

# Ecclesiastes

Title

1:1 The words of the Teacher,<sup>1</sup> the son of

David, king<sup>3</sup> in Jerusalem:<sup>4</sup>

**1 tn** The meaning of קהלת (*qohélet*) is somewhat puzzling. The verb קהל (*qahal*) means “to assemble, summon” (HALOT 1078-79 s.v. קהל), and is derived from the noun קהל (*qahal*, “assembly”; HALOT 1079-80 s.v. קהל). Thus קהלת might mean: (1) convener of the assembly, (2) leader, speaker, teacher, or preacher of the assembly, or (3) member of the assembly. Elsewhere in the book, קהלת is used in collocation with statements about his position as king in Jerusalem (Eccl 1:12), his proclamations about life (Eccl 1:2; 7:27; 12:8), and his teaching of wisdom and writing wise sayings (Eccl 12:9-10). Thus, קהלת probably means “the leader of the assembly” or “speaker of the assembly.” (See also the following study note.) Rabbinic literature treats קהלת as a traditional surname for Solomon, that is, “Qoheleth,” relating it to the noun קהל. For example, this explanation is found in rabbinic literature (Qoheleth Rabbah 1:1): “Why was his name called Qoheleth [קהלת]? Because his words were proclaimed in public meeting [קהל], as it is written (1 Kgs 8:1).” The LXX rendered it ἐκκλησιαστής (*ekklēsiastēs*, “member of the assembly,” LSJ 509), as was the custom of relating Greek ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*, “assembly”) to Hebrew קהל. The book’s English title, “Ecclesiastes,” is simply a transliteration of the Greek term from the LXX. Symmachus’ παροιμιστής (*paromiastēs*, “author of proverbs,” LSJ 1342 s.v.) is not a translation of קהלת but refers to his authorship of many proverbs (Eccl 12:9-10). In terms of the participial form, קהלת is used substantively to designate the profession or title of the author. The term is used in 12:8 with the article, indicating that it is a professional title rather than a personal surname: קהלתה (*qahqohēlet*, “the Teacher”). Substantival participles often designate the title or profession of an individual: כהן (*kohen*), “priest”; רוזן (*rozen*), “ruler”; שׂר (*shoter*), “officer”; נֹקֵד (*noqed*), “sheep-breeder”; שׂוֹפֵט (*shofet*), “judge”; יצר (*yotser*), “potter”; כרם (*korem*), “vine-dresser”; יב (*yogev*), “farmer”; שוער (*sho'er*), “gate-keeper”; צורף (*tsoref*), “smelter”; and רופא (*rofe*), “doctor” (IBHS 614-15 §37.2a). In terms of its feminine ending with a male referent, Joüon 1:266-67 §89.b suggests that it is intensive, e.g., מודיעת (*moda'at*) “close relative” from מודיע (*moda*) “kinsman.” The feminine ending is used similarly in Arabic in reference to a male referent, e.g., Arabic *rawayyat* “a great narrator” from *rawai* “narrator” (C. P. Caspari, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 1:233c). So קהלת may mean “the leader/teacher of the assembly” from the noun קהל. When used in reference to a male referent, feminine forms denote a professional title or vocational office (as in Arabic, Ethiopic, and Aramaic), e.g., פֹּקֶדֶת (*soferet*), “scribe”; פֹּקֶדֶת (*pokheret*), “gazelle-catcher”; פֶּקִידָה (*pekhah*), “provincial governor”; פְּרָעוֹת (*p'ra'ot*), “princes” (GKC 393 §122.r). Occasionally, a professional name later became a personal name, e.g., the title סֹפֵר (“scribe”) became the name “Sophereth” (Ezra 2:55; Neh 7:57); פֹּקֶדֶת (“gazelle-catcher”) became “Pokereth” (Ezra 2:57; Neh 7:59), and perhaps קהלת (“assembler”) became the surname “Qoheleth” (HALOT 926 s.v. קהלת). Many translations render קהלת as a professional title: “the Speaker” (NEB, Moffatt), “the Preacher” (KJV, RSV, YLT, MLB, ASV, NASB), “the Teacher” (NIV, NRSV), “the Leader of the Assembly” (NIV margin), “the Assembler” (NJPS margin). Others render it as a personal surname: “Kohleth” (JPS, NJPS) and “Qoheleth” (NAB, NRSV margin).

**sn** The verbal root קהל means “to assemble; to summon” (HALOT 1078-79 s.v. קהל). It is used of assembling or summoning various groups of people: “all Israel” (1 Chr 13:5; 15:3), “the elders of Israel” (1 Kgs 8:1; 2 Chr 5:2), all the

elders of their tribes” (Deut 31:28), “all the princes of Israel” (1 Chr 28:1), “your tribes” (Deut 31:28), “all the house of Judah” (1 Kgs 12:21; 2 Chr 11:1), “the people” (Deut 4:10; 31:12), “the whole congregation” (Lev 8:3; Num 1:18; 16:19; 20:8), “all the congregation of the sons of Israel” (Exod 35:1; Num 8:9), “the assembly” (Num 10:7; 20:10), and “your assembly” (Ezek 38:13). The verb is often used in reference to summoning/assembling people for a religious occasion (Exod 35:1; Lev 8:3-4; Num 8:9; Deut 4:10; Josh 18:1; 22:12; 1 Kgs 8:1; 2 Chr 5:2-3), a political occasion (2 Sam 20:14), a military occasion (Judg 20:11; 2 Chr 11:1), or a judicial occasion (Job 11:10). The Hiphil stem is used to describe the action of the leader (usually a single individual who possesses/commands authority) summoning the people, e.g., Moses (Exod 35:1; Lev 8:3; Num 20:10), Moses and Aaron (Num 1:18), Korah (Num 16:19), King David (1 Chr 13:5; 15:3; 28:1), King Solomon (1 Kgs 8:1; 12:21; 2 Chr 5:2), and King Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:1). In almost every case, he who assembles the people is a person invested with authority; he makes a public proclamation or leads the nation in an important action. The Niphal stem is most often used to describe the people assembling at the direction of the leader (e.g., Lev 8:4; Josh 18:1; 22:12; 1 Kgs 8:2; 2 Chr 5:3). The root קהל is a denominative derived from the noun קהל (*qahal*, “assembly, contingent”; HALOT 1079-80 s.v. קהל). The noun has numerous referents: the congregated nation as a whole in the wilderness, assembled for ceremonies and instruction (Exod 16:3; Lev 4:13, 21; 16:17, 33; Num 10:7; 14:5; 15:15; 16:3; 17:12; 19:20; 20:4, 6, 10, 12; Deut 9:10; 10:4; 18:16); the congregation of Israel assembled for divine worship (Pss 22:23, 26; 26:5; 35:18; 40:10; 107:32; 149:1; Lam 1:10); the postexilic community assembled to hear the Torah and instruction (Neh 13:1); a military contingent assembled for warfare (Num 16:3; 20:4; Judg 20:2; 21:5, 8; 1 Sam 17:47; 2 Chr 28:14); people summoned to court (Ezek 16:40; 23:46-47); judicial authorities (Jer 26:17; Prov 5:14; 26:26; Sir 7:7). The term is often used as a designation for Israel: “the assembly of Israel” (Lev 16:17; Deut 31:30; Josh 8:35; 1 Kgs 8:14, 22, 55; 12:3; 2 Chr 6:3, 12-13; Sir 50:13, 20), “the assembly of the congregation” (Exod 12:6); “the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel” (Num 14:5), and “the assembly of God” (Neh 13:1). The related noun קהילה (*q<sup>h</sup>illah*) means “assembly, community” (HALOT 1080 s.v. קהילה), e.g., in the idiom נתן קהילה (*natan q<sup>h</sup>illah*) “to hold an assembly”: “I called a great assembly to deal with them” (Neh 5:7).

