrew texts that have been overlooked, ignored, or misunderstood by translations both ancient and modern. Unlike other translations, THF is not informed by a church's religious or doctrinal perspective, conformed toward liturgical tradition or the history of translation, or watered down by a committee that, to reach an accord, must eliminate anything non-conventional so that only the most common, trusted, and non-offensive renderings remain. Instead, it is free to soar as high or low as does the text—to innovate and to speak in a way that challenges the perceptions of its audience as did the author and in the same literary ways. Translation Notes are provided that dissect the process into easily digestible fragments. The text is subjected to a comprehensive treatment in order to bring out its semantic nuances, reveal interpretive cruxes, explain the choices of other English versions, and, ultimately, advance a totally new type of biblical translation. Throughout the process, we hope not only to confront longstanding prejudices, but offer alternative possibilities to capture, in unprecedented fidelity, both the form and content of biblical texts. The *raison d'être* for this project is to aid students, scholars, and translators in better understanding the artistry and tapestry of Israel's ancient scrolls. Its *desideratum* is the progress and advancement of biblical translation.

Introduction

A translation is just that. We do not presume to replace the original text with our own. Yet we do not believe the original so lofty or sacrosanct that it cannot be represented vividly and accurately in another language. If the biblical texts are to be believed, YHWH both *spoke* and *wrote*—the purpose of which must surely be *understanding*. The Rabbis, without anticipating its greater application, left us a saying that illustrates this well: דְּבַר־הַתּוֹרָה כְּלָשׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם, “Scripture speaks in human language.” What follows, therefore, is a discussion of human language and its comprehension. We begin with a look at the various names and terms that are most pertinent.

(A) Names and Terminology

1. Of The Translation

אֵשׁ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם (*’ēš min-haššāmayim*) means “the fire from heaven” or, more simply, *the heavenly fire* (THF). Such language is drawn from theophanic imagery, which likens the presence of YHWH to various manifestations of fire, and from an ancient Jewish conception of YHWH’s word as fire. Early Rabbinic tradition equated the fire that fell from heaven on Sinai with scripture itself. This can be seen, for instance, in the following midrash, which uses a word-play to phonetically link “Torah” (תּוֹרָה) with “its flame” (אִוֶּרָה): “Because YHWH descended upon it in fire (Exod 19:18). This shows that the Torah [is] fire, was given from fire, and is comparable to fire. . . . One can do nothing but warm himself [with] its flame” (*Mek. Bahodesh* 4).

2. Of The Israelite Deity

By way of piety and tradition, the scribes who placed vowel points in the Hebrew manuscripts obscured the name of God by placing under its consonants the vowels of words like Elohim (God), Adonai (My Sovereign/Lord), and Ha-Shem (The Name). Some translations create the hybrid “Jehovah” out of this heterogeneous mix, while others translate the vowels. Still others trace the name back to a hypothetical form of the verb “to be” (Yahweh). Like translations of other religious texts, THF replicates the deity’s name when that name is used. Since, however, its pronunciation was lost, we render the name as we have it and how scribes have written it for the last three millennia: YHWH. Much like how ancient Jews might use the paleo-Hebrew script to indicate the name’s sacred status, we use a font quite different than the rest of the text. So also, we use “**Elohim**,” “**El**,” and “**Eloah**” instead of “God,” but “**The One God**” when a definite article precedes it. Where the text intends to communicate something other than the deity’s name or title, we follow intently.

3. Within Qohelet

A number of words, phrases, and narrative devices appear in Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) that are unique to it in terms of meaning and/or usage. Some of the most common or noteworthy are provided below with their English rendering as used herein and a discussion of their respective meanings.

TERMS

DESCRIPTION

קהלת

gatherer — Since “qohelet” occurs elsewhere with a definite article (7:27 and 12:8 in the Hebrew as well as 1:2 in the Septuagint), we believe it is a title, not a name. It comes from קהל^ל (to gather/assemble) and probably means a gatherer, collector, or assembler of wise sayings (12:9). So Hengstenberg: “It can signify nothing more than 'The Assembler'. . . an explanation of which is given in chap. xii. 9.”ⁱ Rashi gives a similar explanation for why he was called “qohelet”: על-שם שקהל חכמות הרבה (for the reason that he accumulated great wisdom). The same form (feminine singular participle) is used for the title of a scribe in Ezra 2:55 (הספרת) and Neh 7:57 (סופרת). Schoors (HCOT) has noted the use of feminine plural participles as titles in MH: דרוכות (grape-treaders) in *m. Ter.* 3.4, משוחות (surveyors) in *m. 'Erub.* 4.11, and לעוזות (foreign speakers) in *m. Meg.* 2.1.ⁱⁱ Such forms provide additional support for קהלת as a title. As for the argument, often perpetuated, that קהל is only ever used with reference to the gathering of *people* (and, thus, would not refer to something like wise sayings), it must be answered that קהל is also only ever used in the Niphal and Hiphil stems—never the Qal. Yet it is the Qal that appears in Qoh. Thus, the word קהלת is freed from convention to take on a slightly different nuance, but one that is not outside the bounds of Semitic usage (in Syriac, קהל can mean “to compile a book”).ⁱⁱⁱ Renderings like “teacher” or “preacher” are based on the Latin *concionator* (speaker of an assembly), which influenced Luther's German translation (*Prediger*, meaning “preacher”), and both of which influenced Coverdale and subsequent English translations. None of that has any basis in the Hebrew. Symmachus says παροιμιαστής (speaker of parables), which comes much closer to the meaning we propose. The Septuagint rendered it εκκλησιαστής, from which we get the traditional title. As noted by Seow (AB), that word is “attested in the classical period for a member of the citizens' assembly (*ekklēsia*). Thus, Greek *ekklēsiastēs* means lit. 'citizen,' not 'preacher.’”^{iv}

הבל

vapor — Or “breath.” The element directly associated with הבל in Qohelet is רוח (wind/breath/spirit). The Greek translations Theodotion and Aquila chose ατμός (smoke/vapor/mist) as an equivalent. The word refers to a puff

i Ernst Hengstenberg, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes, with other Treatises*. Translated by D. W. Simon. Philadelphia: Smith, English, & Co., 1860, p. 40.

ii Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*. Leuven: Peeters, 2013, p. 35.

iii Robert Payne Smith and J. P. Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*. Edited by J. Payne Smith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957, p. 491.

iv C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1997, p. 95.

of air that quickly dissipates. It may be identified with the exhalation of death in contrast with the inhalation called “the *breath* of life.” Due to the fleeting and insubstantial nature of הֶבֶל, it also has metaphoric senses like “emptiness,” “worthlessness,” or “transience.” The Septuagint mimicked the metaphoric sense with ματαιότης. We, however, prefer a more literal and concrete rendering, which, as a symbol, is better able to apply to the manifold contexts in which it is used. So Miller: “By use of a symbol, Qoheleth is able to employ *hebel* with different meanings, to declare that, like a vapor, some things are transient, other things insubstantial, and still others are foul.”^v The Vulgate followed the Greek with *vanitas* (vanity), which refers to something empty of virtue or lacking in substance. That rendering is followed by many translators. In current English usage, however, “vanity” refers more to moral failings like pride, conceit, and superficiality, which is a far cry from הֶבֶל in Qoh. Thus, the rendering “vanity” should be rejected. Fox (*Qohelet and His Contradictions*), Schoors (HCOT), and others prefer “absurdity,” by which is meant something that doesn't make any sense or is irrational (as opposed to that which is mysterious or incomprehensible). We feel, however, that this stretches the idea too far. The gatherer is not a despairing existentialist who thinks that everything is meaningless or absurd. There is, in fact, much that makes sense in this world and there is meaning to be found in human activity. It is in the *grave* where knowledge, meaning, and the point of it all vanishes. It is, moreover, preposterous to presume that a Jew who believed in the Creator God would say that this God made everything absurd (for that would then say something very clearly about its Maker)! The point is that answers to the big questions (the *whys*) behind the circumstances and events in our lives are beyond our ability to grasp—not that they aren't there. Perhaps Murphy said it best: “The categories of Qoheleth are 'know/not know,' and I would suggest that the nuance is incomprehensible rather than irrational.”^{vi} Thus, “absurdity” should be rejected. “Futility” would be more in line with the text.

יתרון

[lasting] benefit — Or “surplus/excess.” From the root יָתַר (to be left over/remain). This word is unique to Qohelet. Contrary to numerous English translations, it does not refer to “gain,” “advantage,” or “profit” since all those are possible results of one's labor. Rather, יִתְרוֹן refers to something that doesn't lose its value or benefit over time—something left over that ends the cycle of continually having to redo what was already done before. Thus, something like “lasting benefit” or “continuous return” would be more appropriate. This meaning

v Douglas B. Miller, “What the Preacher Forgot: The Rhetoric of Ecclesiastes.” *CBQ* 62.2 (2000), p. 221.

vi Roland E. Murphy, “On Translating Ecclesiastes.” *CBQ* 53.4 (1991), p. 573.

is reflected by 6: περισσεια (more than enough). Some scholars believe that יִתְרוֹן is, basically, an economic or commercial term. Seow (AB) notes that “There is some evidence for this usage in an Aramaic papyrus from North Saqqara in Egypt, where we read: *hyh ytrn ksp' zy qym bsnt 6* '(this) was the surplus of silver that stands in year six' (TAD III, 2.11.6).”^{vii} If so, however, the gatherer has given it his own unique meaning, which, in most places, is neither commercial nor economic.

עמל

to exert/exertion/[what comes of] exertion — The noun עמל means “sorrow/suffering/hardship” in CBH. In LBH, however (the language of Qoh), it refers to “toil/travail/strain/exertion/struggle,” and, by metonymic extension, the product of it. As Weeks explains (“Notes on Some Hebrew Words in Ecclesiastes”), the difference between the normal and metonymic senses “exemplifies the sort of semantic shift or extension that permits English words like 'business' and 'industry' to refer both to personal activities and to entities created by such activities.”^{viii} When someone like H. L. Ginsberg says (“Supplementary Studies in Koheleth”) that the verb can mean “to earn” and the noun “earnings,” this reflects the sense עמל has in MH, which is either “income” or a source of income like “rent” (Jastrow). According to Barton (ICC), “in Samaritan the stem means 'make,' 'do,' as it does also in Ar[abic].”^{ix} This appears to be the basis for translations that render it “to do” (NASB and Fenton) or “make” (NJPST).

תחת השמש

under the sun — This phrase refers to the living—those who dwell on the earth (as opposed to those dwelling below it in the realm of the dead). As Seow (AB) notes, “In the ancient Near East, the light of the sun is equated with life and its blessings, while the deprivation of its rays means death. To be under the sun . . . is the same thing as 'to see the sun,' a metaphor for living.”^x The phrase occurs several times in Phoenician. An inscription on the Tabnit Sarcophagus (KAI §13), from 6th Century BC Sidon, warns against disturbing its contents and gives a curse against those who do: **אל יכן לך זרע בחים תחת שמש ומשכב את רפאם** (may there be no offspring for you among the living under [the] sun nor resting-place with the Rephaim). Tabnit's successor, Eshmunazor, had a similar curse inscribed on his sarcophagus (KAI §14) against those who disturb it: **אל יכן לם שרש למט ופר למעל ותאר בחים תחת שמש** (may there be no root for them below, nor fruit above, nor [any] form among the living under [the] sun).

vii Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 103.

viii Stuart Weeks, “Notes on Some Hebrew Words in Ecclesiastes.” Pages 373-84 in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines*. Edited by James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013.

ix George A. Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*. New York: Scribner, 1908, p. 72.

x Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 105.

- רעות רוח** **corralling of wind** — Though the Targum takes רעות from the root רעע (to break) and the Septuagint takes it as either רעוא or רעותא in Aramaic (purpose/choice/will), it actually comes from רעה (to tend/feed/shepherd/herd/corral). So Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. So Alter (*herding* the wind). An almost identical expression occurs in Hosea 12:2 (רעה רוח), which shows that רעה is the root. Most translations interpret it, in that place, as feeding, tending, or herding. Since, however, רעה רוח is parallel in that verse with the expression רדף קדים (pursuing the east wind), some think that רעה in Qohelet could mean “chasing” or “striving after.” So HCSB (pursuit), NASB (striving), NRSV (chasing after), and NKJV (grasping for). Oddly and inconsistently, however, many of those that render the verb “chasing” or “striving” in Qohelet, render it as feeding (NASB) or herding (NRSV and NKJV) in Hosea. We feel that this inconsistency and the dependence upon one instance of parallelism is an extremely weak peg on which to hang an entirely new definition of רעה. The rendering of the KJV (vexation) has no support whatsoever.
- רעיון רוח** **herding of wind** — רעיון is synonymous with רעות. It comes from the root רעה, meaning “to tend/feed/shepherd/herd/corral” and provides further evidence that that is the meaning of רעות in the phrase above. Like that phrase, רעיון appears in construct with the following noun, giving it the meaning “of wind.”
- שלט** **legal ownership** — In the Hebrew Bible, the verb שלט is only used in Late Biblical Hebrew compositions (Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Ps 119, and Qohelet). It has two meanings depending upon the period in which it is used. In the Persian period (and perhaps shortly thereafter), it refers to having, transferring, or bestowing legal right or ownership over something. After that time (as in the Aramaic portions of Daniel), it took on the meaning “to rule/have power over.” See Gropp, “The Origin and Development of the Aramaic *šallīt* Clause.”
- מתת** **grant** — Traditionally rendered “gift.” This word appears twice in Qohelet in the phrase מתת אלהים (grant of Elohim). In the Persian Period, “grants” were given by the Emperor to individuals within the empire who governed over or were involved in the administration of Persian satrapies (provinces). It gave them the legal right to make use of and enjoy for their own benefit some portion of the property or money they handled or administered. Once a person died, however, the grant was annulled. Qohelet makes use of this word and its context to refer to one's life and the possibility one has to have enjoyment in it, but how that right is revoked once the person dies.

GRAMMAR

- Verb + Pronoun** Although finite verbs followed by an independent pronoun in the same person

occur throughout Biblical literature, this usage is particularly characteristic of Qohelet's style. The purpose of repeating the subject, which is already contained in the verb, is either to indicate focused attention or to emphasize the action being described (see IBHS §16.3.2e). We indicate this using adverbial expressions of emphasis. In such cases, translation notes are usually not provided.

Examples:

אני דברתי **אני** (I said **firmly**) — Qoh 1:16; 2:1, 15; 3:17, 18

אני פניתי **אני** (I **intently** turned) — Qoh 2:11, 12

אני ידעתי **אני** (I am **well** aware) — Qoh 2:14

אני חכמתי **אני** (I was **so** wise) — Qoh 2:15

DEVICES

Quotation → Throughout Qohelet, one discovers a form of teaching in which a person's or
Counter Response group's perspectives are put into storybook or proverbial form (either by Qohelet or by those who hold such views) for the express purpose of countering them with a further, more refined, elucidation.

Examples:

2:14a — **Quotation**: The sage has two eyes in his head,
whereas the fool, in darkness, walks.

(In other words, one who is wise can avoid the ruin that a fool does not notice.)

2:14b — **Counter Response**: Yet I am also well aware that the fate of one befalls them both.

(In other words, there are some ruins—like death—that no sage can escape.)

4:5 — **Quotation**: The fool clasps his hands and devours himself.

(In other words, one who doesn't work hard for food will starve to death.)

4:6 — **Counter Response**: Better [though] a palmful [at] rest than two fistfuls [through] exertion {and a corralling of wind!}

(In other words, better to be at rest with a few bites to eat than to exhaust oneself trying to get a little more.)

(B) Format

1. Lineation

Lineation is the arrangement of the lines of a text according to content and/or strophes. Although, by the time of the Masoretes, many poetic texts were written in a special format, it was not so in antiquity. The lineation herein is an interpretative measure meant to differentiate poetry from prose and to better elucidate textual content. It usually follows the accentual divisions used by the medieval synagogues and documented by the Masoretes. When it does not (the accents were placed in the texts to aid in oral recitation, not to demarcate distinct units of poetry or narrative), the reason(s) for that

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deviation are usually indicated in the Translation Notes.

2. Separation

Ancient scribes divided their texts into smaller sections called *parashot*. One was referred to as “open” due to the fact that either a large space was left open at the end of one section while a new section began on a different line or an entire blank line was left open between the end of one section and the start of the next. The other was referred to as “closed” because one section ended and another began on the same line with only a small, enclosed space between them. The open section differentiated between larger literary units (pericopes) and the closed section differentiated between smaller literary units (paragraphs). Both types of *parashot* can be found in the DSS. Even among the standardized MSS copied and preserved by the Masoretes, however, there are differences in the placement and type of *parashot*. And in the texts that formed the “Writings” in the ancient Jewish canon, many section indicators were not even created until very late in time. In Qohelet,

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Like the ancient scribes, we separate those literary sections by inserting a space between them. Since the Hebrew MSS of Ruth lack “closed” sections, but English narrative requires them, we separate the text into paragraphs. Those divisions can be somewhat arbitrary. While we may explain our choices in Translation Notes, that is not always the case.

3. Versification

Versification refers to the division of the text into verses. That division is ancient. But it was oral long before it was written. The earliest Rabbinic Literature utilized verse division. By the time of the Masoretes, verse divisions were already standardized. Copiers counted the verses within a text in order to guarantee that the text was copied precisely. THF follows the verse division as documented in the Hebrew MSS. Most translations instead follow the verse divisions created by Christians for the Vulgate half a millennium or more later. For this reason, verse numbers in THF will sometimes conflict with verse numbers in translations that follow the Latin.

4. Italics

In narrative texts like Ruth, italics are used primarily to highlight words or phrases with special significance (such as important word-plays or oral devices). See translation notes for more details.

5. Parentheses

Parentheses are used primarily to indicate where an **editorial insertion** has taken place within the body of a text. This is done for literary purposes. No judgment is intended as to the value or authority of the original or secondary portions. Sometimes our parentheses correspond to marks made by the scribes themselves in their MSS. Other times, it is based on our own textual analysis. Occasionally, parentheses are used to further explain something within the text that would otherwise escape the reader.

6. Brackets

Square brackets indicate words that are not present in the Hebrew text itself, but which, nevertheless, are represented by the tone or context of the language, required by English, or included for reasons of style. One of the most common uses of square brackets is to accommodate the linking verb or **copula**. In Biblical Hebrew, a noun or phrase is often juxtaposed with another in order to indicate predication. The use of a copula is unnecessary. English, however, requires the verb “to be” in order to signal predication. Thus, it must be inserted.

Another example involves **oaths**. Oaths typically take the form of a conditional sentence in which a promise or vow is followed by a statement of consequence. In Biblical Hebrew, however, the negative expression is usually elided. Though the curse is not mentioned, it is, nevertheless, assumed (otherwise the oath would have no force). To express that in another language requires reinserting the elided portion. At other times, the opening is elided and must be supplied as seen in Ruth 1:13:

[I swear] that this marring of mine
far exceeds you both . . .

Instead of using a formal opening and then launching into the content of the oath, most of the opening was elided. If the elided portion is not reinserted in translation, the swearing of an oath may be lost to the reader. Unfortunately, English translations are usually ignorant of oaths in the Hebrew Bible or purposely choose to ignore them. In Ruth 1:13, most translations ignore the particle **וְ** entirely, which functions as a complimentizer of the elided verb “to swear.” Others mistake it for a causal particle, which simply doesn't work grammatically and, therefore, introduces tremendous confusion into the text.

Curly brackets are employed in places where there is high probability that a scribe accidentally duplicated part of the text (a common transmission error known as **dittography**). In some instances, where duplication is beyond reasonable doubt, we remove the duplication and mention its presence in Translation Notes.

7. Masoretic Notes

Sometimes in the Translation Notes, reference will be made to Masoretic notes that appear in the margins of the Leningrad Codex (or other MSS). Usually, these notes indicate that ancient Jewish tradition read (*Qere*) the consonantal text differently than it was written (*Ketiv*). Reasons for different readings include, but are not limited to: a different pronunciation, the existence of a variant, reinterpretation of a passage, or the correction of what was presumed to be a scribal error.

At the end of every text or scroll, the Masoretes kept notes of things such as the total number of verses, the number of sections according to the triennial reading cycle, or the number and types of paragraphs. These are called **Masorah Finalis**. Since each MS differs in the way it records that information, THF reproduces the notes at the end of every biblical text according to *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. The following notes, for example, appear at the end of Deuteronomy:

Aleppo Codex	Leningrad	Oriental 4445
The total number of verses in this scroll [is] 955.	The total number of verses in this scroll [is] 955.	The total number of verses in this scroll of Moses in Torah [is]

	<p>The total number of verses in Torah [is] 5,845. 8 100 40 5.</p> <p>The total number of words in Torah [is] 79,856.</p> <p>The total number of letters in Torah [is] 400,945.</p>	<p>955.</p> <p>All the verses in Torah [equal] 5,845. 8 100 40 5.</p> <p>The amount of open sections in Torah [is] 290 and the amount of closed sections in Torah [is] 379.</p> <p>The [section] total [is] 669.</p>
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For more on the Masorah, see Page H. Kelly, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford's *The Masorah of Biblica Hebraica Stuttartensia: Introduction and Annotated Glossary*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998.

Have Joy In Your Exertion

From time immemorial, people have pondered their place in creation and searched for the secrets of life. One such person, a “gatherer” (qohelet) of wise sayings, taught that human life was, quite maddeningly, as fleeting and ephemeral as breath. Nothing is certain. The righteous may suffer or the wicked prosper. What is here today may be gone tomorrow. And nothing can save us from death. Anything greater than us is unattainable—like trying to collect the wind. What good is there in a world of hardship when nothing we do will last? The sage says avoid folly and have joy in your exertion because that is a grant (a right of ownership) from the deity. Everything else is vapor.

Solomon or Sage?

Since 1:1 and 1:12 call the author a Davidic King and the author claims superior wisdom, tradition ascribes authorship to Solomon. Other features suggest otherwise. 12:9, for instance, calls the author a sage who taught and collected proverbs. The language reflects the latest stages of Biblical Hebrew and is strewn with Rabbinic Hebrew. Since it is not quoted in any other biblical text and its inclusion in the canon was still debated in the first century, it must be one of the latest biblical books. The existence of Persian loanwords, strong Aramaic influence, and lateness of Hebrew argues for its composition during the late Persian or early Hellenistic periods. Use of the divine name is strictly avoided (unlike virtually all other biblical texts), which points to a time in which writing and reading the divine name was considered blasphemous (beginning around 300 BC).

Form & Genre

Qohelet is “skeptical” Wisdom Literature, but not in a secular sense. It stresses that human behavior and perception are limited and highlights humanity's fleeting nature. It includes proverbs and metaphors, alternates between poetry and narrative, offers pragmatic, profound, and ironic observations, and takes the form of a famous person's speech. It contains no prophecy, nationalism, or sacred history, and has no concept of an afterlife. It is focused on the here and now. A third-person prologue (1:2-11) and epilogue (12:9-14) frame the monologue of the gatherer. A later scribe peppered the text with theological reflections, which opened the way for its acceptance into the Jewish canon.

Qohelet

Chapter 1

8

¹ *Sayings of [the] gatherer, a Davidic scion, a ruler in Jerusalem.*

² “Vaporous vapor!” proclaimed [the] gatherer.
“Vaporous vapor! The totality [is] vapor!”

³ What [lasting] benefit does a person have
for all his exertion that he exerts under the sun?

⁴ A generation passes [away]
and a generation emerges,
yet the [human] world perpetually persists.

⁵ Yes, rises does the sun and sets does the sun,
then to its place, panting, it rises thereun.

⁶ Passing generally southward
and rounding northward,
around 'round passes the wind,
then to its rounds, returns the wind.

⁷ All the streams pass into the sea,
yet the sea—none of it [is] sated.
Into the place that the streams pass,
there they continue to pass.

⁸ All that is spoken [is] deficient
beyond [what] one would be able to speak.
Eye will never be satisfied to see,
nor ear sated after hearing.

⁹ Whatever has happened
is what will happen;
and whatever has been done
is what will be done

since nothing at all is novel under the sun.

¹⁰ There is a saying that may be said: 'Look [at] this! Novel it [is]!' [Yet] it already existed long ago [in a time] that came before us. ¹¹ Lost is the memory of the former [times] and even the later [times] yet to be—no memory will exist of them among those who come after.

¹² I [am] a gatherer [of maxims]. I became ruler over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I made up my mind to wisely question and look into all that has been done under the sky. Elohim has permitted such a horrid task to human offspring with which to be

tasked. ¹⁴ I observed all the deeds that had been done under the sun and saw [that] the totality [is] vapor and a corralling of wind!

¹⁵ What is twisted cannot be straightened.
An absence cannot be estimated.

¹⁶ I said firmly to myself: 'Look [at] me! I amassed greater wisdom than anyone who was over Jerusalem prior to me so [that] my mind amply perceives wisdom and knowledge.' ¹⁷ Yet, having made up my mind to know wisdom and knowledge, fatuity and folly, I realized that this also was a herding of wind.

¹⁸ Because with much wisdom
[comes] much anger,
and whoever amasses knowledge,
amasses anguish.

Chapter 2

ב

¹ I said firmly to myself, 'Come on! I want you to experience pleasure and see for yourself [what is] good!', but saw even that [to be] vapor.

² Of mirth, I said: 'It is fatuous',
and of joy: 'What [can] it [possibly] do?'

³ I sought with determination for my body to be carried away with wine—while my mind wisely guided [me]—and to seize folly until I could perceive what possible benefit [that has] for human offspring that they might achieve under the sky [in] the short span of their lives.

⁴ I made my endeavors renowned. I built myself residences. I planted myself vineyards. ⁵ I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them a tree [with] every fruit. ⁶ I made myself pools of water from which to irrigate a forest burgeoning [with] trees.

⁷ I purchased male and female slaves and the offspring of the [slave-]house was mine. Also, the property belonging to me—herd and flock—was more numerous than all who were before me in Jerusalem. ⁸ I even accumulated myself silver and gold and the prized possessions of rulers along

with their provinces. I procured myself male and female singers (a mistress and mistresses) and [all] the luxuries of human offspring.

⁹ Then I excelled in renown beyond anyone who was before me in Jerusalem, yet my sagacity served me. ¹⁰ And whatever my eyes desired, I did not deprive them. I did not deny myself any pleasure because I was pleased {from all my exertion} and that was my portion from all my exertion.

¹¹ Then I intently turned to all my deeds that my hands achieved and to the exertion that I exerted to achieve [them] and saw [that] the totality [is] vapor and a corralling of wind and there is no [lasting] benefit under the sun!

¹² Then I intently turned to focus [on] wisdom and [knowledge], fatuity and folly, [and saw] that whatever kind of man comes after me, that one will have dominion [over] what others have previously done. ¹³ And I earnestly perceived that there is more advantage to wisdom than folly like the advantage of light to darkness:

¹⁴ The sage has two eyes in his head,
whereas the fool, in darkness, walks.

Yet I am also well aware that the fall of one befalls them both. ¹⁵ So I said firmly to myself: 'Since the fool's fall will befall even me, why then was I so wise [when] there is nothing more?' So I said to myself that this too [was] vapor. ¹⁶ For lost is the memory of the sage as well as the fool long ago in what already [was]. [In] the days to come, both will be forgotten. Yet, how can it be [that] the sage should die as well as the fool? ¹⁷ So I hated [the realm of] the living because terrible to me [was] the deed that is done under the sun—for the totality [is] vapor and a corralling of wind!

¹⁸ Then I intensely hated all [that came of] my exertion which I had exerted under the sun since I must leave it to the man who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows if he will be a sage or a fool? Yet he will take ownership of all [that comes of] my exertion that I exerted and [for] which I was wise

under the sun. That too [is] vapor!

²⁰ Then I turned my mind over and over till despairing over all the exertion that I exerted under the sun ²¹ since there is one who exerts himself wisely, and shrewdly, and prosperously, yet to another who exerted nothing for it, he must give him his portion. That too [is] vapor and a vile wrong! ²² Indeed, whatever exists [will be] another's despite all his exertion and the herding of his will that he exerted under the sun, ²³ even though throughout his life [there was] grief and frustration [in] his task [and] even at night, his mind was restless. That too—it [is] vapor!

²⁴ Nothing is [so] good as a human [other than] that one should eat, drink, [and] see for oneself the good from one's exertion. (This too I saw clearly: that from the hand of The One God it [comes].

²⁵ For who should eat and who should hoard save I? ²⁶ Indeed, to one who [is] good in his sight, he gives wisdom, and knowledge, and joy. But to the sinner, he gives the task of gathering and collecting in order to surrender [it] to [whomever is] good in the sight of The One God.) That too [is] vapor and a corralling of wind!

Chapter 3

א

¹ Appointed for all [is] a moment,
and a time for every act under the sky.

² A time to procreate
and a time to pass on.

A time to plant
and a time to uproot the implant.

³ A time to kill
and a time to cure.

A time to break
and a time to build.

⁴ A time to lament
and a time to laugh.

A time of grieving
and a time of gamboling.

⁵ A time to throw stones

and a time of collecting stones.
A time to embrace
and a time to elude embracing.

⁶ A time to go after
and a time to give up.
A time to guard
and a time to discard.

⁷ A time to rend
and a time to mend.
A time to quiet
and a time to converse.

⁸ A time to love
and a time to loathe.
A time of conflict
and a time of concord.

⁹ What [is] the worker's [lasting] benefit in exchange for what he exerts? ¹⁰ I perceived the task that Elohim gave to human offspring with [which] to be tasked: ¹¹ everything one does [has] its proper time, yet the one who sets to mind the past utterly lacks [anything] with which he might discover, from beginning to end, the deed that The One God has done.

¹² I concluded that nothing is [so] good in exchange for [such] acts other than having joy and doing well in one's life. ¹³ So also, everyone should eat, drink, [and] see the good from all one's exertion. Elohim's grant [is] it.

¹⁴ I concluded that whatever The One God does, it will, without doubt, always happen.

To it, one cannot add
nor from it, can one subtract.
(Yes, The One God acts
so they will be reverent in his sight.)

¹⁵ Whatever is, it already [was],
and what [is] to be, already has been.
(Yet The One God goes in search
of the fugitive).

¹⁶ And again, I perceived under the sun:
[to] the place of justice,
there the wicked one [goes];

and [to] the place of righteousness,
there the wicked one [goes].

(¹⁷ I said firmly to myself,
'the righteous and the wicked [one],

The One God will judge

because a time is appointed for every act
and for every deed [done] there.')

¹⁸ I said firmly to myself: for the sake of human offspring, the One God clarifies [for] them and reveals that they [are] animals. They [are] like them ¹⁹ [in] that human offspring [have] a fate and the animal [has] a fate, yet the same fate belongs to them. The death of one [is] like the death of the other and the same life force belongs to both. Yes, the surplus of humanity over animal is naught because both [are] vapor. ²⁰ Everyone goes to the same place. Everyone came from the dust and everyone returns to the dust. ²¹ Who knows [about] the life force of human offspring—whether it ascends to the top—or [about] the life force of the animal—whether it descends to the bottom of the earth? ²² Yet I have seen that nothing is [so] good than the one who rejoices in his endeavors because that [is] his portion. For who will bring him [back] to see for himself what will come after him?

Chapter 4

7

¹ Then I intently shifted [my] focus
[to] all the oppressed
subjected [to labor] under the sun
and saw the tears of the oppressed,
yet, for them, there was no comforter;
and from their oppressors' hand [came] force,
yet, for them, there was no avenger.

² Then I highly esteemed the dead—
who were already dead,
more than the living—
they who [were] living still.

³ Yet better than those two [I esteemed]
one who has not yet been,
who has not experienced the vile acts

that have been done under the sun.

⁴ Then I earnestly perceived all the exertion and all the prosperity of labor—that such [is the result of] one's envy of another. That too [is] vapor and a corralling of wind.

⁵ The fool clasps his hands
and devours himself.

⁶ Better [though] a palmful [at] rest
than two fistfuls [through] exertion
{and a corralling of wind!}

⁷ Then I intently shifted [my] focus [to]
[something] vaporous under the sun: ⁸ there [once]
was an individual—one who lacked a partner—not
even a son or a brother had he, yet endless was all
his exertion. His outlook, as well, took no
satisfaction [in] wealth.

For whom then have *I* been exerting and
depriving my life of betterment? That too [is]
vapor! Yes, a horrid task it [is]!

⁹ Better the pair than the individual
because they have a good return
for their exertion—

¹⁰ because if either [of them] should fall,
the other can help his companion up.
But if the individual falls,
then there is no other to help him up!

¹¹ Also, if two lie down,
then it will be warm for them.
But for one, how warm can it be?

¹² And whereas one may overpower
the individual,
the pair can stand fast against him.
So also, the threefold cord
is not quickly snapped.

¹³ Better a youth, low-born and wise,
than a ruler, old and foolish,
who cares no more to be instructed.

¹⁴ Indeed, from the house of the fettered,
one came forth to rule,
though even within his kingdom,
he was born a pauper.

¹⁵ I focused [on] all the living—those who

traverse under the sun—[allied] with the next
young man who will arise in his [predecessor's]
place. ¹⁶ Endless are all the allies—all [those] at
whose forefront he comes—yet future
[generations] will not be happy with him! Surely
this also [is] vapor and a herding of wind!

¹⁷ Minding your steps as though walking into
The One God's temple [is] closer to obeying than
the offering, [by] the fool, of sacrifice, since none
of them care about acting wicked!

Chapter 5

ה

¹ Never be rash with your mouth,
nor with your impulse, hasty
to emit an utterance
in The One God's presence.
Since The One God [is] in the firmament,
yet you [are] on the earth,
that is why your words should be modest.

² As the dream is accompanied
by much task,
so the voice of a fool [is accompanied]
by many words.

³ When *you* vow a vow to Elohim,
never *postpone fulfilling it*.
Since displeasing are fools,
whatever you vow, fulfill!

⁴ Better that you should not vow
than that you should vow, but not fulfill.

⁵ Never allow your mouth
to bring your body condemnation,
nor say in the messenger's presence
that a mistake it [was].

Otherwise The One God may be angered
by your articulation
and confiscate your handiwork.

⁶ Though in abundance [are] vaporous dreams
and words [are] excessive,
yet, The One God, revere!

⁷ If the oppression of the poor or the wresting

of a rightful claim you see in the judicial [court], never by the act be surprised because [one] superior [is] above another [and] superiors watch out for them.

⁸ Yet the advantage of a land entire is a ruler who is, to [his] country, subject.

⁹ The lover of silver is not sated [with] it, and whoever loves wealth instead of produce [is not stuffed].

That too [is] vapor!

¹⁰ When abounding are goods, abundant are its devourers.

What achievement, then, have its owners save the sight of one's eyes?

¹¹ Sweet [is] the sleep of the laborer whether a bit or a bunch he eat, but the surfeit of the wealthy will not give him restful sleep.

¹² There is a sickening misfortune I have seen under the sun: riches are guarded by their owner to his detriment. ¹³ That very wealth is lost through bad luck. So one bears a son, but his hand is empty. ¹⁴ Just as he went forth from his mother's womb, he will go back as naked as he came. And he will take up nothing in exchange for his exertion when he brings [back] his hand.

¹⁵ And this also [is] a sickening misfortune: in every way that it comes, so it will go. And what [lasting] benefit is his who exerts [himself] for the wind? ¹⁶ Besides, his whole life, he eats in darkness. He is increasingly angry, sick, and aggravated.

¹⁷ Here is what I have seen: better [is] what [is] pleasing—to eat, drink, and see benefit for all one's exertion that one exerts under the sun [in] the span of one's life, which The One God gave him. Because that [is] his portion. ¹⁸ Moreover, every person to whom The One God gives wealth and assets and on whom he bestows legal ownership in order to feed from it, and take away his portion, and have pleasure from his exertion—that [is] Elohim's grant. ¹⁹ Yes, he will not often recall the

days of his life because The One God keeps [him] occupied with the joy of his heart.

Chapter 6

י

¹ There is a misfortune that I have seen under the sun and it [is] severe for the person: ² one to whom The One God gives wealth, and assets, and honor so that his body lacks nothing of all that he could crave, but The One God does not bestow on him legal ownership in order to feed from it—indeed, a foreigner feeds off it [instead]—that [is] vapor and a sick misfortune!

³ If one should father a hundred, and live a long life, and the days of his life are plentiful, but his life is not satisfied with good thing[s], then the stillborn, even though it has no burial, I think, is better off than him. ⁴ For it enters with exhalation and in darkness, it exists. It's name is shrouded with obscurity. ⁵ Though it has neither seen nor known the sun, it's repose surpasses the other. ⁶ And if one lived a thousand years once more, but did not experience [what is] good, isn't everyone going to the same place?

⁷ All human exertion [is] for one's mouth, and yet the appetite is never filled. ⁸ For what advantage does the wise [one] have over the fool? What of the wretch who knows [how] to go before the living?

⁹ Better what the eyes see than roaming desire. That too [is] vapor and a corralling of wind.

¹⁰ Whatever has come about, was already called [by] name. And one who [is] human knows that he cannot contend with one more powerful than him.

¹¹ When there are many words, exhalation intensifies. What advantage [does] humanity have?

¹² For who knows what is better for a person in life (the span of his vaporous existence passed like a shadow!) when no one can explain to another what will proceed him under the sun?

Chapter 7

ז

¹ Better a name than oil of fame,
or the day of death than the day one is born.
² Better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting
since that [is] the end of every person
and one who lives will set his mind [on it].
³ Better anger than mirth
because through stern looks,
character is improved.
⁴ The heart of the wise
[is] in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools
[is] in the house of mirth.
⁵ Better to hear the rebuke of the wise [one]
than for one to hear the chorus of fools.
⁶ For like the sound of nettles under kettles,
so [is] the laughter of the fool—
and that too [is] vapor!
⁷ For extortion makes a wise [one] foolish
and a bribe twists the heart.
⁸ Better an afterword than it's beginning.
Better patience than a spirit of pride.
⁹ Be not quick with your temper to be angry
for anger, in the breast of fools, will abide.
¹⁰ Do not say, "Why is [it] that former times
were better than these?"
because you do not ask about that
on the basis of wisdom.
¹¹ Wisdom [is] as beneficial as inheritance
and an advantage to those who view the sun.
¹² Yes, exchange silver's shelter(**antanaclasis)
for the sake of wisdom's shade
Then [with] a surplus of knowledge,
wisdom will preserve its possessor.
¹³ Look at the work of The One God.
For who can straighten what he has twisted?
¹⁴ On a good day, be good,
and on a poor day, pore over:
that too—just like the other—
The One God has wrought
on behalf of the one
who will have no grasp after he [is gone]

of anything [at all].

¹⁵ I have seen everything
in my vaporous life.
There is an innocent [one]
who innocently perishes,
and there is a guilty [one]
who guiltily endures.
¹⁶ Do not be too innocent,
nor show off your wisdom.
Why be astonished [at that]?
¹⁷ Do not be too guilty nor become a fool.
Why die before your time?
¹⁸ Better that you get a handle on this
and of that also, never lose grasp,
for the fearer of Elohim
ventures forth with them both.
¹⁹ (Wisdom will be stronger for the wise [one]
than ten rulers who inhabit a city.)
²⁰ Yet no person is [so] right on the earth
that he [always] does well and never errs.
²¹ Also, do not set your mind
on all the things they say
so that you will not hear
your servant curse you.
²² For your heart knows how many times
that you, yourself, have cursed others.
²³ All this, I wisely tested.
I thought: "I, hereby, will act wise,"
yet it [was] too distant from me.
²⁴ Distant [is] what has been,
and deep—[so] deep—who [can] grasp it?
²⁵ I circled around, my heart and I, to
understand, and to investigate, and seek out
wisdom and [its] solution so that [I] might know
wickedness [is] folly and foolishness [and] fatuity.
²⁶ And I found [that] more bitter than death [is] the
woman who [is] entrapment. Her heart [is] trawls.
Her hands [are] fetters. Better in the sight of The
One God is he who is freed from her. But the
screw-up will be caught by her.
²⁷ Look, this [is what] I grasped," said the

gatherer, “one by one, to reach a total,²⁸ which I still seek, but have not found: (one man out of a thousand, I found, but I found no woman out of all of those.²⁹ Here only [is] what I grasped:) that The One God made humanity upright, but they sought numerous [evil] schemes.

Chapter 8 ט

¹ Who is like the sage? And who knows the interpretation of the saying:

'a person's wisdom will illumine his face,
but the hardness of his face will be hated'?

² Obey the mouth of a ruler by reason of the oath of Elohim. ³ Do not hastily depart from his presence. Do not stand in [the way of] an evil matter because whatever he desires, he does.

⁴ Since the word of a ruler [is] authoritative, who will say to him, “What can you do?” ⁵ One who obeys an order will not experience a troublesome incident and the mind of a sage will know the moment and decision. ⁶ For there is a moment and decision for every affair when a man's trouble [is] severe over him.

⁷ When no one knows what will happen,
then who can tell him when it will occur?

⁸ No person [with] power over wind
can restrain it.

There is no authority
on the day of death.

There is no discharge in battle.

Wealth will not save its possessor.

⁹ All of this, I have seen and my mind was set on every deed that is done under the sun: the moment that one person took ownership of another, [it was] to his detriment.

¹⁰ And then I saw the wicked approaching. They entered and left the Holy Place and boasted in the city that they had done so. That too [is] vapor!

¹¹ When a sentence [against] criminal activity is not executed swiftly, then the heart of human offspring is encouraged to act wickedly ¹² because

a criminal does [what is] wrong a hundred [times] and extends his [life]. (Yet I also know well that it will be good for fearers of The One God because they are reverent in his sight. ¹³ But it will not be good for the wicked [one] and he will not extend [his] life like a shadow because he is not reverent in the sight of Elohim.)

¹⁴ Something vaporous is done upon the earth when there are righteous who are dealt with according to the conduct of the wicked and there are wicked who are dealt with according to the conduct of the righteous. I think that this also [is] vapor!

¹⁵ So I admired what is joyful because there is nothing better for a person under the sun except to eat, drink, and rejoice. And that can accompany him in his exertion [all] the days of life that The One God has granted him under the sun.

¹⁶ Because I made up my mind to learn wisdom and to perceive the business that is carried out on the earth—yes, neither day nor night, did [my] eyes see sleep— ¹⁷ I saw every work of The One God [and] that no man is able to grasp the deed that is done under the sun. In spite of all that one exerts, [he] seeks, but will not find [it]. And even if the sage should think to know [it], he [also] will be unable to grasp [it].

Chapter 9 ט

¹ Yes, on all this, I set my mind to clarify it all: that the righteous, the wise, and their deeds [are] in the grasp of The One God. Even love. Even hatred. No person knows everything that [is] ahead of them.

² Everything [is] the same for all. One fate belongs to the innocent and to the guilty; to the good, to the pure and to the impure; to one who sacrifices and to [one] who has no sacrifice. The decent [one] and the criminal [are] alike. The one who curses [is] the same as [one who] fears a curse.

³ This [is] an evil among everything done under the sun: that one fate belongs to all. Not only that, but the human heart is full of evil and [what is] fatuous [is] on their mind throughout their life. Then, after that, to the dead [they go].

⁴ Yet expectation exists [for] whoever is united with all the living. For a living dog [is] better than the dead lion. ⁵ For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all. And there is no more reward for them because the memory of them has faded. ⁶ Even their love. Even their hatred. Even their passion. It perished long ago and no portion will ever exist for them again in all that is done under the sun.

⁷ Go eat your food joyfully and drink your wine heartily because The One God already took pleasure [in] your accomplishments. ⁸ At every moment, let your clothes be white and over your head, do not let oil diminish. ⁹ Look at life with the wife you love all the days of your vaporous life, which is given to you on earth during your vaporous days because that [is] your portion in life and for the exertion that you exert under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, by your power, do [it]. Because no achievement, ambition, knowledge, or wisdom exists in the underworld to which you [are] going.

¹¹ Again, I perceived under the sun that the race does not belong to the quick or the battle to the strong, nor even bread to the wise or wealth to the discerning, so also, grace does not belong to the sophisticated, but time and chance come [to] them all. ¹² Yes, no person can know his time. Like fish seized in a vicious net or birds in a trap, so human offspring are trapped in a moment of trouble when it falls suddenly upon them. ¹³ I perceived that also [about] wisdom under the sun and it [was] crucial to me.

¹⁴ A small city [once] had a few men in it. Then a great ruler came to it, surrounded it, and constructed massive siege-works against it.

¹⁵ Now, a low-born wise man was found in it and

he saved that city through his wisdom. But no one remembered that low-born man. ¹⁶ So I thought, “Better [is] wisdom than strength, but the wisdom of the poor one is despised and none of his words are heard.”

¹⁷ The words of the wise [uttered] with calm are better to hear than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

¹⁸ Better [is] wisdom than weapons of war, but an individual who screws-up can destroy much better.

Chapter 10

¹ Flies of death turn rancid the incense-maker's oil. More costly than wisdom— [even] than honor— [is] a little foolishness.

² The mind of a sage [turns] to his right, but the mind of a fool [turns] to his left.

³ Even on the road as the fool travels, his mind [is] senseless and everyone is told [how] foolish he [is].

⁴ If the temper of your ruler flares up against you, do not **resign** your position because equanimity can **assuage** grave offenses. (**render the *antanclasis***) ⁵ There is an evil I have seen under the sun when an error proceeds from the presence of the monarch: ⁶ folly is appointed in many high [positions] while the rich sit in degradation. ⁷ I saw slaves on horse[back] and princes walking like slaves over the land.

⁸ Whoever digs a hollow, in it, he may fall. A snake may bite whoever breaches [through] a wall.

⁹ One who quarries stones may be crushed by them. Whoever splits logs may be splintered by them.

¹⁰ If the iron is dull,

but one does not sharpen [its] edge,
it must exert more force,
but [there is] an advantage
[in that] wisdom brings success.

¹¹ If the serpent bites without a charm,
there is no advantage to the owner's tongue.
(***assonance***)

¹² The words of a sage's mouth [bring] repute,
but the lips of the fool swallow him.

¹³ The start of his talk [is] foolishness,
and the end of it [is] detrimental fatuity,
¹⁴ yet the fool increases his words.

No person knows what will happen.

So who can tell him
what his future will be?

¹⁵ The exertion of the fools taxes them.
Whoever is ignorant—go into town!

¹⁶ [What] a pain for you, land,
when your ruler [is] immature
and your princes feast in the morning!

¹⁷ Fortunate [are] you, land,
when your ruler [is] nobly born
and your princes feast at the [proper] time—
vigorously, but not imbibing!

¹⁸ Through indolence, the ceiling caves.
Through slumping hands, the house drips.

¹⁹ One prepares food for laughter
and wine makes life merry,
but silver is the answer [to] everything.

²⁰ Even in your musing,
do not curse a ruler.
And in the chambers of your bed,
do not curse the affluent.

Because an airborne bird
may carry the sound
and one of the winged
may report [the] thing.

Chapter II

א"י

¹ Throw your bread on the water's surface
because long after, you will find it.

² Distribute a portion to seven
and even to eight
because you do not know what trouble
may befall the earth.

³ If clouds are swollen,
they will empty rain over the earth.
And if a tree falls in the north or the south,
the place where it falls, there it will lie.

⁴ Whoever watches wind
will never sow.
Whoever stares [at] clouds
will never harvest.

⁵ Just as you have no clue
what path the wind [takes]
[or] when bones [are] in the belly
of the full-[term] mother,
so you are ignorant of The One God's work
[and] when he will accomplish anything.

⁶ In the morning, sow your seed
and in the evening, do not rest your hand
because you do not know
whether one will succeed—
this [one] or that?—
or whether both [will be] equally well.

⁷ Now, sweet [is] the light
and better for the eyes to view the sun.

⁸ Because if a person exists many years,
he should rejoice in them all.
But one should remember times of darkness
since they will be numerous.
All that happens [is] vapor!

⁹ Enjoy your adolescence, young man. Let your
courage be great at your young age. Follow your
heart's desires and the visions of your eyes. (Yes,
concerning all these [things], The One God will
bring you into judgment.) ¹⁰ But expel anger from
your heart and flush misery from your system
because adolescence and the prime of life [are]
vapor!

Chapter 12 יב

¹ So remember **who created you**
in the days **of your youth**.

render this amazing sound-play

Before troubling times have come
and the years arrive that you think,
“I have no pleasure in them.”

² Before the sun, light, moon, and stars darken
and the clouds withdraw after the rain.

³ When the guards of the house tremble.
When powerful men are bent.
When women who grind [grain]
discontinue due to their diminishing.
When those peering through windows dim.

⁴ When doors outside are shut.
When the cadence of the mill quiets.
When one bolts up at the bird's tune.
When all melodious songs are muffled.