**2 tn** Heb “son of David” or “a son of David.”

**3 sn** While 1:1 says only “king in Jerusalem” (מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם, *melekh birushalayim*), 1:12 adds “king over Israel in Jerusalem” (מֶלֶךְ בְּנִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם, *melekh 'al-yisra'el birushalayim*). The LXX adds “Israel” in 1:1 to harmonize with 1:12; however, the MT makes sense as it stands. Apart from David, only Solomon was “king over Israel in Jerusalem” – unless the term “Israel” (יִשְׂרָאֵל, *yisra'el*) in 1:12 is used for Judah or the postexilic community. Solomon would fit the description of the author of this book, who is characterized by great wisdom (1:13, 16), great wealth (2:8), numerous servants (2:7), great projects (2:4-6), and the collection, editing and writings of many proverbs (12:9-10). All of this generally suggests Solomonic authorship. However, many scholars deny Solomonic authorship on the basis of linguistic and historical arguments.

**4 sn** The form of the title is typical: (1) “the words of [the writer],” (2) his family name or name of his father, and (3) his social/political position in Israel (e.g., Prov 22:17; 24:23; 30:1; 31:1). Sometimes, the writer’s qualifications are given in the introduction to an OT book (e.g., Jer 1:1; Amos 1:1). Qoheleth lists his qualifications at the end of the book (12:9-12).

**map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

## Introduction: Utter Futility

1:2 “Futile! Futile!” laments<sup>1</sup> the Teacher,<sup>2</sup>  
 “Absolutely futile!<sup>3</sup> Everything<sup>4</sup> is futile!”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Heb “says.”

<sup>2</sup> **sn** See the note on “Teacher” in v. 1.

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Heb “futility of futilities.” The phrase “absolutely futile” (הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים, *havel havalim*) is a superlative genitive construction (GKC 431 §133.י). When a plural genitive follows a singular construct noun of the same root, it indicates the most outstanding example of the person or thing described. Examples: קֹדֶשׁ הַקִּדְשִׁים (*qodesh haqqodashim*, “holy of holies”), i.e., “the most holy place” (Exod 26:33); שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים (*shir hashirim*, “song of songs”), i.e., “the most excellent song” (Song 1:1); אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֲדוֹנֵי הָאֲדוֹנִים (*elohe ha'elohim va'adone ha'adonim*, “the God of gods and Lord of lords”), i.e., “the highest God and the supreme Lord” (Deut 10:17). See also R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 17-18, §80; *IBHS* 154 §9.5.3j.

<sup>4</sup> **tn** Although *kol* (“everything, all”) is often used in an absolute or comprehensive sense (BDB 481 s.v. כָּל 1), it is frequently used as a synecdoche of the general for the specific, that is, its sense is limited contextually to the topic at hand (BDB 482 s.v. 2). This is particularly true of הַכֹּל (*hakkol*, BDB 482 s.v. 2.b) in which the article particularizes or limits the referent to the contextual or previously mentioned topic (e.g., Gen 16:12; 24:1; Exod 29:24; Lev 1:9, 13; 8:27; Deut 2:36; Josh 11:19 [see 2 Sam 19:31; 1 Kgs 14:26 = 2 Chr 12:9]; 21:43; 1 Sam 30:19; 2 Sam 17:3; 23:5; 24:23; 1 Kgs 6:18; 2 Kgs 24:16; Isa 29:11; 65:8; Jer 13:7, 10; Ezek 7:14; Pss 14:3; 49:18; 1 Chr 7:5; 28:19; 29:19; 2 Chr 28:6; 29:28; 31:5; 35:7; 36:17-18; Ezra 1:11; 2:42; 8:34-35; 10:17; Eccl 5:8). Thus, “all” does not always mean “all” in an absolute sense or universally in comprehension. In several cases the context limits its reference to two classes of objects or issues being discussed, so הַכֹּל means “both” (e.g., 2:14; 3:19; 9:1, 2). Thus, הַבֵּל refers only to what Qoheleth characterizes as “futile” (הַבֵּל, *havel*) in the context. Qoheleth does not mean that everything in an absolute, all-encompassing sense is futile. For example, the sovereign work of God is not “futile” (3:1-4:3); fearing God is not “futile” (2:26; 3:14-15; 11:9-12:1, 9, 13-14); and enjoying life as a righteous person under the blessing of God is not “futile” (2:24-26; 11:9-10). Only those objects or issues that are contextually placed under *kol* are designated as “futile” (הַבֵּל). The context of 1:3-15 suggests that 1:2 refers to the futility of secular human endeavor. The content and referent of 1:3-15 determines the referent of הַבֵּל in 1:2.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The term הַבֵּל (*havel*, “futile”) is repeated five times within the eight words of this verse for emphasis. The noun הַבֵּל is the key word in Ecclesiastes. The root is used in two ways in the OT, literally and figuratively. The literal, concrete sense is used in reference to the wind, man’s transitory breath, evanescent vapor (Isa 57:13; Pss 62:10; 144:4; Prov 21:6; Job 7:16). In this sense, it is often a synonym for “breath” or “wind” (Eccl 1:14; Isa 57:13; Jer 10:14). The literal sense lent itself to metaphorical senses: (1) breath/vapor/wind is non-physical, evanescent, and lacks concrete substance thus, the connotation “unsubstantial” (Jer 10:15; 16:19; 51:18), “profitless” or “fruitless” (Ps 78:33; Prov 13:11), “worthless” (2 Kgs 17:15; Jer 2:5; 10:3), “pointless” (Prov 21:6), “futile” (Lam 4:17; Eccl 1:2, 14; 2:1, 14-15), (2) breath/vapor/wind is transitory and fleeting – thus, the connotation “fleeting” or “transitory” (Prov 31:30; Eccl 6:12; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10; Job 7:16) and (3) breath/vapor/wind cannot be seen thus, the idea of “obscure,” “dark,” “difficult to understand,” “enigmatic” (Eccl 11:10). See *HALOT* 236-37 s.v. הַבֵּל; BDB 210-11 s.v. הַבֵּל. The metaphorical sense is used with the following synonyms: תוֹהוּ (*tohu*, “empty, vanity”; Isa 49:4), רִיק (*riq*, “profitless, useless”; Isa 30:7; Eccl 6:11), לֹא הוֹיֵל (*lo ho’il*, “worthless, profitless”; Is 30:6; 57:12; Jer 16:19). It is parallel to “few days” and “[days] which he passes like a shadow” (Eccl 6:12). It is used in reference to youth and vigor (11:10) and life (6:12; 7:15; 9:9), which are “transitory” or “fleeting.” The most common parallels to הַבֵּל in Ecclesiastes are the phrases “chasing after the wind” (רֵעֵת רוּחַ, *ruakh*) in 2:11, 17, 26; 7:14 and “what profit?” (מַה יִּתְרוֹן, *mah-yitron*) or “no profit” (אֵין יִתְרוֹן, *en yitron*) in 2:11; 3:19; 6:9. It is used

## Futility Illustrated from Nature

1:3 What benefit<sup>6</sup> do people<sup>7</sup> get from all  
 the effort  
 which<sup>8</sup> they expend<sup>9</sup> on earth?<sup>10</sup>

in reference to enigmas in life (6:2; 8:10, 14) and to the future which is obscure (11:8). It is often used in antithesis to terms connoting value: טוֹב (*tov*, “good, benefit, advantage”) and יֵת (*yoteron*, “profit, advantage, gain”). Because the concrete picture of the “wind” lends itself to the figurative connotation “futile,” the motto “This is futile” (זֶה הַבֵּל, *zeh havel*) is often used with the metaphor, “like striving after the wind” (רֵעֵת רוּחַ, *ruakh*) – a graphic picture of an expenditure of effort in vain because no one can catch the wind by chasing it (e.g., 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). Although it is the key word in Ecclesiastes, it should not be translated the same way in every place.

**sn** The motto *Everything is futile!* is the theme of the book. It occurs at the beginning (1:2) and end of the book (12:8), forming an envelope structure (*inclusio*). Everything described in 1:2-12:8 is the supporting proof of the thesis of 1:2. With few exceptions (e.g., 2:24-26; 3:14-15; 11:9-12:1, 9), everything described in 1:2-12:8 is characterized as “futile” (הַבֵּל, *havel*).

<sup>6</sup> **tn** The term “profit” (יֵתָרוֹן, *yoteron*) is used in Ecclesiastes to evaluate the ultimate benefit/effects of human activities, as is טוֹב (*tov*, “good, worthwhile”) as well (e.g., 2:1, 3). While some relative advantage/profit is recognized (e.g., light over darkness, and wisdom over folly), Qoheleth denies the ultimate advantage of all human endeavors (e.g., 2:11, 15).

<sup>7</sup> **tn** Heb “the man.” The Hebrew term could be used here in a generic sense, referring to the typical man (hence, “a man”). However, it is more likely that the form is collective and that humankind in general is in view (note NIV “man”). Note the reference to “a generation” coming and going in the next verse, as well as v. 13, where the phrase “the sons of man” (= humankind) appears. In this case the singular pronominal suffix and singular verb later in v. 3 reflect grammatical agreement, not individuality.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** The use of the relative pronoun *she* (“which”) – rather than the more common אֲשֶׁר (*asher*, “which”) – is a linguistic feature that is often used to try to date the book of Ecclesiastes. Noting that *she* is the dominant relative pronoun in Mishnaic Hebrew and that אֲשֶׁר does not appear as frequently (Jastrow 130 s.v. אֲשֶׁר), many scholars conclude that אֲשֶׁר is early and *she* is late. They conclude that the use of *she* in Ecclesiastes points to a late date for the book. However, as Samuel-Kings suggest, the *she* versus אֲשֶׁר phenomena may simply be a dialectical issue: אֲשֶׁר is commonly used in the south, and *she* in the north. The use of *she* in Ecclesiastes may indicate that the book was written in a northern rather than a southern province, not that it is a late book. This is supported from related Akkadian terms which occur in texts from the same periods: אֲשֶׁר is related to *asru* (“place”) and *she* is related to *sa* (“what”).

<sup>9</sup> **sn** The Hebrew root עָבַל (*amal*, “toil”) is repeated here for emphasis: “What gain does anyone have in his *toil* with which he *toils*.” For all his efforts, man’s endeavors and secular achievements will not produce anything of ultimate value that will radically revolutionize anything in the world. The term “toil” is used in a pejorative sense to emphasize that the only thing that man obtains ultimately from all his efforts is weariness and exhaustion. Due to sin, mankind has been cursed with the futility of his labor that renders work a “toilsome” task (Gen 3:17-19). Although it was not yet revealed to Qoheleth, God will one day deliver the redeemed from this plight in the future kingdom when man’s labor will no longer be toilsome, but profitable, fulfilling, and enjoyable (Isa 65:17-23).

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Heb “under the sun.”

**sn** This rhetorical question expects a negative answer: “Man has no gain in all his toil.” Ecclesiastes often uses rhetorical questions in this manner (e.g., 2:2; 3:9; 6:8, 11, 12; see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949).

1:4 A generation comes<sup>1</sup> and a generation goes,<sup>2</sup> but the earth remains<sup>3</sup> the same<sup>4</sup> through the ages.<sup>5</sup>  
1:5 The sun rises<sup>6</sup> and the sun sets;<sup>7</sup> it hurries away<sup>8</sup> to a place from which it

rises<sup>9</sup> again.<sup>10</sup>  
1:6 The wind goes to the south and circles around to the north; round and round<sup>11</sup> the wind goes and on its rounds it returns.<sup>12</sup>  
1:7 All the streams flow<sup>13</sup> into the sea, but the sea is not full, and to the place where the streams flow, there they will flow again.<sup>14</sup>

**1 tn** The participle הֹלֵךְ (*holekh*, “to walk, to go”) emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). The root הֹלַךְ (*halakh*) is repeated in this section (1:4a, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 7c) to emphasize the continual action and constant motion of everything in nature. Despite the continual action of everything in nature, there is no completion, attainment or rest for anything. The first use of הֹלֵךְ is in reference to man; all subsequent usages are in reference to nature – illustrations of the futility of human endeavor. Note: All the key terms used in 1:4 to describe the futility of human endeavor are repeated in 1:5-11 as illustrations from nature. The literary monotony in 1:4-11 mirrors the actual monotony of human action that repeats itself with no real change.

**2 tn** The participle הָבָה (*ba’*, “to go”) emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). The term is repeated in 1:4-5 to compare the futility of secular human accomplishments with the futile actions in nature: everything is in motion, but there is nothing new accomplished.

**3 tn** The participle עֹמֶדֶת (*omadet*, “to stand”) emphasizes a continual, durative, uninterrupted state (present universal condition). Man, despite all his secular accomplishments in all generations, makes no ultimate impact on the earth.

**4 tn** The term “the same” does not appear in Hebrew, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

**5 tn** The term עוֹלָם (*olam*) has a wide range of meanings: (1) indefinite time: “long time, duration,” often “eternal” or “eternity”; (2) future time: “things to come”; and (3) past time: “a long time back,” that is, the dark age of prehistory (*HALOT* 798–99 s.v. עוֹלָם; BDB 761–63 s.v. III עוֹלָם). It may also denote an indefinite period of “continuous existence” (BDB 762 s.v. III עוֹלָם 2.b). It is used in this sense in reference to things that remain the same for long periods: the earth (Eccl 1:4), the heavens (Ps 148:6), ruined cities (Isa 25:2; 32:14), ruined lands (Jer 18:16), nations (Isa 47:7), families (Ps 49:12; Isa 14:20), the dynasty of Saul (1 Sam 13:13), the house of Eli (2 Sam 2:30), continual enmity between nations (Ezek 25:15; 35:5), the exclusion of certain nations from the assembly (Deut 23:4; Neh 13:1), a perpetual reproach (Ps 78:66).

**6 tn** The Hebrew text has a perfect verbal form, but it should probably be emended to the participial form, which occurs in the last line of the verse. Note as well the use of participles in vv. 4-7 to describe what typically takes place in the natural world. The participle זֹרֵחַ (*zoreakh*, “to rise”) emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle): the sun is continually rising (and continually setting) day after day.

**7 tn Heb** “the sun goes.” The participle הָבָה (*ba’*, “to go”) emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle): the sun is continually rising and continually setting day after day. The repetition of הָבָה in 1:4-5 creates a comparison between the relative futility of all human endeavor (“a generation comes and a generation goes [בָּהָבָה]”) with the relative futility of the action of the sun (“the sun rises and the sun goes” [i.e., “sets, בָּהָבָה]).

**8 tn Heb** “hastens” or “pants.” The verb שָׂאָף (*sha’af*) has a three-fold range of meanings: (1) “to gasp; to pant,” (2) “to pant after; to long for,” and (3) “to hasten; to hurry” (*HALOT* 1375 s.v. שָׂאָף; BDB 983 s.v. I שָׂאָף). The related Aramaic root שָׂאָף means “to be thirsty; to be parched.” The Hebrew verb is used of “gasping” for breath, like a woman in the travail of childbirth (Isa 42:14); “panting” with eagerness or desire (Job 5:5; 7:2; 36:20; Ps 119:131; Jer 2:24) or “panting” with fatigue (Jer 14:6; Eccl 1:5). Here שָׂאָף personifies the sun, panting with fatigue, as it hastens to its destination (BDB 983 s.v. I שָׂאָף 1). The participle form depicts continual, uninterrupted, durative action (present universal use). Like the sun, man – for all his efforts – never really changes anything; all he accomplishes in his toil is to wear himself out.

**9 tn** The verb זֹרֵחַ (*zoreakh*, “to rise”) is repeated in this verse to emphasize that the sun is locked into a never changing, ever repeating monotonous cycle: rising, setting, rising, setting.