⁵ Even when they fear [what is] high
and great terror [is] on the path.
When the almond tree blossoms.
When the grasshopper gorges itself.
When the caper-berry buds.
When a person heads to his eternal home.
When mourners march about the street.

⁶ Before the silver cord is snapped
or the golden basin broken
or the crock cracked at the fountain
or the wheel warped to the well.

⁷ When the dust returns to the earth as it was
and the breath returns to The One God
who gave it.

⁸ “Vaporous vapor!” proclaimed the gatherer.
“The totality [is] vapor!”

⁹ Not only was [the] gatherer wise, he
continually taught the people knowledge. He
heard, researched, and arranged numerous
maxims. ¹⁰ [The] gatherer sought to discover useful
sayings and what was written of uprightness—the
words of truth.

¹¹ The sayings of sages [are] like prods.
Like driven nails

[are] the collections of pedagogues.

They are placed by one shepherd.

¹² So [of] the rest of them, my son, be warned.
Making many books is endless
and prolonged study taxes the body.

(¹³ EPILOGUE:

Everything has been heard. Fear The One God
and keep his commandments because that [is] the
sum of humanity. ¹⁴ Yes, The One God will bring
every act into judgment including every hidden
[thing], whether good or bad.)

The total number of verses
in this book [is]
222.

And the half-way point [is]
“Whatever has come
about.”

And [there are] 4 reading
sections.

Notes



1:1 The text of Qohelet begins with a scribal superscription that was not part of the “words” of the gatherer. Due to its secondary nature, we separate it from the body of the text and place it in italics.

Sayings — Literally, “Words.” Since, however, דְּבָר has a lot of very different nuances, to render it always “word” would convey a kind of simplicity or semantic rigidity that is directly at odds with its usage. In prophetic texts, for example, דְּבָר functions as a technical term for a prophetic utterance. Thus, in those places, we render it “oracle.” It is no wonder that א would render the opening phrase as “the words of prophecy that Qohelet prophesied.” In this place, however, no such nuance is intended. Neither does דְּבָרִים indicate that what follows is simply “words” that the gatherer once said. These are a collection of proverbs, anecdotes, and perspectives that impart to us the wisdom of an ancient sage. Thus, we render this (and other instances of דְּבָרִים in Wisdom Literature) “sayings.” So Haupt (“Ecclesiastes”). So also AAT and Moffatt. NJB rendered דְּבָרִים as a collective literary term: “Composition.” We view that as entirely too Hellenistic. Fenton rendered it “Sermons.” Since, however, there was neither church nor preacher in the gatherer’s day, we find that entirely too anachronistic. So also, since the gatherer could not be a Greek philosopher expounding his arguments in the public square or at a school/academy (institutions that did not exist in Israel until after the advent of Hellenism), we avoid renderings like “speeches,” “discourses,” “arguments,” or “lectures.” Instead of λογος, the typical expression for דְּבָר in א (see, for instance, 1:8; 5:1-2, 6; 6:11; 7:8, 21), א uses קהמא here. If one compares א’s use of קהמא in this place with its appearance elsewhere in Qoh (8:1 and 5), one can see that all three appear in close proximity to the mention of a ruler. In 1:1, that ruler is “the gatherer.” Though no ruler is introduced in 8:1, the command of a ruler is mentioned right after. The final appearance of קהמא is related to obeying or disobeying a ruler’s command. It seems, therefore, that א interpreted דְּבָר as a royal speech or magisterial pronouncement.

[the] gatherer — Literally, “a gatherer.” It appears that, at a very early stage, קהלת was taken to be a name rather than a title, which would explain the loss of the definite article in this and other places. So NJB and Alter (Qoheleth), NJPST, Leeser, and AAT (Kohleth), SET (Koheles), etc. That interpretation may also lie behind the rendering of α’: κωλεθ (Koleth). Most English translators, however, recognize that קהלת is a title, not a name. Like us, therefore, they insert the article. Most of them, however, render it “the Preacher” (or the like), which has no basis (see section A3).

a Davidic scion — Or “a son/descendant of David.” Eventually, the phrase בן־דוד would take on Messianic connotations (Matt 1:1). Here, however, the phrase indicates the gatherer’s royal status. It indicates that the gatherer is an inheritor of the Davidic throne—most likely through a line of descent that can be traced back to David (as in Matthew’s genealogy). As for the claim of many scholars that these words were intended to identify the speaker as Solomon, we must point out several rather obvious reasons to the contrary. First, if the primary purpose for a scribe to insert this editorial comment at the start of the text was to identify the author of these sayings as Solomon, s/he could not have done a worse job of it. Not only did the editor

simply perpetuate the conundrum of the term קהלת without any further explication, but s/he didn't even bother to use the one word that would have identified the author with Solomon (his name)! ט had to come along later and do it: קהלת הוא שלמה (Qoheleth, who [is] Solomon). Such a blunder cannot be associated with Pro 1:1: משלי שלמה בן-דוד (Proverbs of David's son Solomon). Moreover, if the one who added the superscription is the same as the one who added the epilogue (a purely hypothetical proposal, of course, but one that is far more reasonable than assuming multiple editors got involved in the alteration of a text as late as this one), it would seem rather obvious from the textual frame that Solomonic authorship was *not* intended. We believe Haupt (“The Book of Ecclesiastes”) was right when he stated “The references and allusions to Solomon, however, in the Book of Ecclesiastes are so scanty that it is hard to believe the original author meant to assume the mask of the famous king of Israel.” That any person during the course of hearing or reading Qoh would associate the term קהלת with the mention, in 1 Kgs 8:1-2, of Solomon “gathering” the people (Ginsburg in *Cohleth: Commonly Called the Book of Ecclesiastes*) is incredibly far-fetched (the same verb is also used numerous times with reference, for example, to *Moses*). The fact is, בן-דוד (υιου δαυιδ in 6) no more requires or implies that the person of whom it speaks is, literally, “the” son of David (Solomon), than when the exact same phrase is used in Matt 1:1 (υιου δαυιδ) with reference to *Yeshua*. So Krüger (*Hermeneia*): “In addition to Solomon, any other, later member of the Davidic dynasty *can* be designated בן-דָּוִד *ben-dāwid*, ‘descendant of David’” (not italics added). Only later, when the text of Qohelet was widely circulated along with other texts (when a sort of “biblical canon” was forming) could it be ascribed, by reason of literary association, with Wisdom texts that actually were said to be “of Solomon.” In other words, viewing the gatherer as Solomon is a *canonical* reading, not a *textual* one. So Hengstenberg: “this explanation is involved in the relation existing between this book and the exordium of the book of Proverbs.” Thus, we reject “the son of David” and render it “a son of David” (or “a Davidic scion”). So also Haupt (“Ecclesiastes”).

a ruler in Jerusalem — Or “a king” in Jerusalem. The word מלך can, however, refer to someone with ruling power who is not, strictly speaking, *the king*. That is probably the sense intended by the phrase “in Jerusalem.” Typically, “the king” is indicated by the additional phrase “of Jerusalem,” not “in Jerusalem” (see, for instance, Josh 10:1, 3, 5, 23; 12:10; etc), which may be why 1 altered the text to “of Jerusalem” (to say this is “the king,” not simply “a ruler”). 6 says “king of Israel in Jerusalem,” which is certainly a harmonization with 1:12.

- 1:2 Since verses 2-9 take the form of poetry, we represent them as poetry. This particular verse, however, as many scholars have noted, functions as a motto for the whole of the text. It sets the tone and introduces one of the primary points that is then repeated throughout Qoh. At the end of Qoh before the final narrative frame (12:8) the same information from this verse is reiterated to form an *inclusio* for the material between them. Thus, we set both verses apart from the rest of the text.

Vaporous vapor — Literally, “breath of breaths” or “vapor of vapors” (for הבל as “breath/vapor,” see section A3). Like the expressions “song of songs” (meaning “greatest song”) or

“holy of holies” (meaning “holiest place”), the repetition of the noun in plural form creates a superlative sense (IBHS §14.5b). Thus, we could render this “briefest vapor” or “a puff of breath” (Lohfink). That kind of rendering is now preferred by translators: HCSB (absolute futility), NJPST (utter futility), NJB (sheer futility), GW (absolutely pointless), Alter (merest breath), etc. Some early translations also preferred that rendering. So Bishops' (most vain). We have tried to retain the repetitive sense of the sound, which is part of the poetic character of the text and phonetically represents the very point that the gatherer is trying to convey: the cycles of nature show us that nothing is ultimately ever accomplished—anything that was done before must be done again. Since vapor is already vaporous, a *vaporous* vapor must surely be more vaporous than usual! Thus, our rendering also captures the superlative sense. We agree with Alter that “rendering this phrase as an abstraction (King James Version, ‘vanity of vanities,’ or Michael Fox’s more philosophically subtle “absurdity of absurdities”) is inadvisable, for the writer uses concrete metaphors to indicate general concepts, constantly exploiting the emotional impact of the concrete image and its potential to suggest several related ideas.” Some translations separate the words into successive exclamations. So NET (Futile! Futile!) and NIV (Meaningless! Meaningless!). While that captures the repetition, it misses the superlative sense. Haupt (“Ecclesiastes”) begins this verse with a short exclamation: “O vanity of vanities!” Such an addition is, however, unnecessary.

proclaimed — Literally, “said.” So Alter, YLT, NJPST, etc. Most translations render this “says” (or “saith”), which reflects the participial form (אָמַר), not the perfect (אָמַר). Since, in the Hebrew represented by Qoh (somewhere between LBH and MH), the participle is used more and more for the present and/or progressive tense, the fact both it and the imperfect are avoided in this verse argues strongly against the present tense. The versions (פ, v, and ש), therefore, reflect the simple past. So Schoors (HCOT): “A simple past tense is, no doubt, the best rendering.”

[the] gatherer — Literally, “a gatherer.” A definite article, however, appears in 12:8, which is a recapitulation of this very verse. פ also includes a definite article here. This shows that קהלת is a title, not a name. Thus, “the gatherer” must be its correct sense. Virtually all English translations agree. See 1:1 and section A3 and compare with 12:8.

The totality — Or “the sum” (הכל). In other words: what you get in the end. Most translations drop the definite article (note, however, YLT).

1:3 As most scholars and translators agree, the first section of Qoh begins here and ends with v. 11. So also, it seems clear to most readers that this section includes poetic material. The question, however, is where the poetic part ends. In our opinion, the poetic section ends with v. 9, which summarizes the point of all the previous verses and then repeats the initial word and final phrase that began the poem (“what” & “under the sun”) to form a structural *inclusio* to the whole (though, technically speaking, v. 9 is not actually poetic—see notes there). Appended to this poetic material is a prose elucidation (vv. 10-11), which ties directly into the previous material through the repetition of the *leitworter* (linking word) הַדָּשׁ (novel).

What [lasting] benefit — To harmonize this with 2:22, the Coverdale and Bishops' bibles insert a כִּי at the start of the verse: “For what else.” Ginsburg defends that rendering with the

argument that the interrogative particle functions as an “emphatic denial” and serves as the rationale for the statement in v. 2. Therefore, he renders this phrase “since man hath no advantage.” Despite his translation, however, his commentary describes the phrase much more precisely: “מִה־יִתְרוֹן, *what lasting benefit*” (no italics added). The fact is, v. 2 functions as an opening phrase not for this verse, but for the whole of Qoh. It sets the tone and introduces one of the primary points that is then repeated throughout the text (scholars often refer to it as Qoh's “motto”). The whole thing then closes (12:8) with a restatement of the message in 1:2. Thus, this verse is *not* the rationale for the statement in v. 2. Rather, it is a rhetorical introduction to the first of Qoh's many arguments, which will be elaborated on further. It is certainly possible, however, to interpret the interrogative as an emphatic statement to the contrary: “No person [can] have a [lasting] benefit!” Considering, however, that Qoh already started with a bold negative statement, but then proceeded less forcefully into his first argument, we feel that a translation should do so as well. Thus, we render it as an interrogative and save the more emphatic statements for the summary conclusions. For יִתְרוֹן as “lasting benefit,” see section A3.

does a person have — The *lamed* here is either a *lamed* of possession (What [lasting] benefit *belongs to*) or one of advantage (What [lasting] benefit [*is there*] *for*). Either makes good sense of the text. Many translations treat the text as though it were מִה־הוֹתֵר אָדָם (“What does a person save/retain/gain?”). So HCSB, NRSV, NIV, ESV, etc. We consider that too paraphrastic. Though אָדָם occurs ubiquitously throughout Qohelet, it almost always refers to the general human person or to collective humanity—not a person of a specific gender. Thus, we follow the intent of the text and avoid gendered language like “man.” So also NET and NRSV (people), NJB (we), and REB (anyone). The Masoretic vocalization indicates the presence of a definite article. But the definite article indicates a specific category (that which is human), not a specific person (the man). Thus, there is no need to replicate the definite article.

for — We interpret this as a *bet* of exchange (in exchange for) or, as JM (§133c) calls it, a *bet* of price. It is also possible, however, to interpret it as a *bet* of means (by/through/in). The latter is preferred by 6. Many translations follow it. 7 has מִן כָּל (from all), which may indicate that the text it had before it said מִכָּל, not בְּכָל. It is certainly possible that the text we have suffered, early on, from an accidental *bet-mem* interchange. Since, however, both Kennicott and de Rossi know of no Hebrew MS that reads מִכָּל, we stick with מִן^L. The English rendering of the Bishops' bible and KJV (a man of) is impenetrably unclear. Do they understand the *bet* as meaning “with respect to/about/concerning”? Does “of” indicate the origin or derivation of the יִתְרוֹן (i.e., the lasting benefit that *comes from* עֹמֵל)? Do they view the *bet* as an indicator of consequence or result? Considering their bizarre rendering of the verb עֹמֵל, could “of” convey its archaic sense of something taken *away from* something else (i.e., the lasting benefit a person takes *away from* עֹמֵל)? No wonder almost every translation since has abandoned their rendering.

his exertion that he exerts — For עֹמֵל as “to exert/exertion/[what comes of] exertion,” see

section A3. The verb **עמל** is an imperfect. It reflects not only the irreal situation introduced by the interrogative, but the present (or possible present) situation. Thus, we render it in the present tense. **Ⲅ** rendered the verb as a present indicative, which indicates progressive or durative action (he is exerting). Thus, **Ⲅ** seems to be reading this text as a participle, not an imperfect. Strangely, Geneva used the LBH sense for the noun (travail), but the CBH sense for the verb (to suffer). Our rendering (“exertion” and “exert”) mimics the poetic root-play in the phrase **עמלו שיעמל**. The rendering of the verb in the Bishops' bible and KJV (to take) makes no sense. “To undertake” (as in ISV) would, however, work with the senses in Aramaic and Samaritan (see section A3). *BHQ* believes that the earliest complete text probably lacked a suffix on the noun since **α'** (which follows the text we have quite closely) and **Ⲛ** both lack it (i.e., its presence may be an assimilation to the use of a suffix on the noun in this expression elsewhere in Qoh). That could be true. Since, however, both Kennicott and de Rossi know of no Hebrew MS that lacks a suffix, we follow the Hebrew.

under the sun — See section A3. Qoh also uses the similar phrases “on the earth” or “under the sky.” Here, however, those phrases do not appear. Nevertheless, some translations swap “under the sun” for one of them. See NET, CEV, and ISV. We follow the Hebrew.

1:4 **A generation . . . a generation** — Some translations do not represent each instance of **דור**. NJPST is one such example: “One generation goes, another comes.” Yet repetition is not only important in terms of the character of the poetry—it represents the point: everything that happened before happens again. The repetition of things reveals that progress and change is ultimately an illusion. Note that in this and the following verses, the poetry is woven with alliteration. That alliteration begins here with the repetition of **דור**. So Noegel (“Word Play in Qoheleth”): “This passage provides an excellent instance of alliteration of the consonants **ד** and **ר**, which we hear twice in v. 4 in **דור** 'generation,' and again in **דרום** 'south' in v. 6.” To mimic that alliteration, we render the former “generation” and the latter “generally south.”

passes [away] . . . emerges — Or “goes/is going . . . comes/is coming.” The participles represent on-going action. In this instance, Qoh uses “go” to mean “die” (as also in 3:20 and elsewhere) and “come” to mean “come into being.” Thus, we render them “pass away” and “emerge.” Many translations reverse the order (from “go-come” to “come-go”). We follow the Hebrew. Note that in this and the following verses, the poetry uses repetition as a literary device in order to visually and phonetically support the principle idea: everything that happened before happens again. The repetition of things reveals that progress and change is ultimately an illusion. We mimic that repetition by rendering each instantiation of **הלך** as “to pass.”

yet — We interpret this *waw* as adversative (but/yet).

the [human] world — Usually, **ארץ** is rendered “earth” or “land.” Here, however, Qoh is using **ארץ** in the sense of the realm in which human beings live and exist—the living/human world. So Rashi: **מדרש תנחומא אמר כל-צדיקי ישראל נקראו ארץ** (Midrash Tanhuma says, “All Israel's righteous ones are called 'earth'”). Though that sense is rare in the HB, it occurs in NT writings like, for instance, Matt 5:14, where Yeshua says “You are the light of the world” (“the world” represents the sphere of human life). The point of this verse is not to contrast the

impertinence of human beings with the permanence of the planet (that would have nothing to do with the rest of the poem), but to say that, just like the circuit of the sun, the course of the wind, or the flowing of the rivers, even though it looks like there there is movement and change in the flow of human life, it is simply part of a never-ending cycle. So Schoors (HCOT): “The noun אֶרֶץ occurs 13 times in Qoheleth. It refers to the ground (10:7; 11:3) or to 'land' in the sense of a country or territory (5:8; 10:16-17). In the other occurrences in Qoheleth, אֶרֶץ is . . . the scene of human life (5:1; 7:20; 8:14, 16; 11:2). This meaning is also found in Qoh. 1:4.” Others that render this “world” include NAB, Fox, and Barton (ICC). Note that, if this were MH, “the world” would be העולם, not הארץ.

perpetually — Or “continuously.” Though עולם can also refer to the distant past or future time, here it has the sense of continuous or perpetual existence. Our use of “perpetually” and “persists” mimics the word-initial repetition of *ayin* and long-o in *’ôlam* and *’ômādeṭ*.

persists — Or “stands/stays/remains.” The participle represents on-going action. ש rendered the participle as an indicative perfect, which turns the whole phrase into a fact of the past: “the earth, for time immemorial, has stood.” We follow the Hebrew. Our use of “perpetually” and “persists” mimics the word-initial repetition of *ayin* and long-o in *’ôlam* and *’ômādeṭ*.

1:5 **Yes, rises does the sun and sets does the sun** — וַיִּרָא and וַיָּבֹא are gnomic *qatals* with affixed conjunction. In other words, they are *waw*-copulatives, not inverted perfects (characteristic of LBH, Qoh avoids inverted verbs). The perfects express present/habitual characteristics (patterns of behavior) and the *waws* function as conjunctions. One could reposit the verbs as participles to harmonize them with the use of participles everywhere else in the poem and there would be no discernible difference in translation. Thus, even though their form differs from the surrounding text, the sense is still the same. Curiously, most English translations pretend like the first conjunction doesn't exist. Those that do not (KJV, Leeser, NASB, etc) usually treat it, instead, like ו. Common in Hebrew poetry, however, is the emphatic *waw* (yes/indeed!), which is how we interpret the first conjunction. The second conjunction is simply coordinative (and). Note how we have followed the word-order of the Hebrew (V-S instead of S-V). This was done for two reasons: since English poetry often contains an irregular word-order, its appearance here aids in the attempt to convey the presence of poetry (even though, in BH, a V-S word-order would not be irregular or, necessarily, poetic) and by positioning “sun” at the end of each phrase, we are able to capture the alliteration woven by the oral composer or scribal artisan at the terminus of each phrase and at the end of the verse: *šemeš, šāmeš, šām* (see below).

then — Within the ancient astronomical world-view, the sun was perceived to enter a portal on one side of the Underworld (or subterranean deep) and race through to a portal on the other side, where it rose each day into the sky. That perception is reflected here in Qoh. Since tracing a course across the sky (rising and setting) clearly takes place before the sun races back to its starting-place, this *waw* must introduce subordinate action. Therefore, we render it “then.” So NJB, NAB, ISV, etc. Rotherham treats it as emphatic (yea). Ginsburg prefers the concessive (though). Most translations simply render it “and.” GW renders it twice (and then).

to its place — Note the inverted word-order. To produce emphasis, the composer or scribal

artisan fronted the predicate (“to its place it pants,” not “it pants to its place”). Most translations ignore the emphatic nature of the Hebrew (note, however, NJB, LEB, SET, etc). Some translations keep the definiteness of the noun, but drop the pronominal suffix. So NRSV, NAB, and ESV (the place). NET makes it indefinite (a place). Some drop the word entirely. So NJPST, NIV, and CEV. We follow the Hebrew. Note that the same word is used here to describe where the sun's course begins as is used in v. 7 to describe where the river's course ends.

panting — The participle שָׁאֵף gave ancient interpreters difficulty. ת rendered it “crawl” (as though שָׁחַף, not שָׁאֵף). ט rendered it “draw/drag/haul” (as though מִשָּׁךְ). This is followed by Geneva. ו, ס, σ, and θ rendered it “return” (as though שׁוּב). This is followed by Bishops'. Elsewhere, however, שָׁאֵף means either “breathe hard/gasp/pant” or “stomp/trample.” The closest ancient equivalent was α' (inhale). In this context, only the first sense of שָׁאֵף is possible. Strangely, HCSB rendered it twice: “to pant” and “return” (following ו). NAB and Seow (AB) follow the secondary meaning (to stomp/trample), but hijack it to indicate the idea of hurrying or hastening (it presses on)—a sense quite common among translators. But renderings like “hasten” (KJV, NASB, etc), “hurry” (NRSV, NIV, etc), “rush” (ISV, GW, etc), “speed” (NJB and REB), “glide” (NJPST), or “strive” (Leeser) are, in the words of Hengstenberg, “without any justification from usage” and must be rejected. Haupt (“Ecclesiastes”) denies that שָׁאֵף refers to panting from exhaustion (though on what grounds is impossible to say). Instead, he translates it “rushing” and, in his notes, says it refers to the “snorting” of the horses that drove the chariot of the sun through the sky (a popular Greek depiction). As Barton (ICC) explains, “It is a question whether the writer means to say that the sun continually pants from weariness . . . , or whether he pants from eagerness to start upon his course again.” In either case, the meaning of שָׁאֵף is clearly “pant.” We leave it up to the reader to decide whether the panting results from “weariness,” “eagerness,” or the general “rush” of exertion. The reward for most inventive rendering goes to Fenton, who takes שָׁאֵף as a noun (breeze) and renders it as the subject of the following participle: “when the breeze of morn arises.” There is, however, no other attestation of שָׁאֵף as “breeze” nor any evidence of that meaning among the versions. Montgomery (“Notes on Ecclesiastes”) suggests reading וְאֶל-מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף as וְאֶל-מְקוֹם שָׁאֵף. Thus: “then to the place *where also* it rises—it [is] there!” In agreement with most scholars, we view such an emendation as superfluous (in addition to lacking any support among the versions). The Masoretes placed a disjunctive accent (*zaqef katon*) between “its place” and “panting,” which links שָׁאֵף with the final clause and results in the rendering “it rises breathless.” Others link it more closely to “its place,” resulting in the rendering “to its place it pants.” We feel that, within the poetic syntax of the verse, the participle stands both at the end of the first and beginning of the second statements, holding them both together in one complex thought. Thus, we drop the *zaqef katon* and treat it all as one poetic line.

it rises — Many translators sense that an “again” is implied even though it is not present in the text. So NASB, NET, LEB, etc. So also ס. So we stay closer to the Hebrew.

thereun — In this verse, the oral composer or scribal artisan crafted a string of alliterative words at the terminus of several phrases and here at the end: *šemeš, šāmeš, šām*. So Noegel: “the consonants ש and נ in the repeated word שָׁמֵשׁ in v. 5 echo in the word שָׁמ at the end of the verse.” To mimic that alliteration, we have taken poetic license and created a neologism that alliterates with “sun”: “thereun” (a contraction of “unto there”).

1:6 **Passing . . . passes** — Or “goes/is going.” The participles represent on-going action. For הֹלֵךְ as “to pass,” see 1:4. One might well ask about the subject of these participles. ט, צ, and פ were believed it was still the sun from v. 5. In fact, however, it is “the wind,” which the poet has artfully refrained from identifying until the middle of the verse. Many translations ignore this clever poetic structure and name the subject immediately (KJV, NRSV, NET, NIV, ESV, etc).

generally southward — Literally, “to the south.” The typical word for “south,” however, is נֹגַב. The composer or scribal artisan intentionally chose a word that would provide alliteration with דֹּר (generation). To mimic that alliteration, we render דָּרוֹם as “generally south.” See notes on v. 4.

and rounding — וְסוֹבֵב is a participle with affixed conjunction. The conjunction is coordinative (and). The participle (to turn/go around/circle) represents on-going action.

northward — Literally, “to the north.”

around 'round — More literally, “rounding rounding.” In this case, however, the dual participles probably function adverbially to describe הֹלֵךְ. So Fox. The Hebrew purposely repeats itself to emphasize the idea of continuance. There is, however, one slight difference: orthography. The first spelling is *plene* (סוֹבֵב), the second *defectiva* (סֹבֵב). We mimic that variation with a *plene* “around” and *defectiva* “round.” Contrary to some translations, there is no conjunction (and) between the words.

then — As in the previous verse, this *waw* must introduce subordinate action (the wind returns on its rounds only after going south and north). Therefore, we render it “then.”

to its rounds — Note the inverted word-order. To produce emphasis, the composer or scribal artisan fronted the predicate (“to its rounds it returns,” not “it returns to its rounds”). Many translations ignore the emphatic nature of the Hebrew. Interpreters offer different readings of the preposition. Some believe it has a spatial (on/upon/over) or locational (about/around) nuance. KJV treated it as a marker of topic or circumstance (according to). Seow (AB) believes it signifies purpose (on account of/for the sake of). Krüger (Hermeneia) prefers a causal sense (because). Noting Semitic parallels in Phoenician, Aramaic, Akkadian, and Moabite, Schoors (HCOT) interpreted עַל as “from.” We, however, prefer a terminal sense. So Ginsburg: “שׁוֹב, *to return*, is here construed with the preposition עַל, *to*, as in Prov. xxvi 11. כִּכְלָב שָׁב עַל-קִאוֹ, *as a dog returns to his vomit* (comp. also Mal. iii. 24).” One might well argue that, even though עַל can be used with verbs of motion to provide a terminal sense, שׁוֹב usually takes אֶל (as, for instance, in Qoh 3:20). In this case, however, Qoh 12:7 is more instructive. Like this verse, 12:7 is poetic. It consists of two parallel cola:

וַיָּשָׁב הָעֶפֶר עַל־הָאָרֶץ כְּשֶׁהָיָה
וְהָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּב אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַחַ

In the first colon, שוב + על is parallel to אל + שוב in the second. As the parallel words and structures make evident, both mean “to return to.” The use of על in one case and אל in another is an example of the alternation typical of Hebrew poetry. There is gender alternation, for instance, in the use of a masculine noun with masculine verb in the first colon, but a feminine noun with a feminine verb in the second colon. So also, though the accusative object in the first colon is feminine (ארץ), the accusative object in the second is masculine (אלהים). In the first colon, an inanimate object connected with the earthly sphere is the subject of the first colon whereas an animate object connected with the heavenly sphere is the subject of the second. In the adjunct phrases that end each colon, there is alternation in the use of the relative marker: the particle ש in the first, but אשר in the second. The poetic parallelism between cola provides the opportunity for the alternation of prepositions and invests them with the same meaning (to). In this verse, a similar situation is discernible. This verse is parallel with the previous in numerous ways. The last section of both parts begins with a conjunction affixed to a preposition that is connected by *maqef* to an accusative object with first-person pronominal suffix:

וְאֶל־מְקוֹמוֹ
וְעַל־סְבִיבָתוֹ

Despite these similarities, there is poetic alternation between the parts. The accusative object in v. 5 is singular, whereas it is plural in v. 6 (contrary to translations like NIV and Moffatt) and the preposition shifts from אל to על. As in 12:7, though different propositions are used, they stand in the same syntactic places and communicate the same sense (to). In order to mimic the poetic root-play between סבב, סביב, and סביבתיו, we render them “around,” “round,” and “rounds.”

returns — שב could be read as a gnomic perfect or a present participle. Considering the ubiquitous use of participles in this verse (and surrounding verses), the latter is more likely. In either case, the translation remains the same.

1:7 **the streams** — In parallel with הים, which contains a definite article, הנחלים contains a definite article. Since we represent the definite article with הים, we represent it with הנחלים as well. Some translations (NRSV, NJPST, NIV, etc) do not.

pass — Or “are passing.” The participle represents on-going action. For הלך as “to pass,” see 1:4.

sea — By “sea,” the text may mean “ocean.” Thus, אוקיאנוס (a transliteration of the Greek Ωκεανος, which refers to Oceanus, the great river that encircles the earth). ס, however, simply says “sea” and leaves the interpretation to the reader. So do we.

yet — We interpret this conjunction as adversative (but/yet). Strangely, YLT rendered it as coordinating (and). Even Stranger, NJB renders it twice as both coordinating and adversative (yet).

—**none of it** — אֵין is the *de facto* particle of negation. It has the third-person pronominal suffix נִי-, meaning “it” (the same suffix can also function as a plural, which explains Moffatt’s “they never fill”). We follow the ancient accentual division, which shows a pause between “the sea” and “none of it.”

sated — Usually, one would render מִלֵּא as “full.” Most translations do so here. In this case, however, that does not adequately capture the sense. It is not that the sea is never “full,” but that it is never full to the point that it does not contain any more. In other words, it is never full *to excess*. Thus, in the very next verse, the verb מִלֵּא is used synonymously with the verb שָׂמַע (“to have enough/be satisfied/be satiated”). The point is that even though the streams continually feed into it, the sea never gets enough. To communicate that concept, we render it “sated.” Some translations that try to communicate that sense include NEB (never overflows) and CEV (never spills over).

Into the place that — Or “Into the place where.” KJV renders שָׁ as “from whence,” referring not to the destination, but the place where the streams began flowing. In other words, like the sun or the wind that return to their point of origin, KJV interprets this as a cycle starting from one spot and returning back to that spot to do it again. So also NJPST (from which), NIV (to the place the streams come from), ISV (where they began), etc. That reading is supported by ט, ו (unde), and σ (αφ' ου). In this case, however, “the place” refers to the destination, not the origin. This is evident, for example, from the structure of the poem, in which “the sea” is parallel with “the place” and, thus, indicates its referent. So also, such readings must alter the text in some respect (such as from שָׁ to מִשָּׁ). As Barton (ICC) explains, “The idea is not that the streams return from the abyss by subterranean channels . . . , nor to the return of water in vapor to fall as rain. . . . The thought, . . . is confined to the fact that the flowing rivers accomplish nothing.” So also Fox: “The rivers' ceaseless flowing does not fill up the sea conclusively. The sea can always take more water, always absorb without trace more of the rivers' labor.” This verse, in other words, follows the sense in v. 4, which states that despite the continual passage of each generation, “the earth” (the human world) never reaches a point where human existence is finalized. “The place” (i.e., “the sea”) corresponds to “the earth” (i.e., “the human world”). Both perpetually persist. Therefore, we follow the Hebrew, which is supported by ו (ou, not αφ' ου).

they continue — When שׁוּב (to return) is used with another verb in the infinitive construct form, it means “to do X again” or “to continue to do X” (see JM §177b and IBHS §39.3.1). Some translators, however, prefer to read it on its own as “to return.” So σ (there they return). The point, however, is not that the streams, like the sun, go back to where they start, but that they exert themselves over and over to reach the sea without any lasting benefit. The KJV’s rendering (return again) is a confused mixture of both interpretations.

to pass — For הִלָּךְ as “to pass,” see 1:4. Strangely, NET (they will) and Leeser (will they) render this infinitive construct as an imperfect.

1:8 **All that is spoken . . . to speak** — The first half of this poetic bicolon begins and ends with a poetic root-play (הִרְבִּירִים and לִדְבֹר), which we mimic with our renderings “spoken” and

“speak.” Note that, unlike the other two subjects in this verse, this one has a definite article. Most translations, however, going back to Geneva, Bishops', and KJV, ignore it. To capture that definiteness, we use “that.” Translators routinely differ about whether דְּבָרִים should indicate “words” or “things.” Some even suggest it morphs between both meanings. Though we favor “words” over “things,” our rendering attempts to represent the semantic ambiguity (“that [which] is spoken” could refer to the words themselves or the things that those words signify). The oldest interpretation of this verse comes from 6, which favored “words” (λογοι) over “things” (πραγματα, χρηματα, or simply τα παντα). NET departs radically from the text at this point, rendering דְּבָרִים as “monotony”!

deficient — The adjective יָנַע (Seow allows for a stative participle) refers to a lack of energy or ability. In this context, therefore, human speech is described as so weak or ineffectual, no amount will ever be able to make up for what it lacks. Thus, 6 rendered it ἐγκοποι, meaning “weary” (LEH). Many translations render it “wearisome” (i.e., it “wearies” the speaker of the words, not that the words themselves are “weary”). In all other instances of the adjective, however (Deut 25:18 and 2 Sam 17:2), it has a passive sense, not an active sense. Thus, the passive is preferable here. So Ginsburg: “it is invariably used in a passive sense . . . and can therefore form no exception here.” Barton (ICC) agrees. So also Schoors (HCOT): “the sense of the clause should be that all words are weary.” So Rotherham (All words are weak), NAB (All speech is labored), Leeser (All things weary themselves), Fenton (All language is feeble), and Alter (All things are weary). Astonishingly, JPS renders the word twice—once as a verb and once as a noun (All things toil to weariness)! What Geneva, Bishops', and KJV meant by saying all things are “full of labor” is puzzling, if not nonsensical. Haupt's “ceaselessly active” (“Ecclesiastes”) may better capture what those three meant to say, but stretches the meaning of יָנַע to absurdity.

beyond [what] one would be able — More literally, “one would never be able.” יוֹכַל is an imperfect, expressing incomplete aspect and, most likely, modality. This is supported by 6's use of the future indicative ου δυνησεται (he *will* not be able). So Ginsburg: “Men *could* never.” So also AAT (One *may* not). Most English translations, however, ignore the form of the verb and treat it as a perfect: “man cannot” (KJV), “man is unable” (HCSB), “no one can” (NJB), etc. We follow the Hebrew. Unlike אָדָם (see 1:3), Qohelet usually uses אִישׁ as a reference to a male-gendered person (see 4:4; 6:2, 3; 9:15). In this case, however, it functions in the general sense of a human person. Qoh is certainly not limiting the expressions in this verse to males! Thus, in this particular place, we follow the intent of the text and avoid gendered language like “man.” So also NRSV, NET, NIV, etc.

Eye — Unlike הָדְבָרִים, which has a definite article, עֵין does not. This is due, most likely, to poetic elision. Yet we, unlike most translations, are faithful even to these minor details. Note, however, Seow (AB): “An eye.”

will never be satisfied — Note that תִּשְׂבַּע is an imperfect, expressing incomplete aspect. Thus, we render it “*will* never be satisfied.” This is supported by 6's use of the future indicative ουκ ἐμπλησθησεται (it *will* never be sated). Most English translations, however, ignore the form

of the verb and treat it as a perfect: “*is not satisfied*” and “*is never satisfied*.” We follow the Hebrew. So also Ginsburg (could never).

to see — Or “by/from seeing.”

nor ear sated — Unlike **הרברים**, which has a definite article, **אזן** does not. This is due, most likely, to poetic elision. Yet we, unlike most translations, are faithful even to these minor details. Note, however, Seow (AB): “An ear.” Usually, one would render **מלא** as “full.” Most translations do so here. In this case, however, **מלא** is used synonymously with the verb **שמע** (“to have enough/be satisfied/be satiated”) to say that the eye is never filled to the point that it does not take in more. In other words, it is never full *to excess*. To communicate that concept, we render the verb “sated.” So also Fox. Note that **תמלא** is an imperfect, expressing incomplete aspect. Thus, **לא-תמלא** means “it *will* never be sated,” not that “it *is* never sated.” Most English translations treat it as a perfect. We follow the Hebrew.

after hearing — Here we have prepositional *min* + an infinitive of the verb **שמע**. Most translations render the preposition as a helping particle of **מלא**, meaning “to be filled *with*.” Against this, however, stands the fact that when the Niphal of **מלא** expresses the notion “to be filled with,” **מלא** usually does not take *min* (see, for instance, Gen 6:11, Exod 1:7, and Num 14:21). Similarly, a few translations treat *min* as a marker of the genitive even though it does not function that way elsewhere: “enough *of* hearing” (NJPST), “its fill *of* hearing” (NIV), etc. Instead, what we probably have is a temporal marker of posterior activity (after/since), which is indicated by the use of *min* + infinitive (see GKC §164g or IBHS §11.2.11c and §36.2.2b). Thus, **משמע** means “after hearing.” The point is that even after the ear has heard something, it cannot perpetually retain what was heard. Since it will eventually have to hear everything again, it has no lasting benefit from its exertion. Instead of a temporal marker, one could read the preposition as a marker of means (*by* hearing) or a marker of origin (*from* hearing). ISV and Fenton choose the former. YLT chose the later.

- 1:9 The transition from poetry to prose occurs in this verse. What we have is not a continuation of the previous poem, but a concluding proverb (Whatever has happened is what will happen; and whatever has been done is what will be done) followed by a short, explicative comment (since nothing at all is novel under the sun). The proverb is like poetry in that it is short and features strongly linked parallel passages, which makes it ideal for concluding the poetic section. We differentiate the proverb from the previous poetry by not treating the lines of the proverb with any special linneation other than leaving each line identically justified (see section B1).

Whatever — In the HB, the construction **מה ש** (meaning “that which” or “whatever”) is limited to Qoh. It is, however, a common expression in MH (see GMH §436iii). **ס**, however, mistook it as an interrogative (what?), which was followed by **ו**. So also Geneva and YLT.

has happened — Though one could render the verb **היה** as either “to be/exist” or “to happen/occur,” it seems to us that the nuance here relates more to the occurrence of *events* than states of *being*. Thus, we prefer “to happen/occur.” So Seow (AB): “the issue is what is or has been happening.” So also CEV, ISV, GW, etc. Though we (and most other translators) render this

as a present perfect (whatever has happened up to now), it is also possible to take it as a simple past “it happened/occurred” (so NJB). Either is to be preferred over a plain present tense (Whatever *happens*). Note that, contrary to some translations, the predicate has been fronted for emphasis (“Whatever has happened is what will happen” not “Whatever will happen is what has happened”).

is what will happen — Though we render יהיה as a simple future, JM §111i may be right to say that this imperfect is a “frequentitive present” (is what will *keep* happening). In this proverb, הוּא functions as a copula (is), not as an independent pronoun (it). So Schoors (HCOT): “The two correlative relative clauses constitute a three-member nominal clause, in which, according to traditional terminology, the pronoun הוּא functions as a copula.” Thus, renderings like that in KJV (it is that which) or Seow (that is what) should be rejected. For יהיה as “to happen/occur” instead of “to be/become,” see above.

and — Some translations (NJPST, NIV, NAB, etc) ignore this simple coordinating conjunction.

has been done — Or “carried out/accomplished.” The verb עשה probably refers, in this particular place, to the *actions* carried out by humans as opposed to events that take place/happen in the natural or historical world (represented by יהיה). Barton (ICC) and Krüger (Hermeneia) agree. Schoors (HCOT) disagrees.

is what will be done — Again, הוּא functions as a copula (is), not an independent pronoun (it). See above.

since — We interpret this *waw* as causal—it introduces the reason why the previous statements are true. So also Fenton. Schoors (hence) and NASB (so) treat it as resultative or consequential. We cannot agree. It is not as a *result* of what has already happened happening again in the future that there is nothing at all new under the sun. Rather, nothing at all is new under the sun *because* anything that may happen in the future is simply a recurrence of what has already happened in the past.

nothing at all is novel — Or “there is nothing at all novel.” Most translations minimize the emphatic nature of this phrase by eliminating the “all” (כָּל). As Barton (ICC) notes, אֵין כָּל “is a universal negative in Heb., cf. Nu. 11⁶ Dt. 8⁹ Dn. I⁴” and “The construction has passed into NT. idiom, cf. οὐ πᾶς, Mt. 24²² Lk. I³⁷ 21²⁷.” Instead of “new,” we prefer “novel” since Qoh is not trying to say that there are no “new” things (as opposed to “old” things), but that there is nothing *unique*—nothing that has not happened in some sense already or been experienced to some extent before. Though the Masoretic accentuation (*maqef*) shows that “all” and “novel” were recited together as one word, the evidence cited by Barton (particularly Num 11:6) shows that, contrary to NET (truly new) and YLT (entirely new), “all” and “nothing” belong together as a normal, but emphatic statement of negation (nothing at all). See also 2 Sam 12:3.

under the sun — See section A3. Qoh also uses the similar phrases “on the earth” or “under the sky.” Here, however, those phrases do not appear. Nevertheless, some translations swap “under the sun” for one of them. See NET and ISV. We follow the Hebrew.

1:10 **There is** — This is the *de facto* particle of existence (שֵׁ). It means that something is—that it

exists. There is no question of its existence. By the very use of this particle, such existence is given as a statement of fact. All translations that interpret it as an interrogative “is there?” (such as KJV, ESV, NASB, and NRSV) do extreme violence to the text.

saying — Literally, “word.” **ו** renders this phrase “whosoever speaks” (שִׁירֵבֶר) as if its *Vorlage* had the letters of **שׁ** switched around.

may be said — As is often the case in MH, we interpret this as impersonal or passive.

already — In the HB, this word only occurs in Qoheleth. Outside the HB, it occurs in MH, which is, again, evidence of Qoheleth's very late date.

long ago — Or “in antiquity.” One might be tempted to render **עלמים** as a plural (such as “ages past”), yet the following verb is singular, not plural, which means that this word functions as a collective singular. In **ו**, however, the following verb is plural (probably due to harmonization with the plural word here). We see no reason to deviate from **זז**^L.

1:11 **Lost** — Or “absent/gone.”

the memory of — Since the absolute form is present in this very verse (זְכָרוֹן), it is safe to assume that the particular form vocalized here (זְכָרוֹן) is the construct. Thus, it should be rendered “memory *of*.” So also, it is common in MH for a word to be in construct before *lamed*, which is what we find here.

former [times] — Many interpreters have thought that the masculine forms of **ראשנים** and **אחרנים** must refer to *people*, whereas the feminine forms (we only have evidence of **ראשנות** in the HB) refer to *things*. So **ט** (former *generation*). As the context makes explicit, however, these words refer to the past and future—the former and latter *times* (and, by extension, the events of those times). So Fox: “this passage deals not with the problem of whether people are remembered but whether events are.”

yet to be — Literally, “that will be.”

1:12 **I [am] a gatherer [of maxims].** — The strong disjunctive accent above **קהלת** indicates a break at that point. And since there is no *athnach*, it is the strongest break within the verse. It should be rendered “I [am] **קהלת** (period)” not “I, **קהלת**, was...” The former rendering is also expected in terms of style when it comes to a ruler introducing himself for the first time in an inscription (verse 1 was a superscription and vv. 2-10 were a summary introduction to the primary message of the ruler). Typical royal statements in West Semitic languages begin “I am X, king of Y.” Thus, a 9th Century BC Phoenician inscription on the Kilamuwa Stele (*KAI* §24) begins with the phrase: **אנך כלמו בר חיא** (I [am] Kilamuwa, son of Hayya). A 7th Century BC Phoenician inscription from Karatepe (*KAI* §26) begins: **אנך אזתוד הברך בעל** (I [am] Azatiwada, the blessed one of Baal). A Phoenician inscription on the Tabnit Sarcophagus (*KAI* §13) from 6th Century BC Sidon begins: **אנך תבנת כהן עשתרת מלך צרנם** (I [am] Tabnit, priest of Ashtart, king of [the] Sidonians).

I became — **הייתי** could mean “I was,” “I have been,” or “I became.” Rabbinic tradition supports the first (I was), but probably reflects the way the perfect shifted to a preterite in MH. Thus, **ט** explains at length in this verse how Solomon *was* king *until* the wrath of

YHWH sent Ashmoday, king of demons, to dethrone him. **⚡** renders it as the latter by using the verb γίγνομαι (to become) instead of εἰμι (to be). It could also function as a stative (I am). If the text were written early, the stative would fit in well with other early royal inscriptions. Considering its late date, however, the preterite is likely. We feel that **⚡** has hit on the right nuance. It is because the speaker became a ruler that he was able to devote his life to the understanding of wisdom and folly (and had access to many hidden secrets).

ruler — Or “king.” The word מֶלֶךְ, however, can refer to someone with ruling power who is not, strictly speaking, *the king*. That is, most likely, the sense here. If the speaker truly was King of Israel, including the phrase “in/over Jerusalem” would make no sense because Jerusalem—both at Solomon's time and after the exile—was the only place where one could be king of Israel. The only point in time when one could be king of Israel in a place other than Jerusalem was after the death of Solomon when the Northern Kingdom was formed and up to the point of its destruction by Assyria. The only time in which it was possible to rule over Israel from somewhere other than Jerusalem without being its sole sovereign king was during the Persian or Hellenistic periods—the precise time at which the type of Hebrew in this text existed. Thus, “ruler” is the most likely meaning.

1:13 **I made up my mind** — Or “I set my mind.”

wisely — Literally, “with/by wisdom.” The phrase functions adverbially to tell us the means by which the gatherer attempts to understand what occurs in the world.

look into — Literally, “search/seek regarding/concerning.” We think the phrase “look into” makes more sense in English.

under the sky — **⚡**, **⚡**, and **⚡** read “under the sun” instead of “under the sky,” which is, most likely, a harmonization with the phrase “under the sun” in the next verse. **⚡** supports מִלְּמַלְאִי.

has permitted — Alternatively, “given/delivered/made.” The same verb can also mean “to permit/allow,” which is how we think it functions here. The gatherer is not saying that Elohim has charged people with doing the aforementioned unpleasant task, but that Elohim has made it possible for people to do so.

such — Literally, “it.” The antecedent is the activity of trying to understand what occurs in the world.

task — עָנִין is an Aramaic loanword, which appears several times in **⚡**. The root (עָנָה) means “to be busy/preoccupied.” In order to avoid confusion, we have changed the word order from “Such a horrid task, Elohim has permitted” to “Elohim has permitted such a horrid task.”

task . . . tasked — We mimic in our translation the poetic root-play between עָנִין and לַעֲנוֹת.

1:14 **saw** — Although הִנֵּה usually functions as a presentative or demonstrative particle (“look!” or “here is,” respectfully), it also functions almost like a verb to introduce a new perception—especially following verbs or nouns related to seeing or looking (IBHS §40.2.1b).

1:15 Gorids - switch nun with lamed?

be straightened — Literally, “cannot be straight” (Qal infinitive construct). Based on the use of a previous Pual participle (what is twisted) and parallelism with a Niphal infinitive construct (be counted), most people believe this word should have a passive form as well. Since this verb only appears in the Piel conjugation, we reposit the same consonants as a Pual infinitive

construct (cannot be straightened). This is supported by 𐤄 and 𐤅. Check out 7:13.

absence — From חסר (to lack/be without). In post-biblical Hebrew, this particular term is used in reference to a financial deficit or economic loss, but that is not how it functions here.

1:16 **to myself** — Literally, “with my mind/heart.”

Look [at] me! — Literally, “[At] me, look!” We view this use of הנה as a presentative particle.

I amassed greater — Hendiadys. Literally, “made great and still more.” It is possible that the phrase הנה גרלתי suffers from accidental dittography and should, instead, be הנה גרלתי. In other words, the Hiphil form (I made great) should be a Qal (I became great). This is how 𐤄 seems to have read it. So NAB and LEB (I have become great), NET (I have become much), and the KJV's awkward expression “I am come to great estate.” Instead of its naturally causative meaning, the Hiphil could have the sense of “showing/displaying greatness” or have a reflexive sense like “I made myself great.” So NKJV (I have attained greatness). We believe that the sense of the verb is functioning comparatively: “I more greatly amassed.”

than — Or “over against.” We believe that this על functions in tandem with הנה גרלתי in a comparative sense. So NJB (a greater stock of wisdom *than*), NRSV (great wisdom, *surpassing*), and NASB (magnified and increased wisdom *more than*).

anyone — Or “everyone.” כל is functioning distributively. Solomon would not have used this word. For Solomon to speak of “anyone/everyone who was before me” is like John Adams, second president of the United States, saying “I have become greater than any other U.S. president!” The “any/every” indicates a multiple and only has value as a marker of emphasis if many of those who came before were also exceptionally wise. In fact, this word has the most value if Solomon were being referenced as a *predecessor*. The translators of 𐤅 realized this and added some words to change the meaning and preserve Solomon as a possible author: “more than all *the sages* who were prior to me.”

over Jerusalem — 𐤄 and 𐤅 read “in Jerusalem” as well as over 100 Hebrew MSS. Since the portions of Qohelet preserved in the DSS agree, to a great extent, with everything in 𐤌^L, we stick with 𐤌^L. In either case, the preposition points to an authority other than a king like Solomon (see notes on v. 1 and v. 12).

amply — Literally, “abundantly.”