**10 tn** The word “again” does not appear in Hebrew, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

**11 tn** The Hebrew root כָּבַב (*savav*, “to circle around”) is repeated four times in this verse to depict the wind’s continual motion: “The wind circles around (כָּבַב, *sovev*)...round and round (כָּבַב כָּבַב)...its circuits (כְּבִיבוֹתָיו, *s<sup>v</sup>ivotayv*).” This repetition is designed for a rhetorical purpose – to emphasize that the wind is locked into a never ending cycle. This vicious circle of monotonous action does not change anything. The participle form is used three times to emphasize continual, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). Despite the fact that the wind is always changing direction, nothing really new ever happens. The constant shifting of the wind cannot hide the fact that this is nothing but a repeated cycle; nothing new happens here (e.g., 1:9-10).

**12 tn** The use of שָׁב (*shav*, Qal active participle masculine singular from שָׁב, “to return”) creates a wordplay (paronomasia) with the repetition of כָּבַב (*savav*, “to circle around”). The participle emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use).

**13 tn Heb** “are going” or “are walking.” The term הֹלְכִים (*hol<sup>k</sup>khim*, Qal active participle masculine plural from הֹלַךְ, *halakh*, “to walk”) emphasizes continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle). This may be an example of personification; this verb is normally used in reference to the human activity of walking. Qoheleth compares the flowing of river waters to the action of walking to draw out the comparison between the actions of man (1:4) and the actions of nature (1:5-11).

**14 tn Heb** “there they are returning to go.” The term שָׁבִים (*shavim*, Qal active participle masculine plural from שָׁב, “to return”) emphasizes the continual, durative action of the waters. The root שָׁב is repeated in 1:6-7 to emphasize that everything in nature (e.g., wind and water) continually repeats its actions. For all of the repetition of the cycles of nature, nothing changes; all the constant motion produces nothing new.

**sn** This verse does not refer to the cycle of evaporation or the return of water by underground streams, as sometimes suggested. Rather, it describes the constant flow of river waters to the sea. For all the action of the water – endless repetition and water constantly in motion – there is nothing new accomplished.

1:8 All this<sup>1</sup> monotony<sup>2</sup> is tiresome; no one can bear<sup>3</sup> to describe it.<sup>4</sup>  
 The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear ever content<sup>5</sup> with hearing.  
 1:9 What exists now<sup>6</sup> is what will be,<sup>7</sup> and what has been done is what will be done;  
 there is nothing truly new on earth.<sup>8</sup>  
 1:10 Is there anything about which someone can say, "Look at this! It is new!"<sup>9</sup> It was already<sup>10</sup> done long ago,<sup>11</sup> before

our time.<sup>12</sup>  
 1:11 No one remembers the former events,<sup>13</sup> nor will anyone remember<sup>14</sup> the events that are yet to happen;<sup>15</sup> they will not be remembered by the future generations.<sup>16</sup>

### *Futility of Secular Accomplishment*

1:12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The word "this" is not in Hebrew, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the things." The Hebrew term דְּבָרִים (*d'varim*, masculine plural noun from דָּבַר, *davar*) is often used to denote "words," but it can also refer to actions and events (*HALOT* 2:11 s.v. דָּבַר 3.a; *BDB* 183 s.v. דָּבַר IV.4). Here, it means "things," as is clear from the context: "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done" (1:9). Here דְּבָרִים can be nuanced "occurrences" or even "[natural] phenomena."

<sup>3</sup> **tn** *Heb* "is able."

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The Hebrew text has no stated object. The translation supplies "it" for stylistic reasons and clarification.

**sn** The statement *no one can bear to describe* it probably means that Qoheleth could have multiplied examples (beyond the sun, the wind, and the streams) of the endless cycle of futile events in nature. However, no tongue could ever tell, no eye could ever see, no ear could ever hear all the examples of this continual and futile activity.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The term מָלֵא (*male'*, "to be filled, to be satisfied") is repeated in 1:7-8 to draw a comparison between the futility in the cycle of nature and human secular accomplishments: lots of action, but no lasting effects. In 1:7 אֵינֶנּוּ מָלֵא ('*enen-nu male'*, "it is never filled") describes the futility of the water cycle: "All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is never filled." In 1:8 וְאֵזְרִי תִמְלֵא (וְאֵזְרִי תִמְלֵא, "it is never satisfied") describes the futility of human labor: "the ear is never satisfied with hearing."

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* "what is." The Hebrew verbal form is a perfect. Another option is to translate, "What has been." See the next line, which speaks of the past and the future.

<sup>7</sup> **tn** The Hebrew verbal form is an imperfect.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Heb* "under the sun."

<sup>9</sup> **tn** Alternately, "[Even when] there is something of which someone might claim...." The terms יֵשׁ דָּבָר שֶׁיֵּאמַר (*yesh davar she'yo'mar*) may be an interrogative clause without an introductory interrogative particle (*GKC* 47:3 §150.a). In questions, יֵשׁ often implies doubt about the existence of something (*BDB* 44:1 s.v. יֵשׁ 2.b). The *LXX* rendered it as a question, as do most English versions: "Is there anything of which it can be said...?" (*KJV*, *ASV*, *RSV*, *MLB*, *NEB*, *NASB*, *NIV*, *NRSV*). On the other hand, יֵשׁ is used elsewhere in the book of Ecclesiastes as a predication of existence ("There is...") to assert the existence of something (2:13, 21; 4:8, 9; 5:13[12]; 6:1, 11; 7:15; 8:6, 14; 9:4; 10:5). *HALOT* 44:3 s.v. יֵשׁ 2 renders דָּבָר שֶׁיֵּאמַר as "There is something...." This view is taken by several translations: "Even the thing of which we say..." (*NAB*), "Men may say of something..." (*Moffatt*), and "Sometimes there is a phenomena of which they say..." (*NJPS*).

<sup>10</sup> **tn** The perfect tense verb הָיָה (*hayah*) refers to a past perfect situation: It describes an action that is viewed as a remote past event from the perspective of the past. This past perfect situation is brought out by the temporal adverb בְּכָר (*k'var*, "already"; *HALOT* 45:9 s.v. בְּכָר; *BDB* 46:0 s.v. בְּכָר; cf. 1:10; 2:12, 16; 3:15; 4:2; 6:10; 9:6-7). The expression בְּכָר הָיָה + *inf* connotes a past perfect nuance: "it has already been" (*Ecc* 1:10; see *BDB* 46:0 s.v.).

<sup>11</sup> **sn** This does not deny man's creativity or inventiveness, only the ultimate newness of his accomplishments. For example, there is no essential difference between the first voyage to the moon and the discovery of America (different point of arrival, different vehicles of travel, but the same essential action and results).

<sup>12</sup> **tn** *Heb* "in the ages long ago before us."

<sup>13</sup> **tn** *Heb* "There is no remembrance of former things." The term רֵאשִׁוֹנִים (*ri'shonim*, "former things") is the masculine plural form of the adjective רֵאשִׁוֹן (*ri'shon*, "former, first, chief"; *BDB* 9:11 s.v. רֵאשִׁוֹן). When used in a temporal sense, the singular denotes "former" in time (*BDB* 9:11 s.v. 1.a) or "first" in time (*BDB* 9:11 s.v. 2.a). The plural form is only used to denote "former" in time: "former persons," i.e., ancestors, men of old (e.g., *Lev* 26:45; *Deut* 19:14; *Job* 18:20; *Isa* 61:4; *Ps* 79:8; *Sirach* 4:16) or "former things," i.e., past events (e.g., *Isa* 41:22; 42:9; 43:9, 18; 46:9; 48:3). See *BDB* 9:11 s.v. 1.a, which suggests that this usage refers to "former persons." This approach is adopted by several translations: "men of old" (*NEB*, *NAB*, *NIV*, *Moffatt*), "people of long ago" (*NRSV*), "earlier ones" (*NJPS*), and "former generations" (*ASV*). On the other hand, this Hebrew phrase may be nuanced "former things" or "earlier things" (*HALOT* 1:168 s.v. רֵאשִׁוֹן). This is adopted by some translations: "former things" (*KJV*, *RSV*) and "earlier things" (*NASB*). Although future generations are mentioned in 1:11, what they will not remember is the past events. The context of 1:3-11 focuses on human achievement, that is, former things.