1:17 Gorids - sing to plural?

Yet — We interpret this whole verse as adversative. So NAB (yet). Many translations, missing that this whole verse is in the adversative, throw in a “but/yet/however” halfway through instead: “but/yet/however I realized...” (NET, NJB, LEB, Leeser) or “I realized that this is but...” (RSV, NRSV, ESV).

made up my mind — Or “set my mind.” A rare instance of *waw*-consecutive with imperfect in Qoheleth. Like MH, Qoheleth avoids the use of the *waw*-consecutive.

knowledge — 𐤌^L points this as an infinitive construct (and [to] know). The *lamed*, however, is missing. Instead, it should be taken as a noun (knowledge). Thus, the word-pair “wisdom and knowledge” parallels “fatuity and folly.” This is supported by 𐤄 and 𐤅 and makes sense of the parallelism between wisdom and knowledge in the next verse.

fatuity — Instead of “fatuity” (הוללות), 𐤄, 𐤅, and 𐤓 say “proverbs” (משלים). The plural

ending is one of abstraction, not of number.

folly — שכלות is a variant spelling of סכלות (folly). The plural ending is one of abstraction, not of number.

was — A pronoun can sometimes be used as a copula.

1:18 **anger** — 𐤄 reads “knowledge” (דעת) instead of “anger” (כעס). The form of the proverb, however, like the next line, indicates that something negative should be the outcome, not something positive. Thus, we stick with 𐤌, which is supported by The Three, 𐤄, and 𐤌.

amasses — The form of the verb is *weyiqtol*, not *waw*-consecutive. The shift in verbal form is a common characteristic of Hebrew poetry that is not meant to indicate a change in meaning. This proverb appears here as an explanation of the claim that “amassing” knowledge and wisdom was ultimately “vapor”—because the result of it had a negative instead of positive effect on the gatherer's life. The catchword that links the two together is the verb “amass.”

2:1 **to myself** — Literally, “to my mind/heart.” The prepositional *bet* functions in the same manner that 𐤁 did in v. 16 (to speak “with” or “to”) and it serves to begin the following apostrophe. Contrary to 𐤄 (and 𐤅, which follows it), it does not mean “in.” Early English translations were either not paying attention or were following 𐤄 and 𐤅 too closely (so Coverdale, Bishop's Bible, KJV, YLT, etc). Most modern versions (except ESV) have fixed the error.

I want you to experience — 𐤀𐤏𐤔𐤁 appears to be a cohortative of 𐤏𐤔𐤁 (to try/test/train/experience) with the fuller spelling of the 2MS suffix (you). This kind of spelling is typical of the Hebrew employed by scribes in the Qumran sect. Our rendering “I want” elucidates the cohortative. Translations that say merely “I will,” lose the nuance of the cohortative. 𐤄 and 𐤄 agree that this comes from the verb 𐤏𐤔𐤁. So does 𐤌, but it seems to be reading 𐤀𐤏𐤔𐤁 (try/test it). 𐤅 took the verb as a Niphal of 𐤏𐤔𐤁 (to pour out) and took “wine” as the object (against the grammar of the language). That interpretive move seems to be based on ancient Jewish exegesis. Rashi, for instance, says that 𐤀𐤏𐤔𐤁 is about “mixing wine for drinking.”

see for yourself — 𐤏𐤁 is an imperative and is vocalized as one. So NASB, NRSV, and KJV. This makes a good parallel with the cohortative in the previous sentence. Many interpret the same consonants, however, as an infinitive absolute. Some of those leave it as an infinitive absolute (so NET's and LEB's “to see”), while others treat it as an infinitive that mimics the nature of the previous verb (so HCSB, NAB, NJB). Typically, in fact, infinitive absolutes function as imperatives. So whether this is an imperative or an infinitive absolute, it still functions as an imperative. Almost all translations, however, that interpret 𐤏𐤁 as an infinitive absolute, render it as a simple imperfect and lose its nuance entirely. Although most modern translations render the verb “to enjoy,” Barton (ICC) pointed out over a century ago that “those who hold that 𐤏𐤁 denotes enjoyment, are quite mistaken. It is used for any experience, pleasurable or otherwise.” Thus, it really means “to experience” in parallel with the previous verb. We use the verb in a similar way. One who says “I will see for myself” means to say “I will verify through experience if what you say is correct.”

saw — Although 𐤏𐤁 usually functions as a presentative or demonstrative particle (“look!” or “here is,” respectfully), it also functions almost like a verb to introduce a new perception—

especially following verbs or nouns related to seeing or looking (IBHS §40.2.1b).

2:2 **Of mirth** — Or “about/regarding” mirth. The *lamed* is one of specification. See also “of joy” in the second half of the verse. Ginsburg’s notion that the *lamed* should be rendered “to” (as if Qohelet were now personifying and speaking to abstract entities like “laughter”) is ludicrous.

It is fatuous — This verb is vocalized as a Poal participle from $\sqrt{\text{הלל}}$. The only other Poal of that root occurs in Ps 102:9. The meaning of the verb depends on which $\sqrt{\text{הלל}}$ root it comes from: 1) “to praise” in the Piel, “to be praised/praiseworthy” in the Pual, and “to boast” in the Hithpolel, or 2) “to make a fool of/mock” in the Poel and “to act mad/frenzied/senseless” in the Hithpolel. All the major Greek versions seem to be taking it from root 2 (Θ and θ' say “carrying on,” σ' says “confusion/disorder,” and α' says “misleading”), but they give it a sense only seen in the Hithpolel. Parallelism with “reproach/revile” in Ps 102:9 suggests reading מהולל as a Poel participle with suffix (those who mock me)—also from root 2. \mathcal{T} interprets it as a Poel of root 2 as well. The Talmud (*b. Shabbat* 30b), however, takes it as a Pual from root 1: “‘And I said of laughter, it is to be praised’: that refers to the laughter which the Holy One, blessed be He, laughs with the righteous in the world to come” (Soncino). Since parallelism suggests something negative, this word should not be taken from root 1. It is probably a Pual participle of root 2 meaning “it is foolish/silly/worthy of ridicule.” Despite the renderings of the Greek versions, the idea of “madness” comes from an entirely different stem (Hithpolel) and should be avoided.

what [can] it [possibly] do — זה must be a shortened form of זאת (a feminine instead of masculine demonstrative pronoun) so that it agrees with the feminine gender of its antecedent (joy), which is exactly how the Masoretes pointed it. The use of the feminine זה , however, which Qohelet uses instead of זאת , is rare in BH. It is more typical of MH. As explained in IBHS §17.4.3c, the phrase מה־זה functions as an emphatic adverb in exclamatory questions and means something like “what in the world” or “how did it ever.” Thus our rendering “what [can] it [possibly].” \mathcal{G} says “Why do you do this?” as if reading מה עשה את־זה instead of מה־זה עשה . That could represent a text slightly different from זל or it could be a reinterpretation. In any case, we stick with זל , which the DSS show to be quite reliable in virtually every detail.

2:3 **I sought** — The precise nuance of תרתי is difficult to ascertain. Literally, the verb would mean “to search/spy/seek.” So our translation. So \mathcal{T} . However, many people have a problem with that rendering and virtually all the versions struggle with it. \mathcal{G} has “I examined,” α' and σ' have “I considered,” θ' has “I purposed,” and \mathfrak{V} has “I thought.” Seow (AB) proposes “to go about” based on the use of the verb with “heart/mind” in Num 15:39: $\text{ולא־תתרו אחר־י לבבכם}$ (and not seek after your hearts/minds). We prefer to take the verb in the sense already specified in 1:13.

with determination — Literally, “with my heart/mind.” We believe the phrase functions adverbially and that “my heart/mind” is used here as a metonym for Qohelet’s will/intention. Thus “with determination.” Fox’s rendering “to ply” (meaning “to perform *with diligence*”) is similar.

for my body to be carried away with wine — Literally, “for the carrying away with wine of my flesh.” לִמְשֹׁךְ means to “drag/lead/carry off” or “to extend/lengthen/delay.” Driver proposes “to sustain” based on Aramaic and Arabic (“Problems and Solutions,” VT), but we consider that a stretch. Seow (AB) proposes “to induce,” from the Latin *inducere* (to lead), which is supported by α´ and θ´. That is good, but unnecessary. The word makes enough sense as it stands: Qohelet sought to have his body get “carried away” with wine so that he could see what comes of pleasure, mirth, and joy. This verse explains how he came to the conclusion already given in v. 1. Note also that “wine” is here spelled יַי (yayin), whereas the NH spelling is יָ (yēn). This is important when it comes to dating the text by use of its language because scholars have rightly noted that many of its LBH or MH characteristics could, potentially, represent NH instead and, thus, push its date much further back in time. This word is significant because it represents a well-attested word in NH as witnessed by a significant amount of epigraphic material. Little about NH is well-attested. The Samaria Ostraca show us that “year” in NH is שָׁנָה, not שָׁנָה; that “wine” is יַי, not יָי; and the theophoric element in a personal name is יָוֹ (-yaw), not יָהוּ (-yahu) or יָה (-yah). If Qohelet were written in NH, “wine” would be יָי.

and to seize — Some prefer to amend “and to seize” (וּלְאַחֵז) to “and *not* to seize” (וּלֹא לְאַחֵז) under the assumption that the לֹא fell out due to haplography. So BHS. So Alter (not grasping folly). We think this misses the point. The use of wine is not only to test mirth and joy to see what benefit it has, but to experiment with folly to see what benefit it has as well. This verse fulfills the desire expressed in 1:17 to “know fatuity and folly” as well as wisdom and knowledge.

what possible — The phrase אִי־יָדָע is an emphatic version of the question “what/why/where?” Thus our rendering “possible.” Here, the question is indirect (“what possible benefit there is” instead of “what possible benefit is there?”).

they might achieve — This verb is an imperfect. It functions as a hypothetical. Most translations, however, treat it like an infinitive (to do). The point, however, is not an attempt to find out what is good for people *to do*—as if it were questionable what actions were good and which were not. Rather: what is the good that can be gained by the actions that people do?

under the sky — 𐤔, 𐤌, and 𐤎 read “under the sun” instead of “under the sky,” which is, most likely, a harmonization. See 1:13. 𐤕 supports 𐤎^L.

[in] the short span — Literally, “[in] the few of the days.”

2:4 **I made my endeavors renowned** — Literally, “I made my works great.” Qohelet is boasting of the renown he gained from all he did, which is typical of royal inscriptions. Here, however, the ultimate point is how futile his works were. Renderings similar to “I made *great works*” (ESV, KJV, NRSV) are loose paraphrases.

I built myself — An ethical dative used colloquially (GKC §119s). For example: “I bought me some.” See all other notices of “myself” in vv. 4-8.

2:5 **parks** — פָּרְדֵּס is an Old Persian loanword (*paradayadā* from *pardēd*, meaning “garden, “grove,” or “park”). It may have come into Hebrew through Akkadian (*pardēsu*) or Aramaic

(*pardēs*). Persian loanwords only exist in LBH texts and post-biblical texts. More conclusive evidence that Qohelet was written in the late Persian or early Hellenistic periods.

2:6 **from which** — Literally, “from them.”

a forest burgeoning [with] trees — This rendering follows the Masoretic accents. If we disregard the accents, it can be read “a burgeoning forest of trees” where the participle “burgeoning” functions as an adjective instead of a verb.

2:7 **I purchased** — The verb קנה means “to purchase/buy.” It does not mean “to get” (KJV).

the offspring . . . was — Since the verb is singular (it was), the subject (literally “children/sons”) must function distributively. ⚡ and ⚡, however, change the verb to a plural to provide better number agreement with the noun.

the property . . . was — Since the verb is singular (it was), the subject must be singular. According to the Masoretic accentuation, this word is absolute, not construct. Thus, “herd and flock” is in apposition to “property” (contrary to ⚡, ⚡, and ⚡).

2:8 **prized possessions** — Or “private property/treasures.” This word is a cognate of Ugaritic *sglt* (DUL) and Akkadian *sikiltu* (CAD).

rulers — Or “kings.” See 1:1, 12.

along with — A *waw* of accompaniment (*waw concomitantes*).

provinces — מדינה comes from דיין (to execute justice/bring judgment/pass sentence/argue a case). Thus, elsewhere, we render it “judicial [court].” Here, however, the scope is more broad and refers simply to a “province.” In the Persian period, this would be a satrapy.

(a mistress and mistresses) — שרים ושרות (literally, “male singers and female singers”) comes out of nowhere among a list of *treasured possessions* such as valuable metals, flocks, and slaves. More perplexing, however, is the phrase at the end of the verse שרה ושרות. These words occur only here in the HB and the syntax is confounding. ⚡^B and ⚡^A believe they refer to people who pour liquid: “male wine-pourers and female wine-pourers.” ⚡^A, The Three, ⚡, and ⚡ interpret it as cups, tubes, or other vessels for delivering liquid. All those interpretations are based on the MH verb שרף, (to sprinkle/pour). Ginsburg traced the interpretation “musician” or “musical instruments” to Ibn Melech, who was followed by KJV, ASV, and SET. Such a rendering, however, is baseless. In post-biblical Hebrew, the noun שירה (or שרה *defectiva*) is “chest/box.” So NJB (chest upon chest) and NJPST (coffers and coffers). A cognate is *šaddu* (a “chest/container” for storing gold) in Assyrian (CAD). This would be tempting except that it doesn't work as the accusative of עשה (“I made chests” is by no means worthy of boasting and doesn't fit the context). Context requires the nuance “to get/acquire,” which is used of עשה when referring to renown or people. To unravel this conundrum, we depend on ancient Semitic cognates and historical grammar. Ugaritic *šl* and Arabic *sitt* mean “lady” or “mistress” (DUL). These come from Proto-Semitic **šldt*, from which would also come Hebrew *šidd*, which appears here with the feminine marker as שרה (šiddah). Thus, “wife/lady/mistress/concubine.” This is a person, and thus works well with the verb, but was also viewed as a possession, and thus works well in context. So HCSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NRSV, etc. The syntax, however, is still problematic. Most take it as

appositional to “the luxuries of human offspring” and then interpret the singular noun plus plural noun of the same root as a superlative. That could be the case. Note, however, that **שְׂדֵה וְשָׂדוֹת** is virtually identical to **שָׂרִים וְשָׂדוֹת**. We believe this is more than mere coincidence. These phrases are so similar, one (**שְׂדֵה וְשָׂדוֹת**) is probably a correction of the other (**שָׂרִים וְשָׂדוֹת**), written into the text either at the end of the verse or in the margin above. It then entered the text itself through transmission. Thus, what was a correction or alternative reading became part of the verse. Due to its secondary nature, we place it in parentheses. The situation is simple. A common scribal error is mistaking *dalet* for *resh* (or vice versa). **שְׂדֵה וְשָׂדוֹת** was mistaken as **שָׂרִים וְשָׂדוֹת**. To make better sense of the text, **שָׂרִים** was changed to **שָׂרִים**. The error was caught, however, because an earlier text was known to have **שְׂדֵה וְשָׂדוֹת**. By that time, however, the text had started taking on a sacred status. Thus, **שָׂרִים וְשָׂדוֹת** was left and **שְׂדֵה וְשָׂדוֹת** was added. As it was copied, the addition was perceived to be part of the verse itself. This explanation makes the most sense of all pieces of the text without appealing to post-biblical Hebrew and without ignoring the striking orthographic and syntactic similarities between the two phrases.

2:9 **Then** — A subordinating conjunctive. This is not a *waw*-consecutive.

I excelled in renown — Hendiadys. Literally, “I became great/renowned and still more.” The *waw* functions as a verbal coordinator, turning the second verb into an adverb that modifies the first. See 1:16.

beyond — Comparative *mem*.

anyone — The singular verb **הָיָה** means that **כָּל** is functioning distributively (“anyone” not “all/everyone”). See 1:16.

yet — A concessive use of **אֲפִי**, meaning that one thing led unexpectedly to something else. So NET (yet).

served me — Literally, “stood by me.” However, the verb **עָמַד** (to stand) + *lamed* is an idiom meaning “to attend/serve.” The point is not that wisdom “remained” or “stayed” with him (contrary to most translations), but that it served him well.

2:10 **whatever** — Literally, “all that.”

myself — Synecdoche. Literally, “heart/mind” with privative *mem*.

pleasure — Literally, “joy/gladness.” **שִׂמְחָה** seems to be reading “my pleasure” (probably a corruption).

because I — Synecdoche. Literally, “my heart/mind.”

pleased — Literally, “joyous/glad.”

2:11 **Then** — A subordinating conjunctive. This is not a *waw*-consecutive.

the exertion that I exerted — see **his exertion that he exerts** in 1:3. For **עָמַל** as “exertion/[what comes of] exertion,” see section A3.

saw — Although **הִנֵּה** usually functions as a presentative or demonstrative particle (“look!” or “here is,” respectfully), it also functions almost like a verb to introduce a new perception—especially following verbs or nouns related to seeing or looking (IBHS §40.2.1b).

more — Or “excess/surplus.”

2:12 **to focus** — Literally, “to see/perceive.”

[knowledge] — Literally, “wisdom, both fatuity and folly” (חכמה והוללות וסכלות). According to 1:17-18, however, we expect the word-pairs “wisdom and knowledge” combined with “fatuity and folly.” Therefore, we reconstruct the text as [חכמה ו]עדת הוללות וסכלות.

[and saw] that — The meaning of כִּי is difficult to ascertain. Most translations take it as causal (for/because). A few take it as adversative (but/yet). Often, however, כִּי functions as a complimentizer of the verb רָאָה: “to see *that*...” Thus, the כִּי probably occurs here to pick back up the quality of the verb רָאָה and introduce the thing that is now “seen.”

whatever kind of man — Literally, “whatever *the* man.” 𐤄 smooths this out by changing “whatever” to “whomever.” We keep the definiteness without abandoning “whatever” by using the phrase “kind of.” Since gender is actually a part of the meaning of this text (the author presumes that only a male could reign after him), we retain the gendered rendering “man.”

comes after me — Literally, “comes after.” The same consonants can be read, however, as “comes after *me*,” which is preferable since the same phrase occurs in 2:18.

that one will have dominion — The Masoretes point this as a noun with definite article (literally, “the king”). We point it as a participle with definite article (literally, “the one who rules”). Our use of “that” represents the definiteness of the article.

others — Literally, “they.” Since no antecedent is mentioned, the form of the verb is questionable. A lot of Hebrew MSS, as well as 𐤄^B and 𐤄, read a singular “he/one.” 𐤄^A and 𐤄, however, support 𐤄^L. We follow 𐤄^L, but represent the plurality with “others” instead of a nebulous “they.”

previously — “Previously” does not appear in 𐤄, 𐤄, or 𐤄. 𐤄 supports 𐤄^L.

2:13 **light to darkness** — “To” represents comparative *min*.

2:14 **has two eyes in his head** — Literally, “his two eyes [are] in his head.” An idiom that, fortunately, is easily replicated in English.

2:15 **to myself** — Literally, “with my mind/heart.”

the fool's fall will befall — Repointing it as construct (“the fall of the fool”). Note that, in order to recreate the purposed assonance between the words מִקְרָה and יִקְרַנִּי, we have rendered the noun “fall” and the verb “befall.” Literally, מִקְרָה means “fate.” But the way Qohelet uses it, it refers to death. Thus, our rendering “fall.”

there is nothing more — Or “no more advantage.” Most translations take וְיִתֵּר as an adverb meaning “very much/exceedingly” and reposition אֵל at the beginning of the question. There are several problems with this. First, a “then” already exists in the *waw* at the start of the question: וְלָמָּה (why *then*). Second, an adverbial emphasis like “very much/exceedingly” also exists already in the question through use of Qohelet's verb+pronoun idiom: חֲכַמְתִּי אֲנִי (I was *so* wise). Third, אֵל יִתֵּר seems to form its own phrase at the end of the question and was

accented as such by the Masoretes. If it is to be taken the way most translations do, the emphasis should be doubly rendered: “why then was I so incredibly wise earlier?” That, however, is just too much. We think, instead, that **אז** (then) is a corruption of **אין** (there is not/nothing). So *BHS*. We also think that **יותר** fulfills its characteristic meaning in Qohelet (6:8, 11; 7:11, 12:9, 12) as a synonym of **יתרון** meaning “advantage/excess/more.” So *NET* (then what did I *gain*), *NAB* (the *profit*), *NJB* (the *point*), and *LEB* and *NJPST* (what *advantage*). Although **אז** is present in **Ⲑ^A** and **Ⲛ**, it is not present in **Ⲑ^B**, **Ⲑ^S**, **ⲛ**, and **Ⲕ**. Perhaps this is evidence that many translators recognized, early on, that **אז** was a corruption.

to myself — Literally, “with my mind/heart.”

I said to myself that this too [was] vapor. — **Ⲑ** says: “I said to myself—because a fool, from his surplus, speaks—that this too [was] vapor.” The phrase “because a fool, from his surplus, speaks” appears to be a scribal addition meant to have Qohelet call himself a fool! Since we know that many Jews did not believe Qohelet to be canonical even by the late first century AD, could that be evidence of scribes who held that view?

2:16 **long ago** — Most translations render **לעולם** as “forever,” “the future,” or “lasting/enduring.” The same word, however, also refers to the distant past. The phrase **אין זכרון לראשנים** (lost is the memory of the former [times]) in 1:11 seems to be taken directly from this verse. Thus, we believe that **לראשנים** is the equivalent of **לעולם**. And just as 1:11 plays the former times/ past against the later times/future, so the same appears to be happening here.

what already [was]. — We move the *athnach* here (represented by the period) since “in what already [was]” belongs to the part of the verse describing the past. This whole phrase is compounded in a way that does not occur in *BH*, but often occurs in *MH*—more evidence of the extreme lateness of the composition. The *KJV*'s rendering (seeing that which now is) and those based upon it (*ESV*, *RSV*, *NRSV*) has no basis. Other translations ignore part of the compound expression. Thus, *HCSB* (since), *NAB* (for), *NASB* (inasmuch as), and *NET* (because) treat **בשכבר** as if it were only **בש-** (the equivalent of **באשר**) and ignore **כבר** (already/previous). *THF* is one of the only English translations that pays attention to the full meaning of the compound expression. Ginsburg remarks, quite disapprovingly, that “this is one of three instances . . . where our translators have shewn their inconsistency in the translation of **כְּכָר**.” Rotherham's rendering (seeing that, already, in the days to come) takes the cake for its absurdity.

Yet — This *waw* is adversative.

how can it be . . . ? — We believe that **אִךְ** functions here as both an exclamatory particle and an interrogative. By asking the very question, Qohelet is lamenting a reality that should be different. There is no need to choose between one or the other. Thus, we render it “how can it be” and end the sentence with an interrobang.

should die — The imperfect form reflects the modality of the exclamatory question.

2:17 **So I hated** — **Ⲕ** and **Ⲛ** have a pronoun of emphasis here as in v. 18: “So I intensely hated.” That is probably a case of harmonization. We stick with **אני**.

[the realm of] the living — Qohelet uses a more expressive form of Hebrew than simply “life.”

הַחַיִּים refers to the state or realm of the living—an expression parallel to “under the sun.”

terrible — Literally, “evil/bad/ugly.” So NAB. Other possible renderings include “awful” (NET) or “horrible.” Translations like “distressing” (HCSB), “grievous” (ESV, KJV, NASB, NRSV), or “sad” (YLT) are paraphrastic.

to me — In LBH, עַל often functions as a simple dative (JM §133f).

2:18 **[that came of] my exertion that I exerted** — See **his exertion that he exerts** in 1:3. For עָמַל as “exertion/[what comes of] exertion,” see section A3.

2:19 **Yet** — וַיֵּן treats the *waw* as if it were וְאִם (and if).

he will take ownership — See discussion in Special Language: Terms.

[that comes of] my exertion that I exerted — See **his exertion that he exerts** in 1:3. For עָמַל as “exertion/[what comes of] exertion,” see section A3.

I was wise — The rendering of KJV, NKJV, and Geneva (I have *shown myself* wise) has no basis.

2:20 **I turned my mind** — As the direct object marker makes explicit, “my mind” is the object of the verb.

over and over — The verb “I went/turned around” is followed by an independent pronoun in order to create emphasis. Thus, “I turned around and around.” Or more colloquially, “over and over.”

till — Temporal *lamed*.

despairing — An infinitive construct of יָאֵשׁ (to give up hope).

the exertion that I exerted — Many Hebrew MSS expand this with “and [for] which I was wise” under the influence of v. 19. So 𐤔. The shorter version is more likely to be original. Thus, we stick with 𐤍^L. See **his exertion that he exerts** in 1:3. For עָמַל as “exertion/[what comes of] exertion,” see section A3.

2:21 **there is one** — Literally, “there is a man.” Undoubtedly, this statement reflects back on Qohelet. It does so not because Qohelet means to reference himself with it, but because, as Seow notes (AB), this expression was used “to introduce comments on the general human condition.”

wisely, and shrewdly, and prosperously — Literally “with wisdom and with knowledge and with prosperity.” All three nouns are adverbial accusatives. *kišrôn* comes from כִּשְׂרָן (to prosper/profit/have success). So Akkadian *kuštru*, meaning “success/profit” (CAD). In Ugaritic (*ktr*), it refers to “skill” (DUL), which is why many translations prefer that rendering here (and in 4:4). Note, however, that the exact same word occurs in 5:10, yet virtually all translations that render it “skill” in this verse in 4:4, render it “achievement/advantage/profit/gain” in 5:10. The inconsistency is perplexing. In all three cases, the same word is being used to refer to the same thing—what comes from one’s labor, not one’s skill or level of proficiency.

he must give him — We read the pronominal suffix on נָתַן as a dative (give *him*). See JM §125ba. So 𐤍^B, 𐤍^K, and 𐤍. It could, however, function as an accusative, which is then expanded or explained (give *it*—his portion). So 𐤍^A and 𐤔.

vile — Literally, “great,” but in a negative sense.

- 2:22 **whatever exists** — Or “whatever is there” (מה־הוּהוּ). We interpret מה as an indefinite pronoun (whatever), not as an interrogative. So also, we believe that the rendering “what is there for a person in exchange for all his exertion?”, which is how most translations handle the Hebrew here, makes no sense because Qohelet doesn't ask anywhere else “what is there?” in exchange for one's exertion. Qohelet knows very well that there is something that one can get in exchange for one's exertion. The point is to highlight the philosophical incongruity that lies in the fact that one who doesn't exert himself gets to reap the results of the one who did. If Qohelet were asking the question translators think he is, he would say something like “what benefit is there/ what good is it?” or “what advantage?,” not “what is there?”
- another's** — The *lamed* is one of possession. It does not mean “for.”
- despite** — Or “in spite of.” A circumstantial use of *bet*.
- his exertion . . . that he exerted** — See **his exertion that he exerts** in 1:3. For עֲמַל as “exertion/[what comes of] exertion,” see section A3.
- his will** — Literally, “his mind/heart.” Used here as a metonym for the will/intention.
- 2:23 **even though** — Concessive כִּי. This verse supplements the previous one.
- throughout his life** — Literally, “all his days.”
- was restless** — Literally, “did not lay down/sleep.”
- it [is] vapor** — Literally, “vapor [is] it.” Normally, when the Hebrew fronts the predicate for emphasis, we do the same. Since, however, the translation is already broken up by use of a dash, we have opted not to confuse the English too much.
- 2:24 Gordis - add prep mem before “that one eats”?
- [so] good as** — We interpret the preposition as a *bet essentiae*. In other words, “the best that a human being can be is one who...” Based on 6:12 and 8:15, one would expect a *lamed* (for). ט^B, ט^A, and ש read *lamed*, but that may only be evidence of harmonization.
- a human [other than]** — Literally, “a human/person who eats” (אָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל). So ש. Many prefer to read “a human/person *than* one who eats” (אָדָם מִשֵּׂיֹּאכַל) in consonance with the same thought elsewhere (3:12, 22; 8:15). A similar grammatical construction occurs in 3:22 (מֵאֲשֶׁר). The comparative *mem* would have been dropped due to haplography. This might have the support of ש and ט, which have the missing *mem*. It is equally likely, however, that the prefixed -שֶׁ is doing double duty: that it not only stands in for כִּי (that), but it stands in for the longer expression כִּי אִם (except/other than). In either case, the meaning is the same.
- see for oneself** — Literally, “makes oneself see.” However, the verb really means “to experience.” See 2:1. In context, it means “to experience that which is good,” which is why so many translations render it “enjoy” (to render it “enjoy good” like the KJV or NKJV is redundant). The use of “good” should be retained in translations instead of collapsed down into the verb “enjoy” because it serves a specific and important function. It takes up the same language as the first verse of the chapter in order to signal an end to this part of the soliloquy. All that is left, then, is to state how “vaporous” and “wind-corralling” such a thing is (end of v. 26) and Qohelet can move on to the next topic. Instead, however, we are suddenly treated to a short description about morality and its consequences, which destroys the perfect symmetry

created by the language in the first half of v. 24. Such a part was obviously added later. **𐤔**^s, **𐤔**^B, and **S** harmonize the whole string of verbs: “and that one drinks and that one experiences...” Curiously, Alter takes this word from **רָוָה** (to drink one's fill). Yet the word here is **הִרְאָה**, not **הִרְוָה**. Strangely for Qohelet, the last two verbs here are *waw*-consecutives. This means that there isn't any “and” (the *waw* is not a conjunction).

2:25 **should hoard** — Typically, the verb **חָוַשׁ** means “to hurry” (so KJV), but that doesn't make any sense here. **𐤔**, **𐤕**, and **S** obviously felt how wrong that was and read, instead, “should drink” (**יִשְׁתֶּה**). So NAB, NET, LEB, and NJB. But that is an obvious harmonization with v. 24. **α** and **σ** read **יָחֹשׁ** (a by-form of **יָחַס**) meaning “to spare.” But that doesn't work any better than “to hurry.” **𐤔** ignores the Hebrew and goes for what it thinks makes sense of the context (to enjoy). Many translations follow the Vulgate even though that rendering is baseless (HCSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NKJV, NRSV, NJPST, etc). There are better options. (1) The use of the verb **חָוַשׁ** in Job 20:2 and in Rabbinic Literature means “to suffer/be troubled/be pained.” This is a strong possibility since it is a verified meaning in both biblical and post-biblical Hebrew. (2) It could be a cognate of Old Babylonian *ḥašū*, meaning “to worry” (CAD). So Fox's rendering “fret.” Or (3) it could be a cognate of Arabic *ḥawwiṣ*, meaning “to gather/save/collect (money)” (Spiro). The third makes the most sense in terms of context since, in the next verse, it talks about the sinner “gathering” and “collecting” and Qohelet has just spent a lot of time boasting about his money and riches that he “accumulated.” His own title is “gatherer/collector/assembler.” Therefore, we render this verb “hoard.” Seow (AB) also depends on Arabic, but renders it “glean.”

save — Apart from its appearance right here, the expression **חֲוִץ מִן** (other than/except) only occurs in Rabbinic Literature (see, for instance, *b. Berakot* 33b and *Niddah* 16b). This is plain and certain evidence that this portion was added much later than the rest of the text.

save I — Translation literal. Many, however, believe the suffix was originally a *waw* (him). This is supported by **𐤔** and **S**. If true, the current text arose through an interchange of *waw* and *yod*. **𐤔** and **𐤕** support **𐤓**^L.

2:26 **in his sight** — Literally, “to his face/in his Presence/before him.” See also later in the verse.

sinner — When the verb **חָטָא** is used with reference to the Israelite deity, it almost always means “to sin.” When it is used in reference to people, it almost always means “to offend” or “to err.” Qohelet uses the verb in the latter manner throughout his text. In a few places, however, which seem to be editorial insertions (here as well as 8:12-13), the verb is used for its moral semantic nuance.

2:24b-26by **(This too I saw clearly: . . . in the sight of The One God.)** — The parenthetical portion was probably inserted at the end of the passage. It interrupts the text to say that Elohim rewards those who are good and punishes those who sin—a tidy moral philosophy that is alien to Qohelet (see, for instance, 9:2). Even the language is foreign. The phrase “this too I saw” occurs nowhere else. Instead of “from the hand of The One God,” Qohelet would have said “[is] The One God's grant” (3:17 and 11:9). So also, we have evidence of the editorial practice called *Wiederaufnahme* (repetitive resumption) in v. 24 (**גַּם־זֶה**, “this too”) and v. 26 (**גַּם־זֶה**,

“this too”). When a scribe wanted to comment on a text or insert something into it without changing the text itself, s/he would use a repetition of the same words at the beginning and end of the insertion to bracket the text and signal the expansion.

- 3:1 **Appointed for** — The *lamed* that begins this verse is one of preparation/disposition (see HALOT). So, for instance, Isa 2:12 has the phrase **יום ליהודה**, which means “a day *prepared/appointed by YHWH*” and Mic 3:1 has the phrase **הלווא לכם**, which means “Is it beyond your *ability*?”
- all** — As is clear from this word's parallelism with **חפץ**, which is an attribute of people, not of things, and from the wider context, which uses verbs that are only applicable to people, **כל** refers to all human beings or “everyone,” not “everything.” So **כל גבר** (every person).
- moment** — **זמן** means “a predetermined/fixed/appointed time.” All other words from Aramaic **זמן** in the HB come from texts written during the Persian period (Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, and parts of Daniel) or Hellenistic period (Ben Sira and parts of Daniel). More evidence that Qohelet is one of the last biblical texts ever written. The cognate in Akkadian, *simanu*, can refer to seasons of the year, phases of human life, astrological cycles, sacred times, or appropriate moments (CAD).
- act** — From **חפץ** (to be pleased/to desire). In BH, the noun means “pleasure/desire/delight.” In post-biblical Hebrew, like that at Qumran (The Community Rule and Damascus Document) or Ben Sira, it refers to one's “work/assignment/task.” That definition arose through the influence of Aramaic. **ע** follows the late meaning with **πραγμα** (act/matter/affair), as do most modern translations. Parallelism with the word “deed/work” in 3:17 shows that this is the correct semantic nuance. Many translations revert to a paraphrase here: KJV and NKJV (purpose), Rotherham and Leeser (pursuit), NASB (event), NJB (occupation), and NJPST (experience).
- 3:2-8 The Masoretic Text is often formatted differently in recognition of a particularly poetic pericope. The medieval scribes would split the text so that the first half of a parallel line was on one side of the page and the second half was on the other with a gap between. This is one such section. If we were to mimic the scribal lineation, our translation would look like this:
- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A time to procreate | and a time to pass on. |
| A time to plant | and a time to uproot the implant. |
| A time to kill | and a time to cure. |
| A time to break | and a time to build. |
- 3:2 **to procreate** — This verb is Qal (not Niphal or Hophal) and active (not passive). Thus, it does not mean “be born” (contrary to KJV, ESV, NET, NJPST, and NRSV), but “to give birth/bear/beget/bring forth life” (so HCSB, NASB, NJB, LEB, and YLT). This is supported by **ע**'s *active* infinitive and **ע**. It is also supported by the word choice itself since the passive form was chosen for 7:2, but not for this verse (assuming that the words in the text were chosen over others on purpose). So also, virtually the same expression appears in Job 39:1 (**עת לדת**, “a time of birthing”) where it is parallel to the expression **חלל** (writhing in labor), an expression that can be said of the one giving birth, but not the one being born. Three

unsupported assumptions are required to get the rendering “be born”: 1) that the same person is being born and dying, 2) this verb must be an antonym of the next one when many of the verbs in the following verses are not, and 3) that the verb “to die” can’t have an active sense.

pass on — Or “die.” Since this whole section (through v. 8) contains highly formulaic rhythms, root-plays, alliteration, and assonance, we have tried to convey this in our English rendering. In many cases, that takes the form of parallel verbs and nouns having the same initial sound.

implant — The passive participle **נטוע** functions as a verbal noun. The noun “implant” has the exact same passive connotation as the verbose expression “what is/has been planted.” NJPST and YLT come close to this with their rendering “the planted.”

3:3 **cure** — Or “heal.”

break . . . build — Or “a time to ruin and a time to rear.”

3:4 **time of** — There is no *lamed* here (meaning “to do X”). Instead, the infinitive is in construct (meaning “a time *of* X”). See also the next line, the next verse, and v. 8.

grieving — Over someone who has died.

gamboling — The verb **רקד** means “to dance/leap/skip.” It is used here as an expression of joy and for its assonance with **ספור**. Thus, we render it “gamboling” to bring out that word-play.

3:5 **elude** — Literally, “draw back from.”

3:6 **go after** — Literally, “seek/search.”

give up — The Piel of **אבד** has two different semantic nuances: 1) “to destroy” and 2) “to lose/give up as lost.” The second meaning is often used in reference to searching for lost sheep (see, for instance, Ezek 34:4 and Psa 119:176).

3:7 **mend** — Or “sew.”

3:8 **conflict** — Or “battle/war.”

concord — Or “peace.”

3:9 **the worker’s [lasting] benefit** — Literally, “the [lasting] benefit of the worker.”

3:10 **task** — **ענין** is an Aramaic loanword, which appears several times in **א**. The root (**ענה**) means “to be busy/preoccupied.” This word occurs often in Qohelet and always means “task/business/ undertaking.” It does not mean “travail” (Geneva, Coverdale, Bishop’s Bible, and KJV). Nor does it mean “burden” (NET). Those words are based on an alternate root meaning “to afflict/humble/humiliate/violate.”

to be tasked — The verb **ענה** means “to be busy/preoccupied.” It does not mean “to exercise” (KJV). Geneva’s rendering (to humble) is based on a confusion of this root with another root meaning “to afflict/humble/humiliate/violate.” See previous note. Such confusion is quite possible since a fragment of Qohelet in the Cairo Genizah was vocalized in that way.

3:11 **one** — Traditionally, the subject (he) is taken to mean “Elohim” because the previous verse talks about Elohim giving humanity their task. As the context makes clear, however, the “he” that this is talking about is “the worker”—the one who has the “task” to do—and the things that the subject “does” are outlined in vv. 2-8: giving birth, dying, lamenting, laughing, etc.

[has] its proper time — Literally, “[is] proper in its time”—meaning, in the time appointed for it. **יפה** means both “beautiful/lovely” and “fitting/proper.”

yet — This **וְ** is adversative (yet/but). So NET and NJB. Contrary to virtually all English translations, it does not mean “also” as if to say something more about Elohim.

the one — Literally, “the man” (**הָאִישׁ**). But it really refers to anyone regardless of gender.

to mind — Literally, “their mind” (**לָבָם**). However, one Hebrew text says “his mind” and that reading is supported by **5**^A. Both provide ancient support for our interpretation. The *mem* on the end of the word could be a case of accidental duplication resulting from dittography with the next word (**מִבְּלִי**). This is suggested by BHS. It is also possible that “their” is collective and that the subject is also collective (whoever), in which case, there is no issue. However one understands the suffix, it does not conflict with the subject we have identified or the interpretation we have given the phrase.

the past — In BH, **הָעוֹלָם** (or **הָעוֹלָם** *plene*) can mean (1) “the future/ages to come,” (2) “the past/days of yore/time immemorial,” or (3) “the span/passage of time” generally. The rendering “eternity” (HCSB, ESV, NASB, RSV, etc) or “timeless” (NAB) misses the point: this word refers to a period of time as experienced on earth—not something beyond time, out of time, or without time. And because it is so obvious, it is embarrassing that Barton (ICC) had to point it out: “To say that ‘God has put eternity in their heart, . . .’ makes no sense.” In MH, the meaning changed to “the world” or “universe” (so KJV and WEB). Since, however, that meaning is later than the texts in the HB, it must be rejected. YLT’s “knowledge” and Rotherham’s “intelligence” are loose paraphrases based on Arabic. NET (ignorance) and Moffatt (mystery) base this word on the root **עָלַם** (to be hidden/secret/obscure). So Rashi. Since the verb **עָלַם** is used in 12:14 to refer to hidden/secret things, that is a possible rendering. However, the traditional Jewish understanding preserved by the Masoretes and supported by **5** understands it to mean **עוֹלָם**. Thus, so do we. #3 is also a possibility. It better represents the idea of a stretch or span of time than “eternity.” So NRSV (a sense of past and future) and NJB (the passage of time). However, #2 is probably the best interpretation since Qohelet already used the word **עוֹלָם** to mean “the past/long ago” (1:11 and 2:16). So LEB and Krüger (Hermeneia).

utterly lacks — This rendering mimics the emphatic nature of the double negative “without” (**מִבְּלִי**) and “not” (**לֹא**).

utterly lacks [anything] with which he might discover — Literally, “is without that which (**מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר**) he will not find out (**לֹא-יִמְצָא**),” which is extremely awkward in English. The phrase “is without that which” means “lacks anything” or “is missing whatever.” Many translations, having extreme difficulty with the phrase **מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר**, follow **5** (like **4**, **5**, and **6**) in rendering this as a phrase of result (so that). So ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, etc. However, that is an extreme corruption of the sense that **מִבְּלִי** has everywhere else in the HB (without/except/unless/because not).

end — There are several different Hebrew words for “end.” This one (**סוֹף**) is common in post-biblical Hebrew, but rare in biblical texts other than those composed in the post-exilic period (Chronicles and Joel) or in Biblical Aramaic of the Persian and/or Hellenistic periods

(Daniel). More evidence of the text's late nature.

3:12 **for [such] acts** — Literally, “for them” (בם). The preposition is a *bet* of exchange (in exchange for)—the same kind of *bet* that occurs in v. 9. The antecedent for “them” is “everything” that one does—or the “acts” first mentioned in v. 1 and listed in vv. 2-8. It should not be altered to “for man/men/people” (באדם) as in the KJV, NET, or NJB.

3:13 **So also** — Literally, “and also [that]...”

drink, [and] see — As in 2:24, the last two verbs here are *waw*-consecutives, which means that there isn't any “and”—the *waw* does not function as a conjunction. To better follow the rules of English, however, we add one.

everyone should eat, drink, [and] see the good from all one's exertion. — This is very similar to 2:24 (one should eat, drink, [and] see for oneself the good from one's exertion). The differences are:

(1) This verse says “every one” instead of just “one.”

(2) This verse has a shorter version of 2:24's “see for oneself.”

(3) The Hiphil of ראה appears in 2:24, whereas this is the Qal.

(4) This verse includes another “all” with “one's exertion,” which is not the case in 2:24.

3:14 **whatever** — Literally, “all that.”

it will, without doubt, . . . happen — The construction הוּא יִהְיֶה is emphatic. The statement “it will happen” is simply יִהְיֶה. We represent the emphatic nature of the added pronoun with “without doubt.” One might also say “certainly” or “truly.”

always — לעולם functions as an adverb. As Fox says, it “does not indicate duration, as if Qohelet were asserting the eternality of everything God creates or makes happen; that is a notion both untrue and irrelevant.” Instead, the point is to emphasize that what happens due to the work of The One God is not something we can stop, restart, or cause to turn out differently. This leads directly to the proverb that follows.

To — In LBH, ל often functions as a simple dative (JM §133f).

one cannot add — As Seow (AB) notes, the construction אֵין + *lamed* + infinitive construct occurs almost entirely in LBH texts (Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Esther) and post-biblical texts like Sira and those at Qumran. More evidence of its late nature. The construction means “one cannot.” The one instance of this construction in earlier literature (1 Sam 9:7) has a different purpose: “there is nothing to X”). The same construction occurs in the next line.

Yes — Common in Hebrew poetry is the use of the so-called “emphatic *waw*,” meaning “yes!” or “indeed!” See also the next parenthetical (v. 15).

so — Here, the relative expresses purpose.

(Yes, The One God . . . reverent in his sight.) — This part was secondarily added as a scribal comment. It interrupts the flow of thought (which is continued in the first half of v. 15) by giving theological purpose to Qohelet's learned insight.

3:15 **Whatever is** — In the HB, the construction מִה שֵׁ (meaning “whatever”) is limited to Qohelet. It is, however, a common expression in MH (see Segal's *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*, p. 209, for examples), which is evidence of its very late date of composition. In 1:9, the perfect

signifies the past. Here, however, it signifies the present (or complete aspect “whatever happens”).

it already [was] — 1:9 says “it will be,” pointing to the future. This verse, however, uses the word כָּבַר (already/long ago) to refer to the past. In other words, the direction of time is reversed between 1:9 and 3:15. KJV's “is now” butchers the Hebrew (probably why the NKJV says “has already been” instead).

[is] to be — This verb is an infinitive. Literally, “to be/become/happen/occur/exist.” The *lamed* plus infinitive construct can, however, take a future tense, which is what it has here as shown by contrast with the next phrase, which is about the past (made evident by the use of “already”). Fortunately, to say “is to be,” which is the literal rendering of the Hebrew, signifies future time in English as well.

Yet — Whereas the *waw* in the previous parenthetical was emphatic, this is adversative.

the fugitive — ׀ and S say “the persecuted [one]” (so NJB and NJPST). T seems to be interpreting it similarly. V takes it as “what is past” or “has passed away” (so HCSB, KJV, NASB, NET, NRSV). G is ambiguous. It could mean what is “followed/pursued,” what is “pressed/driven out,” or what is “persecuted” (so ESV, NAB, RSV). The Hebrew is a Niphal participle from רָדַף (to pursue/chase/go after). Literally, “what is pursued/chased” or “he who is pursued/chased.” So SET. In common English idiom, this refers to a fugitive. Translators and commentators have been thrown for a loop by this expression because it has nothing to do with what immediately follows. They fail to realize that this is another scribal parenthetical giving theological reflection. The author seems to have been concerned about the idea that things are as they have been. When applying that to the morals and ethics of human beings, which the parenthetical scribe likes to do, this is problematic. It almost seems to suggest that YHWH causes human beings to do what they do or that there is nothing one can do about those who do not follow YHWH. The parenthetical scribe notes that YHWH not only acts so that people will be reverent of him, but he is also active in seeking/searching for those who do not follow him.

3:16 **[to] the place** — Even though G takes this next phrase as the accusative object of the previous verb (I saw the place), the extremely strong disjunctive accent (*athnach*) means that ancient Jewish tradition read a break here, with “place” being the start of a new clause. The presence of the adverbial “to there” supports our rendering of the phrase as dative (to).

there the wicked one [goes] — Literally, “to there the wickedness.” The consonants (הַרְשָׁע) can also be read “the wicked [one],” which we think makes more sense. So G and T. V and S, however, support מִלֵּל. We represent the locative particle (to/toward) with “goes.”

and [to] the place — Even though G takes this next phrase as the accusative object of the previous verb (I saw the place), the extremely strong disjunctive accent (*athnach*) means that ancient Jewish tradition read a break here, with “place” being the start of a new clause. The presence of the adverbial “to there” supports our rendering of the phrase as dative (to).

righteousness — G^B and G^A say “the righteous [one]” (G^A says “the righteous [ones]”). All are probably a case of harmonization. The parallelism with “justice” requires “righteousness,” not “righteous one(s).”

there the wicked one [goes] — Literally, “to there the wickedness.” The consonants (הרשע) can also be read “the wicked [one],” which we think makes more sense. So 𐤅 and 𐤔. 𐤕 and 𐤓, however, support 𐤍^L. We represent the locative particle (to/toward) with “goes.”

3:17 **I said firmly** — 𐤅^B and 𐤓 have a *waw*-conjunctive: 𐤍אמרתִי (So/Then I said). See 2:15 and 9:16. It is possible that the *waw* is original, but the two phrases at the start of vv. 17 and 18 were harmonized. Since, however, the evidence shows this verse to be a later addition, which reused the phrase at the start of v. 18, whatever the phrase is at the start of v. 18 is most likely to represent the original. Therefore, we stick with 𐤍^L.

to myself — The *bet* functions in the same manner as in 2:1.

a time is appointed for every act — Language from 3:1 is reused here. The *lamed* is one of preparation/disposition, meaning “appointed for.” The word 𐤇פץ refers, in post-biblical Hebrew, to one's “work/assignment/task,” as the parallelism with “deed/work” makes evident. More evidence of Qohelet's late date of composition.

for — In LBH, 𐤅 often functions as a simple dative (JM §133f). In 3:1, a *lamed* is used instead. This inconsistency in grammar use is evidence of a scribal addition.