<sup>14</sup> **tn** The term "remember" is not in the Hebrew text, but has been supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>15</sup> **tn** *Heb* "and also of the last things which will be." The term אַחֲרָיִים (*akharonim*, "the future things") is the masculine plural form of the adjective אַחֲרָיִם (*akharon*) which means "coming after" (*BDB* 30 s.v. אַחֲרָיִם) or "at the back" (*HALOT* 36 s.v. אַחֲרָיִם). When used in a temporal sense, it may mean (1) "later one; (2) "in the future"; (3) "last"; or (4) "at the last" or "in the end" (*HALOT* 36 s.v. 2). The plural form may be used in reference to (1) future generations, e.g., *Deut* 29:21; *Pss* 48:14; 78:4, 6; 102:19; *Job* 18:20; *Ecc* 4:16, or (2) future events, e.g., *Neh* 8:18 (*BDB* 30 s.v.). *BDB* 30 s.v. b suggests that this usage refers to "future generations," while *HALOT* 36 s.v. 2.c suggests future events. As mentioned in the previous note, it probably refers to future events rather than future generations.

**sn** The Hebrew terms translated *former events* and *future events* create a merism (two polar extremes encompass everything in between). This encompasses all secular achievements in human history past to future things yet to be done.

<sup>16</sup> **tn** *Heb* "There will not be any remembrance of them among those who come after."

**sn** According to Qoheleth, nothing new really happens under the sun (1:9). Apparent observations of what appears to be revolutionary are due to a lack of remembrance by subsequent generations of what happened long before their time in past generations (1:10-11a). And what will happen in future generations will not be remembered by the subsequent generations to arise after them (1:11b).

<sup>17</sup> **map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.





and what is missing<sup>1</sup> cannot be supplied.<sup>2</sup>

*Futility of Secular Wisdom*

**1:16** I thought to myself,<sup>3</sup>  
 “I have become much wiser<sup>4</sup> than any of  
 my predecessors who ruled<sup>5</sup> over Jeru-  
 salem;<sup>6</sup>  
**17** I have acquired much wisdom and  
 knowledge.”<sup>8</sup>  
**1:17** So I decided<sup>9</sup> to discern the benefit  
 of<sup>10</sup> wisdom and knowledge over<sup>11</sup>  
 foolish behavior and ideas;<sup>12</sup>  
 however, I concluded<sup>13</sup> that even<sup>14</sup> this  
 endeavor<sup>15</sup> is like<sup>16</sup> trying to chase the

wind!<sup>17</sup>

**1:18** For with great wisdom comes<sup>18</sup> great  
 frustration;  
 whoever increases his<sup>19</sup> knowledge mere-  
 ly<sup>20</sup> increases his<sup>21</sup> heartache.

*Futility of Self-Indulgent Pleasure*

**2:1** I thought to myself.<sup>22</sup>  
 “Come now,<sup>23</sup> I will try<sup>24</sup> self-indulgent  
 pleasure<sup>25</sup> to see<sup>26</sup> if it is worthwhile.”<sup>27</sup>

**1 tn** The Hebrew noun חסרון (*khesron*) is used in the OT only here and means “what is lacking” (as an antonym to יטרון [*yitron*], “what is profitable”; HALOT 339 s.v. חסרון; BDB 341 s.v. חסרון). It is an Aramaic loanword meaning “deficit.” The related verb חסר (*khasar*) means “to lack, to be in need of, to decrease, to lessen [in number]”; the related noun חסור (*khasor*) refers to “one in want of”; and the noun חסר (*kheser*) means “poverty, want” (HALOT 338 s.v. חסר; BDB 341 s.v. חסר). It refers to what is absent (zero in terms of quantity) rather than what is deficient (poor in terms of quality). The LXX misunderstood the term and rendered it as *usterēma*, “deficiency”: “deficiency cannot be numbered.” It is also misunderstood by a few English versions: “nor can you count up the defects in life” (Moffatt); “the number of fools is infinite” (Douay). However, most English versions correctly understand it as referring to what is lacking in terms of quantity: “what is lacking” (RSV, MLB, NASB, NIV, NRSV), “a lack” (NJPS), “that which is wanting” (KJV, ASV), “what is not there” (NEB), and “what is missing” (NAB).

**2 tn** Heb “cannot be counted” or “cannot be numbered.” The term חסרונה (*himmanot*, Niphal infinitive construct from נטה, *manah*, “to count”) is rendered literally by most translations: “[cannot] be counted” or “[cannot] be numbered” (KJV, ASV, RSV, MLB, NEB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, JPS, NJPS). However, the nuance “count” might function as a metonymy of effect for cause, that is, “to supply.” What is absent cannot be supplied (cause) therefore, it cannot be counted as present (effect). NAB adopts this approach: “what is missing cannot be supplied.”

**3 tn** Heb “I spoke, I, with my heart.”

**4 tn** Heb “I, look, I have made great and increased wisdom.” The expression הגדלתי הרוכסתי (*higdalti v<sup>h</sup>hosafiti*) is a verbal hendiadys; it means that Qoheleth had become the wisest man in the history of Jerusalem.

**5 tn** The phrase “who ruled” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**6 map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

**7 tn** Heb “my heart” (לבי, *libbi*). The term “heart” is a metonymy of part for the whole (“my heart” = myself).

**8 tn** Heb “My heart has seen much wisdom and knowledge.”

**9 tn** Heb “gave my heart,” or “set my mind.” See v. 13.

**10 tn** The phrase “the benefit of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**11 tn** The word “over” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**12 tn** The terms שכלות (*sikhlut*, “folly”) and הוללות (*holelot*, “foolishness”) are synonyms. The term שכלות (alternate spelling of חכמות, *sikhkut*) refers to foolish behavior (HALOT 755 s.v. שכלות), while הוללות refers to foolish ideas and mental blindness (HALOT 242 s.v. הוללות). Qoheleth uses these terms to refer to foolish ideas and self-indulgent pleasures (e.g., Eccl 2:2-3, 12-14; 7:25; 9:3; 10:1, 6, 13).

**13 tn** Heb “I know.”

**14 tn** The term גם (*gam*, “even”) is a particle of association and emphasis (HALOT 195 s.v. גם).

**15 tn** This term does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**16 tn** This term does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is

supplied in the translation for clarity.

**17 tn** Heb “striving of wind.”

**18 tn** This term does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**19 tn** This term does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**20 tn** This term does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**21 tn** This term does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**22 tn** Heb “I said, I, in my heart” (אמרתי אני בלבי, *amarti ani b<sup>e</sup>libbi*). The term “heart” (לב, *lev*) is a synecdoche of part (“heart”) for the whole (the whole person), and thus means “I said to myself” (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 648).

**23 tn** The Hebrew verb לכה (*l<sup>e</sup>kha*, “Come!”) is a weakened imperative, used merely as an introductory word, e.g., Gen 19:32; 31:44; Judg 19:11; 1 Sam 9:9-10; 11:14; 2 Kgs 3:7; Ps 66:5; Song 7:12; Isa 1:18; 2:3; Mic 4:2 (HALOT 246 s.v. הלך 2; BDB 234 s.v. הלך 1.5.f.2). Whenever לכה introduces an exhortation, it functions as an invitation to the audience to adopt a course of action that will be beneficial to the addressee or mutually beneficial to both the speaker and the addressee. Here, Qoheleth personifies his “heart” (לבי, *libbi*) and addresses himself. The examination of self-indulgent pleasure is designed to be beneficial to Qoheleth.

**24 tn** Or “test.” The cohortative אנסה (*anasse<sup>e</sup>kha*) emphasizes the resolve of the speaker. The term נסה (*nasah*, “to test”) means “to conduct a test,” that is, to conduct an experiment (Judg 6:39; Eccl 2:1; 7:23; Dan 1:12, 14; see HALOT 702 s.v. נסה 3; BDB 650 s.v. נסה 1). The verb נסה is often used as a synonym with בכה (*bakhah*, “to examine”; BDB 103 s.v. בכה 1) and 650 s.v. נסה 1) and לדיעה (*lada<sup>e</sup>at*, “to ascertain”; Deut 8:2).

**25 tn** Heb “I will test you with pleasure.” The term שמחה (*simkha*, “pleasure”) has a two-fold range of meanings: (1) it can refer to the legitimate enjoyment of life that Qoheleth affirms is good (5:17; 8:15; 9:7; 11:8, 9) and that God gives to those who please him (2:26; 5:19); or (2) it can refer to foolish pleasure, self-indulgent, frivolous merrymaking (2:1, 2; 7:4). The parallelism in 2:2 between שמחה and שחוק (*s<sup>e</sup>khoo*, “laughter, frivolous merrymaking”), which always appears in the context of banqueting, drinking, and merrymaking, suggests that the pejorative sense is in view in this context.

**sn** The statement *I will try self-indulgent pleasure* is a figurative expression known as metonymy of association. As 2:1-3 makes clear, it is not so much Qoheleth who is put to the test with pleasure, but rather that pleasure is put to the test by Qoheleth.

**26 tn** Heb “See what is good!” The volitive sequence of the cohortative אנסה (*anasse<sup>e</sup>kha*, “I will test you”) followed by *vav* + imperative ראה (*ra<sup>e</sup>ah*, “and see!”) denotes purpose/result: “I will test you...in order to see....” The verb ראה (*ra<sup>e</sup>ah*, “to see”) has a broad range of meanings (e.g., in the Qal stem 16 categories are listed in HALOT 1157-1160 s.v.). In this context it means “to discover; to perceive; to discern; to understand” (HALOT 1159 s.v. ראה 13; BDB 907 s.v. ראה 5).

**27 sn** The phrase “to see what is good” (ראה, *ra<sup>e</sup>ah*, “to see” + טוב, *tov*, “good”) is repeated twice in 2:1-3. This is the key phrase in this section of Ecclesiastes. Qoheleth sought to discover (ראה) whether merry-making offered any value (טוב) to mankind.

But I found<sup>1</sup> that it also is futile.<sup>2</sup>  
 2:2 I said of partying,<sup>3</sup> "It is folly,"  
 and of self-indulgent pleasure,<sup>4</sup> "It ac-  
 complishes nothing!"<sup>5</sup>  
 2:3 I thought deeply<sup>6</sup> about the effects of<sup>7</sup>  
 indulging<sup>8</sup> myself<sup>9</sup> with wine

(all the while<sup>10</sup> my mind was guiding me<sup>11</sup>  
 with wisdom)<sup>12</sup>  
 and the effects of<sup>13</sup> behaving foolishly,<sup>14</sup>  
 so that<sup>15</sup> I might discover what is profit-  
 able<sup>16</sup>  
 for people<sup>17</sup> to do on earth<sup>18</sup> during the  
 few days<sup>19</sup> of their lives.

**1 tn** The participle הִנֵּה (v<sup>h</sup>*hinneh*, literally "Behold!") occurs after verbs of perception to introduce what was seen, understood or discovered (HALOT 252 s.v. הִנֵּה 8). It is used to make the narrative graphic and vivid, enabling the reader to enter into the surprise of the speaker (BDB 244 s.v. הִנֵּה c). This is an example of the heterosis of the deictic particle ("Behold!") for a verb of perception ("I found"). See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 510-34.

**2 tn** This use of הֵבֵל (*hevel*) denotes "futile, worthless, fruitless, pointless" (HALOT 237 s.v. הֵבֵל 2; BDB 210-11 s.v. הֵבֵל 2). It is a synonym of מְהוֹלָה (*m<sup>h</sup>hohal*, "folly") in 2:2a and an antonym of יוֹב (*tov*, "worthwhile, beneficial") in 2:1b and 2:3c.

**3 tn** Heb "laughter." The term שִׂוּחַ (*s<sup>h</sup>khooq*, "laughter") has a fourfold range of meanings: (1) "joyful laughter" (Ps 126:2; Prov 14:13; Job 8:21); (2) "frivolous laughter, merrymaking" (Eccl 2:2; 7:3, 6); (3) "pleasure, sport" (Prov 10:23; Eccl 10:19); and (4) "derision, mockery, laughingstock" (Jer 20:7; 48:26, 27, 39; Job 12:4; Lam 3:14). See HALOT 1315 s.v. שִׂוּחַ; BDB 966 s.v. שִׂוּחַ. In Ecclesiastes, שִׂוּחַ is always used in contexts of self-indulgent banqueting, drinking, frivolous partying and merrymaking (Eccl 2:2; 7:3, 6; 10:19). It is distinct from "healthy" joy and laughter (Ps 126:2; Job 8:21). The connotation of "frivolous merrymaking" fits this context best.

**4 tn** The term שִׂמְחָה (*simkhah*, "pleasure") has a two-fold range of meanings in Ecclesiastes: (1) it can refer to the enjoyment of life that Qoheleth affirms is good (5:17; 8:15; 9:7; 11:8, 9) and that God gives to those who are pleasing to him (2:26; 5:19); and (2) it can refer to foolish pleasure, that is, frivolous merrymaking (2:1, 2; 7:4). The parallelism between שִׂוּחַ and שִׂמְחָה (*s<sup>h</sup>khooq*, "laughter, frivolous merrymaking") in 2:2 suggests that the pejorative sense is in view here.

**5 tn** Heb "What does it accomplish?" The rhetorical question "What does it accomplish?" expects a negative answer: "It accomplishes nothing!" (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949-51). See, e.g., Gen 1:19; 18:14, 17; Deut 7:17; 1 Sam 2:25; Job 40:2; Pss 56:7[8]; 90:11; 94:16; 106:2; Eccl 3:21.

**6 tn** Heb "In my heart I explored." The verb תִּוֵּר (*tur*, "to seek out, to spy out, to explore") is used in the OT to describe: (1) the physical activity of "spying out" or "exploring" geographical locations (Num 13:2, 16, 17, 21, 25, 32; 14:6, 7, 34, 36, 38; Job 39:8) and (2) the mental activity of "exploring" or "examining" a course of action or the effects of an action (Eccl 1:13; 2:3; 7:25; 9:1). See BDB 1064 s.v. תִּוֵּר 2; HALOT 1708 s.v. תִּוֵּר. It was used as a synonym with דָּרַשׁ (*darash*, "to study") in 1:13: "I devoted myself to study (דָּרַשׁ, *lidrosh*) and to explore (תִּוֵּר, *latur*)."

**sn** As the repetition of the term לֵב (*lev*, "heart" or "mind") indicates (2:1, 3), this experiment appears to have been only an intellectual exercise or a cognitive reflection: "I said to myself (*Heb* "in my heart [or 'mind']": 2:1); 'I explored with my mind (*Heb* "heart": 2:3a); and 'my mind (*Heb* "heart") guiding me with wisdom" (2:3b). Qoheleth himself did not indulge in drunkenness, but he contemplated the value of self-indulgence in his mind.

**7 tn** The phrase "the effects of" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**8 tn** Or "I sought to cheer my flesh with wine." The term לִמְשַׁח (*limshakh*, Qal infinitive construct from מִשַּׁח, *mashakh*, "to draw, pull") functions in a complementary sense with the preceding verb תִּוֵּר (*tur* "to examine"): *Heb* "I sought to draw out my flesh with wine" or "I [mentally] explored [the effects] of drawing out my flesh with wine." The verb מִשַּׁח means "to draw, to drag along, to lead" (BDB 604 s.v. מִשַּׁח) or "to draw out; to stretch out [to full length]; to drag; to pull; to seize; to carry off; to pull; to go" (HALOT 645-46 s.v. מִשַּׁח). BDB suggests that this use be nuanced "to draw, to attract, to gratify" the flesh, that is, "to cheer" (BDB 604 s.v. מִשַּׁח 7). While this meaning is not attested elsewhere in the OT, it is found in Mishnaic Hebrew: "to attract" (Qal), e.g., "it is different with heresy, be-

cause it attracts [i.e., persuades, offers inducements]" (*b. Avodah Zarah* 27b) and "to be attracted, carried away, seduced," e.g., "he was drawn after them, he indulged in the luxuries of the palace" (*b. Shabbat* 147b). See Jastrow 853-54 s.v. מִשַּׁח. Here it denotes "to stretch; to draw out [to full length]," that is, "to revive; to restore" the body (HALOT 646 s.v. מִשַּׁח [sic] 3). The statement is a metonymy of cause (i.e., indulging the flesh with wine) for effect (i.e., the effects of self-indulgence).