(I said . . . there.) — “There” means “on earth/under the sun.” The obvious point being that the judgment, which results in punishment for the wicked and vindication for the righteous, will take place outside of present worldly time. This is so out-of-place that many translations attempt to hide or reinterpret the particle. 𐤔 and 𐤓 support 𐤍^L. 𐤅 shifts it to the start of the next verse (though 𐤅^B lacks it). What they fail to realize is that the parenthetical scribe has struck again—injecting theological statements into the text. Here, we find that Qohelet's description of injustice being prevalent in the places where justice and rightness are supposed to be upheld—in the courts and systems of governance—is shifted suddenly to a claim of ultimate judgment. Yet Qohelet admits to knowing nothing about such things. Whereas all the previous acts were not equated in any way with good or evil, they are in this verse. Notice the use of *Wiederaufnahme* (repetitive resumption) between v. 17 (אמרתִי אני בלבי, “I said firmly to myself”) and v. 18 (אמרתִי אני בלבי, “I said firmly to myself”). When a scribe wanted to comment on a text or insert something into it without changing the text, s/he would use a repetition of the same words at the beginning and end of the insertion to bracket the text and signal the expansion.

3:18 **to myself** — Literally, “to my mind/heart.” The prepositional *bet* functions in the same manner as in 2:1.

for the sake of — This particular expression (על-דברת) is late. In BH, it only occurs in Qohelet and Ps 110. The classical form is על-דבר. It means “for the sake of/on account of/with respect to.” 𐤅 and 𐤓 miss the idiom and render דברת as the feminine noun “speech/matter/thing/affair.” So Leeser (concerning the speaking). Some English translations miss the idiom as well: KJV (concerning the estate), NKJV (concerning the condition), YLT (concerning the matter), and WEB (concerning the state).

clarifies — We take this from בִּרְרִי in MH, meaning “to clarify/prove/ascertain” or “single out/sift/select” (Jastrow). The first meaning is ideal for the original text (v. 16) and works well

in parallel with the verb “to see.” So our rendering, NET (show), Leeser (make it clear), KJV (manifest), and ASV (prove). The second meaning fits well with the parenthetical text (v. 17). So LEB and NJPST. **𐤔** renders it “to distinguish/discern,” which also follows the second. The numerous translations that say “test” are paraphrastic. The few that render it “to purify/cleanse/ purge” (YLT and Geneva) miss the point.

reveals — According to the Masoretic accentuation, this is the Qal (sees). But that doesn't make much sense. A new subject, *which is not there*, would have to be inserted in order for it make sense. Many translations go that direction. Since, however, the same word can be vocalized as a Hiphil (to show/reveal/make see), and this is supported by **𐤔**, **𐤕**, and **𐤖**, we consider that the most likely meaning. So NAB, NET, NJB, NRSV, and LEB. The loss of the Hiphil's *heh* through syncope can be seen in Qoh 5:5.

that — The prefixed -**𐤖** is standing in for the complimentizer **כי**.

animals — Literally, “animal,” but functioning as a collective. There is no “as/but/like” in the text here (contrary to HCSB, ESV, NASB, NRSV, NKJV, etc). Since the metaphor is explained by the next phrase, no addition of “as/but/like” is necessary.

They [are] like them — The phrase **המה להם** is tricky. Some think **המה** should be ignored because it resulted from dittography with **בהמה**. That is a possibility, but we have chosen to stick with the text as it is. We also take the *lamed* as one of specification (as/like). So Ezek 3:3: **למתוק** (as sweet). This phrase exists to clarify what the previous phrase meant. **𐤔** appears to have had **והם** instead of **המה** in its *Vorlage*, which is perplexing.

3:19 **[in] that** — Based on the previous phrase, we understand this **כי** as introducing a subordinate clause.

human offspring [have] a fate — The Masoretic pointing puts “fate” in the absolute. So **𐤔**. The text reads literally, “the fate, human offspring.” One may take them as appositional (human offspring fate) or, more idiomatically, “the fate [that] human offspring [have].” This is a highly likely rendering since the *lamed* of possession in **להם** indicates the same meaning. One does not need to repoint the same consonants as a construct “the fate of” (as in **𐤔** and **𐤕**). Renderings like KJV (that which befallerth X befallerth Y) and ESV (what happens to X happens to Y) are paraphrases.

the animal [has] a fate — The Masoretic pointing puts “fate” in the absolute. The text reads literally, “the fate, the animal.” One may take them as appositional (the animal fate) or, more idiomatically, “the fate [that] the animals [has].” This is a highly likely rendering since the *lamed* of possession in **להם** indicates the same meaning. One does not need to repoint the same consonants as a construct “the fate of” (as in **𐤔**, **𐤕**, **𐤔**, and **𐤖**).

yet — Some Hebrew MSS lack this adversative *waw*. So **𐤔**. If that were correct, the translation would be: “human offspring [have] a fate and the animal [has] a fate—the same fate belongs to them.”

the same — Literally, “one/a single.”

The death of one [is] like the death of the other — Literally, “As [is] the death of this, so [is] the death of that.”

the same — Literally, “one/a single.”

life force — Or, to link this closer with Qohelet's use of רוּחַ in 1:6, one could render it “anima” (from Latin, meaning both “wind” and “vital force”). Literally, “spirit/breath.” Here, as in v. 21, it seems stands for the energy or impulse that animates creatures—both human and animal—with life. As Schoors (HCOT) states, “There is no indication that for Qoheleth the spirit is an immortal soul. On the contrary, these verses suggest that it is rather an impersonal principle of life.”

Yes — We take this *waw* as emphatic.

surplus — This is the only time that מוֹתָר appears in Qohelet. Instead, יִתְרוֹן and יֵתֵר are used (it is synonymous with them). It may be for that reason that שׁ, ס', and ס' rendered it as though the text was מִהּ יֵתֵר (what abundance...?).

3:20 **Everyone** — Since the participle is singular, הַכֹּל must be taken collectively as a whole (all/everyone) instead of as a dual (both)—contrary to NET, NJPST, LEB, and NAB.

the same — Literally, “one/a single.”

3:21 **Who** — שׁ, ס', and numerous MSS have a *waw* here (and who...?). Since the DSS show מִי^L to be highly reliable, we stick with מִי^L.

life force — Or, to link this closer with Qohelet's use of רוּחַ in 1:6, one could render it “anima” (from Latin, meaning both “wind” and “vital force”). Literally, “spirit/breath.” Here, as in v. 19, it seems stands for the energy or impulse that animates creatures—both human and animal—with life.

whether — There are two ways to read the *heh* on this and the following participle: 1) as an interrogative (*whether* it goes up...*whether* it goes down)—so שׁ, ס', ט, and וּ—or 2) as an article pronoun (*that* goes up...*that* goes down), which is how the Masoretes punctuated it. Since the evidence of the versions is so overwhelming, we follow them. It is quite possible that the *qamets* under the *heh* does stand for an interrogative, as can be seen in some texts (especially before gutturals). If we follow מִי^L's accentuation, we are left with the idea that there is a place above and below the earth to which people go after death, which flies in the face of everything Qohelet says elsewhere.

3:22 **because that** — Literally, “because it.”

to see for himself — Literally, “to see.” However, the verb here really means “to experience.” The English idiom is “see for oneself.” See 2:1.

4:1 **I intently shifted [my] focus** — Hendiadys. Literally, “I turned back intently and saw/perceived.” The second verb is a rare occurrence of *waw*-consecutive. Many translations take the use of שׁוּב with another finite verb as indicating repeated action or a return to the same subject (thus “again”). So HCSB, NASB, NET, NRSV, etc. Even though שׁוּב does function this way when combined with other verbs, there is no previous point where the oppressed where either perceived or discussed. It makes no sense, therefore, to take the verb in this way. Rather, the phrase וּשְׁבַתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה functions in the same manner as the phrase וּפְנִיתִי אֲנִי לִרְאוֹת in 2:12. Both refer to turning and seeing as indicative of a new focus of attention.

the oppressed — This passive participle refers to those who are oppressed. Even though numerous translations render it as the abstract word “oppression(s),” they then render the exact same word, only a few phrases later, as the concrete word “the oppressed.” This inconsistent rendering goes back to **𐤅** and **𐤆**, which are followed by **𐤇**. Unlike the verb **נָחַם**, which functions as an *antanclasis* (see below), this word has the exact same meaning in both instances. So **𐤅**. So Rashi, Leiser, etc.

subjected [to labor] — Literally, “who are worked.” Most English translations blur the distinction between the present Niphal participle (indicating that someone is being acted upon) and a Qal perfect or Qal participle (indicating that an action is done or is being done). Translations are forced to interpret the Hebrew this way by rendering the subject as “oppression(s)” instead of “the oppressed” (see above). The Niphal indicates a quality of the oppressed—that they are “worked/busied/subjected to labor.” It carries on the passive sense of their description as “those who are oppressed.”

saw — Although **הִנֵּה** usually functions as a presentative or demonstrative particle (“look!” or “here is,” respectfully), it also functions almost like a verb to introduce a new perception—especially following verbs or nouns related to seeing or looking (IBHS §40.2.1b).

tears — A collective singular.

yet — Adversative *waw*. See also the last line of the verse.

comforter . . . avenger — Even though this verse uses the same verb twice (**נָחַם**), it is a well-known example of *antanclasis* (the reuse of the same word with different meaning). See, for instance, G. R. Driver's “Problems and Solutions” (VT), Immanuel Casanowicz's “Paronomasia in the Old Testament” (JBL), and Jack Sasson's “Wordplay in the Old Testament” (IDBSup). **נָחַם** means both “to comfort” (in the Qal) and “to take revenge” (in the Hithpael). The second occurrence is a Hithpael participle with assimilated *tav* (and thus should be vocalized *minnahēm*). **S** seems to have understood that there was a word-play involved, which is why it renders the first “comforter” and the second “helper.” So NEB (to *comfort* them...to *avenge* them). NET interprets it as a different poetic device—a “metonymy of effect”—yet comes to a similar conclusion (*comforting* them...*delivers* them).

4:2 This verse makes use of poetic assonance, which we replicate in English through repetition of “dead” and “living.”

esteemed — This infinitive absolute is used as a finite verb—a usage not uncommon in either BH or other Canaanite languages (like Phoenician).

still — The word **עַד־נָה** (still/yet) is an early version of what would later, in MH, be **עַד־יֵין** or **אֶד־יֵין** (Jastrow)—a combination of **נָה** + **עַד**.

4:3 **those two** — Literally, “the two of them.”

[I esteemed] — The next line begins with a definite direct object, which means that it continues the sense of a previous verb. That must be **שָׁכַח** at the start of v. 2. As is common in Semitic poetry, the second occurrence of a verb that would be parallel with the first is elided. So ASV (better than them both *did I esteem*). **S**, however, has ignored the definite direct object and completely changed the clause from accusative, which is required by the direct object marker, to nominative (far better than the these two *is* one who). That aberration is followed by

virtually all English translations. **ו** recognized that the next lines of the verse were governed by a verb, but, perplexingly, introduced a completely new verb for the direct object marker (to judge) instead of using the one that was already there.

experienced — Literally, “seen.” However, the verb here really means “to experience.” See 2:1.

acts — A collective singular. **ט**^B is either reading a MS that said “every act” or it is trying to make sense of the singular.

that have — Literally, “is.” The subject is a collective singular.

4:4 **prosperity** — *kišrôn* comes from **כשר**√ (to prosper/profit/have success). So Akkadian *kušru*, meaning “success/profit” (CAD). See 2:21.

that — **כי** is a complimentizer of the verb **ראה** (I saw...*that*).

such — Literally, “it.” The pronoun is feminine. The only feminine antecedent is “the labor.”

[is the result of] — Literally, “[is of].”

one's envy — Literally, “the jealousy of a man.” The KJV (a man is envied) is paraphrastic. The NET (competition) and NASB (rivalry) are also paraphrastic.

another — Literally, “his neighbor.”

4:5 **himself** — Metonymy. Literally, “his flesh/body.” **ו** adds at the end “saying,” which turns the next verse, which is clearly the gatherer's wisdom, into the thought of the fool instead!

4:6 **palmful** — Different words are used in vv. 5 and 6 to describe the hand. Here, it is **כף** (palm).

[at] rest — The noun **נחת** (rest/repose) functions as an accusative of specification, which is commonly used in phrases of comparison (IBHS §10.2.2e). Thus something like “[at] rest” or “[with] rest” is preferable. So **ו** and **ט**. **ט**'s reading of the text as a construct (a handful *of* rest) is ludicrous. Rest is not measured by “handfuls” and the point is not that one gets “a little bit” of it. Rather, the point is being at rest with a small portion is better than working yourself hard for a little bit more. The rendering of NASB (of rest), ESV (of quietness), NJB (of repose), and NJPST (of gratification) must be rejected.

two fistfuls — Different words are used in vv. 5 and 6 to describe the hand. Here, it is **חפץ** (fist) in the dual form. As Seow indicates (AB), the Aramaic version of this word functioned during the Persian period to indicate the smallest portion of a worker's ration—more evidence of Qohelet's late composition.

[through] exertion — The noun **עמל** (exertion) functions as an accusative of specification, which is commonly used in phrases of comparison (IBHS §10.2.2e). Thus something like “[through] exertion” or “[with] exertion” are preferable. To read it with **ט** as a construct (two fistfuls *of* exertion) is ludicrous. Exertion is not measured by “fistfuls” and the point is not that one gets “a bit more” of it. Rather, the point is working yourself hard for a little more is not as good as having a bit less and being at rest. The rendering of NASB (of labor), ESV and NET (of toil), NJB (of achievements), and NJPST (of trouble) must be rejected. For **עמל** as “exertion/[what comes of] exertion,” see section A3.

{and a corraling of wind!} — This line is probably an instance of dittography—an accidental duplication of the phrase that ended v. 4. However, it also makes sense as part of Qohelet's commentary on the proverb in v. 5. Therefore we have left the phrase, but surrounded it with curly brackets.

- 4:7 **I intently shifted [my] focus** — Hendiadys. Literally, “I turned back intently and saw/perceived.” The second verb is a rare occurrence of *waw*-consecutive. Many translations take the use of **שוב** with another finite verb as indicating repeated action or a return to the same subject (thus “again”). So HCSB, NASB, NET, NRSV, etc). Even though **שוב** does function this way when combined with other verbs, there is no previous point where the oppressed where either perceived or discussed. It makes no sense, therefore, to take the verb in that way. Rather, the phrase **ושבתי אני ואראה** functions in the same manner as the phrase **ופניתי אני לראות** in 2:12. Both refer to turning and seeing as indicative of a new focus of attention.
- [something] vaporous** — Literally, “a vapor.” Clearly, however, it is the characteristic of the vapor that is defining.
- 4:8 **an individual** — Literally, “one.” The word can also indicate somebody who is all “alone.” NASB captures the nuance of the numeral and its story-book opening well with “there was a certain man.” NJPST also captures the sense well with “the case of the man.”
- one who lacked** — Literally, “that is, there was no.” The *waw* is epexegetical. It introduces a phrase that further explains what the previous one meant.
- a partner** — Or “another.” Literally, “a second.” The grammar is not specific enough to indicate whether this refers to a wife, a business associate, or even a friend.
- endless was** — Literally, “there was no end to.”
- His outlook** — Literally, “his two eyes.” The verb, however, is singular, which means that the dual noun functions collectively. Thus, we have rendered it “outlook.” Ancient Jewish scribes understood this, which is why their traditional reading of the text was singular (his eye). So also **ס** and **ש**.
- I** — We have italicized the article to indicate its emphatic nature and the shift in subject. Following **ט**, many translations interpret this part of the verse as a quotation of the person who realized they were working themselves to the bone for no benefit to themselves or someone else. To accommodate that strange and unnatural interpretation, translations are forced to insert some marker of the speech as did **ט**. The KJV, for example, says, “neither saith he”. NASB says, “and he never asked.” HCSB says, “‘So who am I struggling for,’ he asks.” NET says “*He laments.*” NRSV says, “‘For whom am I toiling,’ they ask.” SET says, “*nor does he ask himself.*” All this is unnecessary and misses the point. The gatherer is forming a conclusion about his own life based on what he has seen in the life of others. Nothing in the text indicates that the person in the story who worked so hard for no one came to the same conclusion. Rather, his life is an object lesson for the gatherer (and, thus, for us).
- been exerting** — According to Masoretic accentuation, this is a noun (exertion). We take the word, however, as a Qal participle, in parallel with the next participle, indicating continual action. This explains the use of a *tsere* under the second radical, but the first vowel must be emended to *cholem-waw*. It should not be taken as a perfect since, according to the style of Qohelet, emphatic pronouns should follow the verb, not come before it. For **עמל** as “to exert/exertion/[what comes of] exertion,” see section A3.
- my life** — Instead of **נפשי** (*my* life/being), Bab^{ber} says **נפשו** (*his* life/being). Since the other

markers of the first-person are present, that probably resulted from a common confusion between *waw* and *yod*. We follow מ^L.

betterment — Or “goodness/wellness.” Renderings like “pleasure” (NASB, ESV, LEB, NRSV) or “enjoyment” (NJPST) are paraphrastic and miss the point. Qohelet is not saying he lacked pleasure or enjoyment in life—quite the opposite was the case (2:10)!

Yes — Common in Hebrew poetry is the use of the so-called “emphatic *waw*,” meaning “yes!” or “indeed!”

4:9 **because** — This אֲשֶׁר is causal (because). It is parallel to כִּי (because) at the start of v. 10.

they have — Literally, “there is for them.”

for their — This is a *bet* of exchange. Literally, “in exchange for.”

4:10 **either [of them] should fall** — The verb is plural (so פ), but functioning distributively (so ט).

HCSB and NASB hit the nail on the head. The disjunctive accent (*zaqef qaton*) makes it evident that the following noun (the one) is not the subject. Some translations, however, erroneously treat it as the subject. So NAB (if the one falls), NJB (if one should fall), and Rotherham (if the one should fall).

the other — Literally, “the one.”

if — אִלּוּ is, literally, the Aramaic word “if.” So ט. This should be obvious since אִלּוּ is parallel with אִם (if). מ^L, however, has pointed it as though it were a compound of אִלּוּ and לוֹ (literally, “if regarding him”). פ (followed by ס and ט) treats it as though it were the interjection “woe/alas” (אֵי). Since, however, אֵי does not have that meaning elsewhere, such an interpretation must be rejected (along with virtually all English translations). If אֵי meant “woe/alas” as it does in MH, it would be vocalized אֵי (Jastrow), not אֵי.

other — Literally, “second.”

4:11

4:12 **And whereas one may overpower the individual** — Literally, “And if he overpowers him—the individual.” The “individual” is an explication of the object (him), not an indication of the subject (he). It is one of “the two” as seen previously in v. 10, which is why it has the definite article. The subject of the verb is indefinite. פ, however, took “the individual” as the subject, which breaks with the use of the same word in v. 10 and introduces grammatical confusion by rendering a specific person in the party of two unstated and indefinite. פ’s reading should be rejected. The KJV, however, seems to follow פ (either that, or it is ignoring the word אִחָד).

stand fast — Our use of “fast” communicates the nuance of the Hiphil stem, which indicates duration or constancy.

So also — Or “furthermore.” So NET (Moreover). This *waw* picks up the function of the “also” at the start of v. 11 in order to carry the argument forward in a new, but related direction.

the threefold cord is not quickly snapped — This may have been a well-known proverb in the ancient world. It seems to have been part of the Standard Babylonian edition of the Gilgamesh Epic. In his critical edition of the epic (2003), A. R. George translates the first part of line 76, Tablet 5, as “a three-ply rope” and fills in the second, unattested, portion with “is not easily broken.”

- 4:13 **youth** — Since the meaning of this word stands in contrast with “old/elder,” it should be rendered something like “youth,” “youngster,” or “young man” instead of “boy.”
- low-born** — Though most translations render מַסְכֵּן as “poor,” that is a misunderstanding of the term. The word is borrowed from Akkadian *muškēnu* (CAD), where it refers to the inferiority of someone's social status in comparison with another. The same comparison occurs here. מַסְכֵּן is not contrasted with a “rich” person, but with a “ruler” (for the rendering of מֶלֶךְ as “ruler” instead of “king,” see 1:1, 12). So Seow (AB): “a youngster who is a *commoner* but wise.” So also Moffatt: “a young man, *lowly born* and wise.”
- to be instructed** — לְהוֹדִיעַ is pointed as a Niphal infinitive construct of הָדַע, which usually means “to be warned/cautioned.” The same root, however, appears in the Hiphil with the meaning “to give instruction” (Exod 18:20) and the Niphal is sometimes used to express the passive sense of the Hiphil instead of a Hophal (שָׁמַד, for instance, which means “to destroy/exterminate” in the Hiphil, also means “to be destroyed/exterminated” in the Niphal). We believe, therefore, that the Niphal functions, in this case, as a passive indicator of the Hiphil: “to be instructed.” So NASB (to receive instruction), NET (to receive advice), and NRSV (to take advice). This also makes far more sense than “to be warned/cautioned” since “being wise” (the characteristic of the youth) has more to do with listening to advice or being instructed than it does with simply heeding warnings.
- 4:14 **Indeed** — We understand this כִּי to function in an emphatic sense. Like the proverb about a threefold cord, which takes a previous saying about “two” and intensifies it to “three,” so this takes what was previously said about a “lower-class” person and intensifies it by speaking about a *slave* (the lowest social class). So NRSV (indeed). The causal interpretation (for/because) makes far less sense.
- the fettered** — הַסּוֹרִיִּם is a Qal passive participle from אָסַר, meaning “the bound/fettered/imprisoned ones.” The guttural *aleph* has dropped out of the text due to its weakened nature, which is a characteristic quite common of later Hebrew (such as Mishnaic and Samaritan Hebrew). That the Masoretes read an *aleph* there is proven by the use of *qamets* under the definite article. The lengthening of the vowel from *pathach* is exactly what one would expect before *aleph*. So שׁ and ס'. Thus, the word should not be taken from סוּר (to turn aside), and then rendered something like “rebels.”
- one** — The “one” who came forth to rule is not known.
- came forth** — The verb צָא is perfect, not imperfect (contrary to שׁ). It is referencing some event that has already happened. That the past tense is indicated is supported by the parallel verb נוֹלַד, which refers to something that already happened (see below). The renderings of the KJV (he cometh), NAB (one comes forth), and NKJV (he comes out) are fudging it.
- was born** — In BH, the Niphal participle נוֹלֵד means “to be born.” Only in post-biblical Hebrew could it mean “to become” (as in KJV, WEB, and Leeser) or “to have been” (as in YLT).
- pauper** — We take this participle as a substantive. It can, alternatively, be taken as an adjective (impoverished).

- 4:15 **traverse** — If Qohelet had wanted to say “who walk” (as in KJV, NET, NJPST, or YLT), the Qal was at its disposal. Instead, it used the more emphatic Piel stem, which means “to move about/walk around/peregrinate.” SET takes it in the sense of “wander.”
- those who journey under the sun** — This phrase is in apposition to the phrase “all the living.” The disjunctive accent above “the living” makes the position of these two phrases stark. Thus, one should not translate them “all the living who journey under the sun” as if the text were one continuous description without break or expansion. The same syntactic situation will occur in the next verse.
- [allied] with** — Here, the word “with/together with” signifies allegiance or being “on the side of.” Note the word-play created between this and the word “people” in the next verse. We recreate the word-play by using the renderings “allied with” and “allies.”
- arise** — As Seow notes (AB), the verb עָמַד (to stand) is often used in LBH in place of קָם (to get up/arise). So NET. The idea is one of succession to a position of power or authority. So HCSB and NAB.
- in his [predecessor’s] place** — Literally, “in place of him.” The 3MS suffix, however, is distributive (who will stand in one’s place).
- 4:16 **Endless are** — Literally, “There is no end to.”
- allies** — Literally, “people.” Note, however, the particular word-play created by using the words “together with” (עִם) to describe the people he is looking at and then “people” (עַם) to describe them again. By using these particular words, Qohelet puts an emphasis on the fact that these “people” are “with” the next young man. We recreate the word-play by using the renderings “allied with” and “allies.”
- at whose forefront he comes** — Literally, “he is/comes at their front/face.” Some translations render לְפָנֵיהֶם as “before them.” While that is technically correct, it is imprecise because the idea of being “before” someone in terms of location and importance can easily be confused with being “before” in terms of time and circumstance. The former is intended by the text. Of all the translations that use “before,” Alter succeeds best in dispelling the confusion (to all before whom he stood). Though the basic idea is captured by other translations, it often comes at the cost of a loose rendering. After THF, the translation closest to the meaning of the Hebrew is NAB (to all over whom he takes precedence). Unfortunately, many translations wrongly interpret the subject of the verb as “all the people” or those who chronologically came before instead of the “young man” (so HCSB, KJV, NASB, NET, etc). Note that the phrase “all [those] at whose forefront he comes” is in apposition to the phrase “all the people.” The same syntax occurred in the previous verse.
- yet** — Adversative וְ.
- future [generations]** — Literally, “the after/latter ones.” We have not rendered הָאֲחֵרֹנִים as “those who come after” as in so many English translations because we have already used the phrase in 1:11 for what literally means “they who come after” (שִׁדְּיוֹ לְאַחֲרֵנָה).
- will not be happy** — The nuance of the Hebrew is not that people “will not rejoice” in him (and, thus, could simply be indifferent or semi-pleased), but that they will actually be *unhappy* with him. So NASB and Alter.