**9 tn** Heb "my flesh." The term בָּשָׂר (*b<sup>s</sup>sari*, "my flesh") may function as a synecdoche of part (i.e., flesh) for the whole (i.e., whole person). See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 642. One could translate, "I sought to cheer myself."

**10 tn** The phrase "all the while" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**11 tn** The word "me" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**12 tn** Heb "and my heart was leading along in wisdom." The *vav* + noun, לִבִּי (*v<sup>l</sup>libbi*) introduces a disjunctive, parenthetical clause designed to qualify the speaker's remarks lest he be misunderstood: "Now my heart/mind...." He emphasizes that he never lost control of his senses in this process. It was a purely mental, cognitive endeavor; he never actually gave himself over to wanton self-indulgence in wine or folly.

**13 tn** The phrase "the effects of" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**14 tn** Heb "embracing folly." The verb אָחַז (*'akhoz*, "to embrace") is normally used to describe the physical action of taking hold of an object. Here it is used metaphorically to describe a person's choice of lifestyle, that is, adopting a particular course of moral conduct (e.g., Job 17:9); see HALOT 31-32 s.v. אָחַז; BDB 28 s.v. אָחַז.

**15 tn** Or "until." The construction עַד אֲשֶׁר (*'ad 'asher*, "until") introduces a temporal result clause (e.g., Gen 27:44; 28:15; Num 21:35; Isa 6:11); see HALOT 787 s.v. III עַד B.b. With an imperfect verb (such as אָרַח, *er'eh*, "to see"), Qal imperfect first common singular from רָאָה, *ra'ah*, "to see"), the compound construction עַד אֲשֶׁר usually refers to future time (Gen 27:44; 29:8; Exod 23:30; 24:14; Lev 22:4; Num 11:20; 20:17; 1 Sam 22:3; Hos 5:15), but it also rarely refers to past time (Jonah 4:5; Eccl 2:3); see BDB 725 s.v. III עַד I.1.a.b. Joüon 2:370 §113.c notes that when the compound construction עַד אֲשֶׁר is occasionally used with an imperfect depicting past action to denote a virtual nuance of purpose: "until" = "so that," e.g., Jonah 4:5; Eccl 2:3.

**16 tn** Heb "I might see where is the good?" The interrogative particle אַי ("where?") used with the demonstrative pronoun זה (*zeh*, "this") forms an idiom: "where [then]?" (HALOT 37-38 s.v. אַי 2.a; see, e.g., 1 Sam 9:18; 1 Kgs 13:12; 2 Kgs 3:8; Isa 50:1; 66:1; Jer 6:16; Job 28:12, 20; 38:19, 24; Esth 7:5). The phrase אַי זה טוֹב (*e-zeh tov*) is an indirect question that literally means, "Where is the good?" that is, "what good?" (HALOT 38 s.v. אַי 2.d).

**17 tn** Heb "the sons of man."

**18 tn** Heb "under the heavens."

**19 tn** Heb "number of the days." The Hebrew noun מִסְפָּר (*mispār*, "number, quantity") sometimes means "few" (e.g., Gen 34:30; Num 9:20; Deut 4:27; 33:6; Isa 10:19; Jer 44:28; Ezek 12:16; Ps 105:12; Job 16:22; 1 Chr 16:19); see HALOT 607 s.v. מִסְפָּר 2.b; BDB 709 s.v. מִסְפָּר 1.a. This phrase is an idiom that means, "during all their lives" (BDB 709 s.v.), "during their total [short] time of life," that is, "as long as they live" (HALOT 608 s.v. מִסְפָּר 3.d). Ecclesiastes often emphasizes the brevity of life (e.g., 5:17; 6:12; 9:9). The LXX rendered מִסְפָּר in a woodenly literal sense: ἀριθμὸν (*arithmon*, "the number [of days of their lives]"). Several English translations adopt a similar approach: "all the days of their life" (ASV, Douay) and "the number of days of their lives" (YLT). However, this idiom is

*Futility of Materialism*

2:4 I increased my possessions:<sup>1</sup>  
 I built houses for myself;<sup>2</sup>  
 I planted vineyards for myself.  
 2:5 I designed<sup>3</sup> royal gardens<sup>4</sup> and parks<sup>5</sup>  
 for myself,  
 and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in  
 them.  
 2:6 I constructed pools of water for my-  
 self,  
 to irrigate my grove<sup>6</sup> of flourishing trees.  
 2:7 I purchased male and female slaves,  
 and I owned slaves who were born in my  
 house;<sup>7</sup>

I also possessed more livestock – both  
 herds and flocks –  
 than any of my predecessors in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>  
 2:8 I also amassed silver and gold for  
 myself,  
 as well as valuable treasures<sup>9</sup> taken from  
 kingdoms and provinces.<sup>10</sup>  
 I acquired male singers and female sing-  
 ers for myself,  
 and what gives a man sensual delight<sup>11</sup>  
 – a harem of beautiful concubines!<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> map For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

<sup>9</sup> tn The term מְגִלָּה (*sēgullāh*) denotes “personal property” (HALOT 742 s.v. מְגִלָּה 1) or “valued property, personal treasure” (BDB 688 s.v. מְגִלָּה 2). Elsewhere, it refers to a king’s silver and gold (1 Chr 27:3). It is related to Akkadian *sug/kullu* “flock” (AHw 2:1053-54) and *sikiltu* “private property [belonging to the king]” (AHw 2:1041). The term refers to the personal, private and valued possessions of kings, which do not pass into the hands of the state.

<sup>10</sup> tn Heb “of kings and provinces.” This personal treasure was taken as tribute from other kings and governors. See T. Longman III, *Ecclesiastes* (NICOT), 92.

<sup>11</sup> tn Heb “and sensual delights of the sons of man.” The noun הֵנֵנֵנִי (*ta’anug*) has a three-fold range of meanings: (1) “luxury; comfort” (Mic 2:9; Prov 19:10; Sir 6:28; 11:27; 14:16; 37:29; 41:1); (2) “pleasure; delight” of sexual love (Song 7:7); and (3) “daintiness; feminine” (Mic 1:16); see HALOT 1769 s.v. הֵנֵנֵנִי; BDB 772 s.v. הֵנֵנֵנִי. The related adjective הֵנֵנֵנִי (*anog*, “pampered; dainty”) is used to describe a pampered woman (Deut 28:56), to personify Babylon as a delicate woman (Isa 47:1), and to ridicule delicate men (Deut 28:54); see HALOT 851 s.v. הֵנֵנֵנִי; BDB 772 s.v. הֵנֵנֵנִי. It is related to the noun הֵנֵנֵנִי (*oneg*, “pleasure; exquisite delight; daintiness”; see HALOT 851 s.v. הֵנֵנֵנִי; BDB 772 s.v. הֵנֵנֵנִי) and the verb הֵנֵנֵנִי which means “to be soft; to be delicate” and “pleasurable” (Pual) and “to pamper oneself” and “to take delight or pleasure in” (HALOT 851 s.v. הֵנֵנֵנִי; BDB 772 s.v. הֵנֵנֵנִי). The root הֵנֵנֵנִי is paralleled with רַךְ (*rokh*, Deut 28:56), רַךְ (*rakh*, Deut 28:54), and רַבֵּוּ (*rakkah*, Deut 28:56) with the meanings “delicate; soft; tender; weak; coddled; pampered.” The context of Eccl 2:4-11 suggests that it denotes either “luxury” as in “the luxuries of commoners” (NJPS) or “pleasure; delight” as in “the delights of men” (KJV, NASB, NIV). Part of the difficulty in determining the meaning of this term is caused by the ambiguity in meaning of its referent, namely, the appositional phrase שִׂדְדָה וְיָוֵדוֹת (*shiddah v’shiddot*), the meaning of which is uncertain (see the note on the phrase “a harem of beautiful concubines” at the end of this verse).