Surely — Asseverative כִּי.

4:17 **Minding** — We interpret this verb as an infinitive absolute שָׁמַר (keeping/observing/watching) instead of an imperative שָׁמֹר (keep/observe/watch!) since it is parallel to the infinitive תֵּת (giving/offering) and makes the most sense of כֹּאשֶׁר (see below). The Masoretic vocalization arose through a simple confusion between the defective form of the infinitive absolute and the imperative. Two other instances of the defective spelling of this infinitive absolute occur in Deut 11:22 and 27:1.

your steps — Metonymy. Literally, “your two feet.” More idiomatically, “your conduct.” The traditional Jewish reading, which is backed by a plethora of Hebrew MSS, א, and ט, is “your foot.” We, however, stick with אָל, which is perfectly acceptable and comprehensible.

as though — כֹּאשֶׁר typically has a comparative sense (just as/in the same way as/in accordance with) or a temporal sense (when). Here, however, it has a hypothetical sense (as though). For a similar use of כֹּאשֶׁר, see Zech 10:6 and Job 10:19.

The One God's temple — Literally, “the house of The One God.” The phrase בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים occurs almost entirely in LBH texts (limited almost exclusively to Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah), which is further proof of Qohelet's extremely late date.

closer — קָרוֹב can be interpreted as an infinitive absolute (meaning either “to draw near” or functioning as an imperative, meaning “go near!”) or as an adjective (close/near). The presence of a comparative *min* supports its identification as an adjective. Thus, “closer/nearer...than.” So NJPST (more acceptable...than). So also Seow (AB). The KJV's rendering (be more ready...than) is paraphrastic. Contrary to many translations (like ASV, HCSB, ESV, NRSV, etc), there is nothing in the text that indicates something is “better.”

obeying — שָׁמַע means both “to listen/hear” and “to obey.” The latter makes more sense here as shown by the remainder of the verse.

offering — ט misinterprets the comparative *min* plus infinitive construct as the noun “grant.”

the offering, [by] the fool, of sacrifice — S switches the word order from מִתַּת הַכִּסִּילִים זֶבַח (than the offering, [by] the fool, of sacrifice) to מִתַּת זֶבַח הַכִּסִּילִים (than offering the sacrifice of fools). Many English translations do the same (so ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, RSV, LEB). Such a switch, however, is unnecessary and arbitrary. The subject follows the infinitive as though the infinitive were a finite verb. So NAB (the fools' offering of sacrifice) and Seow (the fools' giving a sacrifice). Similar to this is Alter (the offering of sacrifice by fools) and NRSV (the sacrifice offered by fools). A few translations play looser with the text and add “like” or “as” to arrive at a similar meaning (NET and HCSB).

care — יָדַע means “to know” as well as “to care about/be concerned with.” So HALOT. For a previous example, see v. 13.

about acting — This is a Qal infinitive construct with prepositional *lamed* from עָשָׂה meaning “to do/work/perform/act/behave.” The infinitive construct with *lamed* often functions as a gerundive to further explain the circumstances of a previous verb (IBHS §36.2.3.e). This tells us that “acting/doing/behaving” wicked is what they “do not care about.” Rotherham comes

close to this with “they make no acknowledgment of doing wrong.” Though the infinitive construct plus *lamed* can function as a marker of result (so that), purpose (in order to), consequence (and so), or explain how a previous action was performed (by), nowhere does it function as a complementizer meaning “that they do/are doing” (contrary to virtually all English translations). Ginsburg pointed this out over a century ago, yet it seems no one has listened: “the *infinit.* לַעֲשׂוֹת cannot grammatically be translated *that*, or *what they do*.” What makes someone a “fool” in Wisdom Literature is not that they have no knowledge of evil/wickedness, but that they act in a way that is contrary to wisdom. Since the way of wisdom is also the way of God, acting contrary to it (and thus being a fool) is synonymous with disobedience to God. Equally preposterous renderings are “keep doing” (NRSV) and “keep from doing” (NAB).

- 5:1 **be rash** — Since this is Piel, a more emphatic form of the Qal, one may be tempted to take it in a sense other than “being hasty/rash.” There is, however, no Qal form for this verb. This stem, therefore, takes that sense. Contrary to Ginsburg, and in line with typical Hebrew grammar, the causative is not identified by the Piel, but by the Hiphil (as in Est 6:14).

impulse — Literally, “mind/heart.” The word, however, is often used to indicate one's will, intention, or inclination. Thus, we render it “impulse.”

presence. — The Masoretes put a strong disjunctive accent at this point (*athnach*), indicating a major break in thought. One should not, therefore, render this verse as though there were none (such as “in The One God's presence because”) without good cause. Newer English translations are starting to pay attention to this. So HCSB (before God. God is), NAB (God's presence. God is), NASB (presence of God. For God), and NKJV (before God. For God).

yet — Adversative *waw* (yet/but), not conjunctive (and).

modest — Literally, “little/small/few/low.” Like the verbs “hasty/rash,” which do not refer to speed itself, but to a failure to think before speaking, so this does not refer to the quantity of words itself, but to a failure to limit one's speech to what is properly reverent. Thus, Ginsburg remarks that “in the presence of our superiors,” this word “indicates a due reverence for their elevated position, and a modest acknowledgment of our inferiority.”

- 5:2 **is accompanied by** — Literally “comes with” or “is accompanied by.”

much task — Literally, “the abundance of task.”

[is accompanied] — Typical of Semitic poetry, the second verb that would be parallel with the first is elided. Although it was realized as long ago as the KJV that a verb should be here, the verb KJV inserted (to know) shows its ignorance of ancient Semitic poetic parallelism. Other translations have rightly provided a verb synonymous or identical with בּוֹא (to come about/happen/occur/arrive/result). So NET (occurs), NJPST (come), and Leeser (cometh).

many words — Literally, “the abundance of words.”

- 5:3 This verse quotes from Deut 23:22, which shows that the gatherer was familiar with the Mosaic Law. There are, however, a few differences. Instead of “if,” this says “when.” Instead of YHWH your god,” this says “Elohim.” Instead of “do not,” this says “never.”

vow a vow — Mimicking the root-play in נדר נדר.

displeasing are fools — Literally, “there is no pleasure in fools.” There is nothing in the

Hebrew stating “he” or “God” has no pleasure in fools. This is a generalized statement regarding a simple fact of life quite common in Wisdom Literature. Fools are those who, by nature, others have no pleasure in. Fox thinks that such language could have been used in order to avoid speaking about God's emotions directly. Whatever the case, almost all English translations portray the text as conveying more than it does.

you vow — The verb here is imperfect, not perfect. Thus, it should not be rendered in the past tense (vowed) as some translations have it (KJV, NAB, NKJV).

5:4

5:5 **allow** — נָתַן means “to give/present/deliver,” “make,” and “to permit/allow/let.”

body — Synecdoche. Literally, “flesh.” The part refers to the whole (body). So Alter, Leeser, and Seow (AB).

to bring condemnation — When the verb חָטָא is used with reference to the Israelite deity, it almost always means “to sin.” When it is used in reference to people, it almost always means “to offend” or “to err.” Here, as the parallelism with “mistake/error” makes clear (as well, perhaps, as the use of “messenger” instead of “Elohim”), it refers not to moral failing, but to the breaking of one's contractual obligation, which makes one guilty under the Law. See the quote from Deut 23:22 in v. 2. We represent the causative sense of the Hiphil by use of “bring.”

messenger's — שָׁ (followed by שָׁ) says “god” instead of “messenger.” It is hard to say which is original. Unfortunately, this passage is not preserved in the DSS. ת and The Three support מ^L.

mistake — שָׁ says “ignorance” instead of “mistake/error,” which is a different animal. The Hebrew refers to that which is unintentional, not, necessarily, that which is unknown.

Otherwise — Though לָמָּה is usually used as an interrogative (why?), it also functions to introduce an undesirable alternative (lest/so that not/otherwise). See IBHS §18.3c. So NAB (lest) and NJPST (else).

articulation — The word used here (קוֹל) means “voice/sound.” In context, it must mean “articulation” or “vocalization.” Had the author meant something like “word” (דָּבָר) or “words” (דְּבָרִים) that particular lexical item could have been used as it is used elsewhere, but it wasn't (contrary to HCSB, NAB, and NRSV). NJPST's “talk” is a good alternative.

confiscate — As the text is pointed, it literally means “destroy.” The consonantal verb חָבַל, however, can be read either as a Piel or a Qal. In Post-biblical Hebrew, the Qal means both “to seize” and “to destroy” (Jastrow). The Akkadian cognate (*ḥabālu*) refers to seizing someone's property (CAD). We think that makes more sense since the very concept of the vow is that something is being given to the deity. Better to forcefully take what was vowed along with what was not vowed as a penalty than to destroy it all. So Seow (AB): “take away.”

your handiwork — Literally, “the work of your hands.”

5:6

Though — Adversative כִּי (rather/but).

vaporous dreams — Hendiadys. Literally, “dreams and vapor.”

excessive — Though הַרְבֵּה literally means “abundant,” it functions here in the opposite sense

that **מעטים** (modest) functioned in v. 1. It refers to that which is beyond what is appropriate. NJPST comes close to this with “superfluous.” SET interprets it rather loosely as “idle.” Those that render it “many,” “a multitude,” or “numerous” have missed the point.

yet — Adversative **כי**. So **ס’**.

5:7 **wresting** — This refers to a violent taking away of justice or forceful usurpation (from a root referring to theft/robbery). An equivalent expression occurs in Isa 10:2 (**לגזל משפט**), meaning “to wrest the right.” The KJV’s inclusion of the word “perversion” is unfounded, yet is followed by some translations (like HCSB and NET).

a rightful claim — Hendiadys. Literally, “a claim and a right.”

judicial [court] — **מדינה** comes from **דין** (to execute justice/bring judgment/pass sentence/argue a case). Thus, we render it “judicial [court].” See 2:8.

the act — The word **חפץ** refers, in post-biblical Hebrew, to one’s “work/assignment/task.” This is the meaning it has in Qohelet as well (see 3:1, 17). The Greek renders it in this respect as well (act/matter/affair), which is how most English translations take it.

superior — Or “high/lofty [one].” As Seow (AB) points out, **גבה** often describes someone who is prideful or arrogant. Thus Seow’s translation “arrogant one.” Here, however, the word was chosen primarily for its alliteration with the verb **תמה** (to surprise/amaze). Thus, it is the *sound* that is definitive. Since the next verse focuses on a high official (a king), it seems evident that **גבה** is being used in that sense here as well. We mimic the Hebraic word-play with “surprised” and “superior” and place the two words close to each other so the alliteration is easier to notice.

another — Literally, “superior.”

superiors watch out for — The text was wrongly divided. Instead of **שמר וגבהים** (he watches and superiors), read **גבה שמרו** (superiors watch). The *waw* was accidentally detached from the verb (turning it from a plural into a singular) and attached to the word “superiors.” Our redivision agrees with normal Hebrew syntax. So Seow (AB). The combination of the verb “to watch” with the preposition “over” gives the meaning “watch out for” or “protect.” *BHS* suggests emending the last part to **וגבה מעליהם** (and a superior [is] over them). That, however, does not resolve the difficulty with the verb.

5:8 **Yet** — Probably an adversative *waw* since we have evidence of Qohelet creating contrasts between fortunate and unfortunate lands elsewhere (10:16-17) and the word “advantage” throws this verse into contrast with the previous one. So ESV, NAB, NJB, NRSV, etc.

a land entire — Literally “in the totality.” We have shifted the *athnach* from the next word to the end of this phrase.

is — A pronoun can sometimes be used as a copula. See also 1:17. The switch, therefore, between masculine (*Qere*) and feminine (*Ketiv*), is moot.

ruler — Or “king.” Yet there is no definite article here, which argues against the designation “king.” See also 1:1.

to [his] country — Parallelism with “land” argues for a meaning here of “country,” not “field.” The same parallelism can be seen in other parts of scripture such as Ruth 1:1 (the land of

Judah/the country of Moab). The *lamed* retains its usual meaning (to). **ט**, however, took it as a genitive marker (king *of* the tilled field). It is, however, improbable that a whole land/country would be “cultivated/tilled.” The verb must, therefore, have a different subject (see below).

who is subject — We believe that “ruler” is the subject of this verb because this verse functions to set up a “superior” in contrast to those mentioned in the previous verse. If “field” were the subject, the meaning would be “tilled/cultivated” (as in Deut 21:4 and Ezek 36:9, 34). Yet parallelism prevents us from making that association (see above). Here, with “ruler” as the subject, the meaning is something along the lines of being “in service to” or “subject to.” This is supported by **ט** (the king is made subject). So Rashi (the king is subservient), Leeser (a king who is subject), and Fenton (a King who is the Servant). So Robert Gordis in *Koheleth: The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes* (even a king is subject).

5:9 **it** — Literally, “silver.”

loves wealth — Literally, “is in love *with* wealth” (**אהב בהמוֹן**). Read instead “loves wealth” (**אהב המוֹן**). The second *bet* may be an error of dittography since **אהב** does not take *bet* anywhere else in scripture. So *BHS*. So all other English translations. Seow (AB), however, thinks that it is an attempt to copy the syntax of other verbs that do use *bet*, which is possible. In either case, the *bet* should not be accounted for in translation.

instead of — Literally, “not” (**לא**). **ט**, however, represents “to him/it” (**לו**). Since they sound identical, it is easy to conceive of a copier hearing the first and misunderstanding it as the second.

produce — Qohelet uses the term “produce” here to expand the concept from mere want to bodily need. So **ח**. So Rashi. So NAB (fruit), Alter (crop), and Fox (produce). Most English translations miss the point entirely, despite the fact that the very next verse repeats the idea through the use of the terms “goods” and “eat/devour.”

[is not stuffed] — Typical of Semitic poetry, the second verb that would be parallel with the first is elided. Some translations have recognized this and reinserted it as we do (NET and HCSB). Here, the meaning of the verb “to satisfy/satiate/be filled with” takes on a particularly striking nuance—one cannot eat wealth.

5:10 **goods** — Clearly, **הטובה** is used here to refer to food. It appears as a collective singular, which we represent with the plural. Along with most translations, we do not render the definite article since it refers to a category of thing, which is not necessary in English.

achievement — *kišrôn* comes from **כשר**√ (to prosper/profit/have success). See 2:21.

sight — **ראית** does not appear elsewhere in BH, but is a common noun in MH with the meaning “sight/glance” (Jastrow). There is no need to emend it to an infinitive construct (seeing) as suggested by the traditional Jewish reading.

one's eyes — Since the subject was previously plural (owners), the singular pronoun here must be functioning distributively. The switch in number between cola is typical of Semitic poetry.

5:11

5:12

5:13

5:14

5:15

5:16

5:17 **one's exertion that one exerts** — See **his exertion that he exerts** in 1:3.5:18 **he bestows legal ownership** — The verb שָׁלַט means “to have/transfer legal right (over something).” It has the Hiphil form here, which means “to *make* the legal owner.”

5:19

6:1

6:2 **body** — Metonymy. Literally, “throat/being/life.”**bestow legal ownership** — The verb שָׁלַט means “to have/transfer legal right (over something).” It has the Hiphil form here, which means “to *make* the legal owner.”

6:3

6:4

6:5

6:6

6:7

6:8

6:9

6:10

6:11

6:12

7:1 **name . . . fame** — What wondrous word-play! The colon contains four words: good name / oil good. The first and last are the same and the middle two rhyme. Sean McEvenue and Norbert Lohfink's translation in *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary* also represents poetry well: “Better a name *esteemed* than scented *creams*.” For a similar sentiment, see Prov 22:1.

7:2

7:3

7:4

7:5 For a similar sentiment, see Prov 12:15.

7:6 **nettles . . . kettles** — We attempt to mimic the poetic word-play between הַסִּיר and הַסִּירִים.7:7 **twists** — מָל has “it (masculine) destroys” from אָבַד. 4QQoh^a has “it (she) twists” from עוֹדָה. Not only does the second make more sense, but it agrees with the feminine gender of its subject. For this reason, we follow 4QQoh^a.7:8 **spirit of pride** — We mimic the rhyme created by the scribe at the end of vv. 8 (רוּחַ) and 9 (יְנוּחַ) by switching word order from “pride of spirit” to “spirit of pride.”

7:9

7:10

7:11

7:12

7:13

7:14 **pore over** — To “pore over” means to “gaze intently.” It also means “to study/analyze” and so*the heavenly fire*

“discern.” Both ideas are part of the Hebrew root **רָאָה**. The word “pore” also works as a word-play with “poor.” Thus, we mimic the poetic word-play in the Hebrew phrase **רָעָה רָאָה**.

on behalf of — This particular expression (**עַל-דְּבַרֵּת**) is late. It BH, it only occurs in Qohelet and Ps 110. It means “for the sake of/on account of/with respect to.” See 3:18.

have no grasp — Qohelet often uses the verb **מָצָא** to mean attainment of some kind.

after he [is gone] — Literally, “after him.” Referring to death.

anything [at all] — The word **מְאֹמֶה** is an emphatic expression of “anything.” Therefore, we render it “anything at all.”

7:15 **innocently** — Literally “in his innocence.”

guiltily — Literally, “in his guilt.”

7:16

7:17

7:18

7:19

7:20

errs — When the verb **חָטָא** is used with reference to the Israelite deity, it almost always means “to sin.” When it is used in reference to people, it almost always means “to offend” or “to err.” Here, as the context of innocence and guilt (vv. 15-18) and the contrast with “rightness” or “correctness” makes clear, it refers not to moral failing, but to our inherent inability to always get everything right.

7:21

7:22

7:23 **wisely** — Literally, “with wisdom.” The noun functions, however, as an adverbial accusative.

hereby — Capturing the affirmative aspect of the cohortative.

7:24

grasp — Qohelet often uses the verb **מָצָא** to mean attainment of some kind.

7:25

7:26

the screw-up — When the verb **חָטָא** is used with reference to the Israelite deity, it almost always means “to sin.” When it is used in reference to people, it almost always means “to offend” or “to err.” Here, as the context of falling into the hands of the “strange woman” makes clear, this refers not to moral failing, but to one who continually makes foolish decisions (thus the participial form, which functions as a substantive).

7:27

I grasped — Qohelet often uses the verb **מָצָא** to mean attainment of some kind.

said the gatherer — The Hebrew was incorrectly divided. As it stands, **אָמְרָה קָהֵלֶת** means “[Lady] Qohelet said.” Divide instead as **אָמַר הַקָּהֵלֶת** (the gatherer said). This is far more likely and is supported by ❸.

to reach — Qohelet plays with the verb **מָצָא** in a few places, using it several times with different meanings—an example of *antanaclasis*.

7:28

man — One reason to view this section as a later addition: everywhere else, Qoheleth uses **אָדָם** universally. Only here does it refer specifically to a “man.”

- 7:29 Notice the use of *Wiederaufnahme* (repetitive resumption) between “Look, this [is what] I grasped” (ראה זה מצאתי) in v. 27 and “Here [is] what I grasped” (ראה-זה מצאתי) in this verse. When a scribe wanted to comment on a text or insert something into it without changing the text, s/he would use a repetition of the same words at the beginning and end of the insertion to bracket the text and signal the expansion.
- 8:1 **hated** — Depending on how שנא is interpreted, it can mean “to hate” (ש) or “to change” (מ^L). Since the Pual form of the verb “to change” occurs nowhere else and the versions do not follow it, we follow ש.
- 8:2
- 8:3
- 8:4
- 8:5
- 8:6
- 8:7
- 8:8 **Wealth** — Reading עשר (wealth) instead of רשע (wickedness).
- 8:9 **took ownership** — The verb שלט means “to have/transfer legal right (over something).”
- 8:10 **They entered** — Reading קרבים instead of קברים (buried).
boasted — Reading וישתבחו instead of וישתכחו (were forgotten).
- 8:11
- 8:12 **criminal** — When the verb חטא is used with reference to the Israelite deity, it almost always means “to sin.” When it is used in reference to people, it almost always means “to offend” or “to err.” Here, as the context of a “decree” or “sentence” being carried out because of a “wrong act” makes clear, this refers not to moral failing, but to allowing someone to break the law without consequence, which only impels others to do the same.
- 8:13 **life** — Literally, “days.”
- 8:14
- 8:15 **of life** — Literally, “of *his* life.”
- 8:16
- 8:17 **to grasp** — Qohelet often uses the verb מצא to mean attainment of some kind.
find [it] — Qohelet plays with the verb מצא in a few places, using it several times with different meaning—an example of *antanaclasis*. Here, it means “find/discover.”
to grasp [it] — Qohelet plays with the verb מצא in a few places, using it several times with different meanings—an example of *antanaclasis*. Here, refers to attaining knowledge and wisdom.
- 9:1
- 9:2 G renders ha-kol as habel – either it misread הכל as הבל, purposely tried to make its source text smoother, or reinterpreted the verse in order to bring out the significance of the claim (i.e., the idea that both the wicked and the righteous have the same fate is an example of how everything is ματαιοτης).
who has no sacrifice — Literally, “who does not have it.”

criminal — When the verb **חטא** is used with reference to the Israelite deity, it almost always means “to sin.” When it is used in reference to people, it almost always means “to offend” or “to err.” Qohelet uses the verb in the latter manner throughout his text. That seems to be its meaning here as well—one who follows the rules, laws, or customs of society versus one who “errs” in them. The only activity that would seem to involve the deity is sacrificing or not sacrificing, but the strong disjunctive accent right after that separates it from the activity described here.

9:3

9:4

9:5

9:6

9:7

9:8

9:9 **the exertion that you exert** — See **his exertion that he exerts** in 1:3.

9:10

9:11

9:12

9:13

9:14

9:15 **low-born** — Though most translations render **מסכן** as “poor,” that is a misunderstanding of the term. The word is borrowed from Akkadian *muškēnu* (CAD), where it refers to the inferiority of someone's social status in comparison with another. See 4:13.

9:16

9:17

9:18 **individual** — Literally, “one,” but referring to a singular person, not a singular act.

screws-up — When the verb **חטא** is used with reference to the Israelite deity, it almost always means “to sin.” When it is used in reference to people, it almost always means “to offend” or “to err.” Here, as the context makes clear, this refers not to moral failing, but the destruction that a fool can create in comparison to weapons of warfare.

10:1

10:2

10:3

10:4 **your** — Literally, “the.”

offenses — When the verb **חטא** is used with reference to the Israelite deity, it almost always means “to sin.” When it is used in reference to people, it almost always means “to offend” or “to err.” Here, as context makes clear, this refers not to moral failing, but to the displeasure of the king.

10:5

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11:1 Compare this saying to the ancient Egyptian proverb in the Instruction of Ankhsheshonq: “Do a good deed and throw it in the water; when it dries you will find it” (translation by Miriam Lichtheim in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: Volume III: The Late Period*).

11:2

11:3

11:4

11:5

11:6

11:7

11:8

11:9

11:10

12:1

12:2

12:3

12:4

12:5 **buds** — Reading תפר (break/breach) as תפרה (bear fruit). The final ה may have been lost due to haplography with האביונה.

12:6

12:7 **to the earth** — In LBH, על often functions as a simple dative (JM §133f).

12:8 This verse is nearly identical to 1:2. The differences are: (1) the phrase “Vaporous vapor” is not repeated a second time and (2) a definite article is attached to קהלת even though one does not appear in 1:2 (ס agrees with the Hebrew). For notes on individual parts of this verse and the reason why we separate it from the rest of the text, see 1:2.

12:9

12:10

12:11

12:12

12:13 **EPILOGUE** — Literally, “end of matter” or “end of word.”

12:14

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