<sup>12</sup> tn The meaning of the superlative construction שִׂדְדָה וְיָוֵדוֹת (*shiddah v’shiddot*) is uncertain because the term שִׂדְדָה (*shiddah*) occurs only here in the OT. There are four basic approaches to the phrase: (1) Most scholars suggest that it refers to a royal harem and that it is in apposition to “the sensual delights of man” (וְהֵנֵנֵנִי בְנֵי הָאָדָם, *v’he’anugot b’ne ha’adam*). There are four variations of this approach: (a) There is a possible connection to the Ugaritic *shu* “mistress, lady” and the Arabic *sitt* “lady” (HALOT 1420 s.v. שִׂדְדָה). (b) German scholars relate it to Assyrian *sadadu* “love” (Delitzsch, König, Wildeboer, Siegfried); however, BDB questions this connection (BDB 994 s.v. שִׂדְדָה). (c) Ibn Ezra relates it to Il שָׂדָה (*shad*) “plunder; spoil” or שִׂדָה “[women] taken by violence,” and suggests that it refers to the occupants of the royal harem. (d) BDB connects it to the Hebrew noun שֶׁדַּי (*shad*, “breast”; e.g., Isa 28:9; Ezek 16:7; 23:3, 21, 34; Hos 2:4; 9:14; Song 1:13; 4:5; 7:4, 8, 9; 8:1, 8, 10; Job 3:12) adding that שִׂדָה is related to the cognate Arabic and Aramaic roots meaning “breast” (BDB 994 s.v.). This would be a synecdoche of part (i.e., breast) for the whole (i.e., woman), similar to the idiom “one womb, two wombs” (רַחֲמֵי רַחֲמָתַיִם, *rakhm rakhmatayim*) where “womb” = woman (Judg 5:30). This is the approach taken by most English versions: “many concubines” (NASB, RSV, NRSV), “a wife and wives” (YLT), “mistresses galore” (MLB), “many a mistress”

handled well by a number of English translations: “during the few days of their lives” (RSV, NRSV, NASB, NIV, Moffatt, NJPS), “during the limited days of their life” (NAB), and “throughout the brief span of their lives” (NEB).

<sup>1</sup> tn Or “my works”; or “my accomplishments.” The term מְעָשָׂי (*ma’asay*, “my works”) has been handled in two basic ways: (1) great works or projects, and (2) possessions. The latter assumes a metonymy, one’s effort standing for the possessions it produces. Both interpretations are reflected in the major English translations: “works” (KJV, NEB, NAB, ASV, NASB, MLB, RSV, Douay, Moffatt), “projects” (NIV), and “possessions” (NJPS).

<sup>2</sup> sn This section (2:4-11) is unified and bracketed by the repetition of the verb גָּדַל (*gadal*, “to increase”) which occurs at the beginning (2:4) and end (2:9), and by the repetition of the root עָשָׂה (noun: “works” and verb: “to do, make, acquire”) which occurs throughout the section (2:4, 5, 6, 8, 11).

<sup>3</sup> sn The expression for myself is repeated eight times in 2:4-8 to emphasize that Qoheleth did not deny himself any acquisition. He indulged himself in acquiring everything he desired. His vast resources as king allowed him the unlimited opportunity to indulge himself. He could have anything his heart desired, and he did.

<sup>4</sup> tn Heb “made.”

<sup>5</sup> tn The term does not refer here to vegetable gardens, but to orchards (cf. the next line). In the same way the so-called “garden” of Eden was actually an orchard filled with fruit trees. See Gen 2:8-9.

<sup>6</sup> tn The noun פָּרְדֵּס (*pardes*, “garden, parkland, forest”) is a foreign loanword that occurs only 3 times in biblical Hebrew (Song 4:13; Eccl 2:5; Neh 2:8). The original Old Persian term *pairidaeza* designated the enclosed parks and pleasure-grounds that were the exclusive domain of the Persian kings and nobility (HALOT 963 s.v. פָּרְדֵּס; LSJ 1308 s.v. παραδείσος). The related Babylonian term *pardesu* “marvelous garden” referred to the enclosed parks of the kings (AHw 2:833 and 3:1582). The term passed into Greek as παραδείσος (*paradeisos*, “enclosed park, pleasure-ground”), referring to the enclosed parks and gardens of the Persian kings (LSJ 1308). The Greek term has been transliterated into English as “paradise.”

<sup>7</sup> tn Heb “to water from them a grove” (or “forest”).

<sup>8</sup> tn The phrase “sons of a house” בְּנֵי בַיִת, *v’ne bayit*) appears to be parallel to “a son of my house” בֶּן־בֵּיתִי (*ben-beti*) which refers to a person born into slavery from male and female servants in the master’s possession, e.g., Eleazar of Damascus (Gen 15:3). The phrase appears to denote children born from male and female slaves already in his possession, that is, “homeborn slaves” (NASB) or “other slaves who were born in my house” (NIV). Apparently confusing the sense of the phrase with the referent of the phrase in Gen 15:3, NJPS erroneously suggests “stewards” in Eccl 2:7.



2:9 So<sup>4</sup> I was far wealthier<sup>2</sup> than all my predecessors in Jerusalem, yet I maintained my objectivity:<sup>3</sup>

2:10 I did not restrain myself from getting whatever I wanted;<sup>4</sup> I did not deny myself anything that would bring me pleasure.<sup>5</sup>

So all my accomplishments gave me joy;<sup>6</sup> this was my reward for all my effort.<sup>7</sup>

2:11 Yet when I reflected on everything I had accomplished<sup>8</sup> and on all the effort that I had expended to accomplish it,<sup>9</sup>

I concluded:<sup>10</sup> “All these<sup>11</sup> achievements and possessions<sup>12</sup> are ultimately<sup>13</sup> profitless<sup>14</sup> –

like chasing the wind!

There is nothing gained<sup>15</sup> from them<sup>16</sup> on earth.”<sup>17</sup>

(Moffatt) and “a harem” (NIV). This is the approach suggested by the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project: “une femme et des femmes” = one or two women (e.g., Judg 5:30); see D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:566. (2) The NJPS connects it to the Mishnaic Hebrew noun שָׂדֵה (which became שִׂדָּה (“a strong box, chest”); Jastrow 1558 s.v. שִׂדָּה) and renders the phrase “coffers and coffers of them” in apposition to the phrase “the luxuries of commoners” (וְהַתְּעוּבָה בְּנֵי הָאָדָם). (3) KJV and ASV take the phrase in apposition to “male and female singers” and translate it as “musical instruments.” However, there is no known Hebrew term that would justify this approach. (4) The LXX related the term to the Aramaic root שָׂדָא (“to pour out [wine]”) and rendered the phrase as οἰνοχοῶν καὶ οἰνοχοῶς (*oinochoon kai oinochoas*), “a male-butler and female cupbearers.” Aquila took a similar approach: κουλίκιον καὶ κουλίκια (*kulikion kai kulikia*), “wine cups and wine vessels.” This is reflected in the Vulgate and Douay: “cups and vessels to serve to pour out wine.” Although the semantic meaning of the term שָׂדֵה וְשִׂדָּה (“a breast of breasts”) is uncertain, the grammatical/syntactical form of the phrase is straightforward: (1) It is in apposition to the preceding line, “the delights of the son of men” (וְהַתְּעוּבָה בְּנֵי הָאָדָם). (2) The phrase is a superlative construction. When the second word is plural and it follows a noun from the same root which is singular, it indicates the best or most outstanding example of the person or thing so described. In addition to the Judg 5:30 parallel cited above, see the expression “a generation, generations” in Pss 72:5; 102:25; Isa 51:8. Unlike, Eccl 2:8, this juxtapositioning of the singular and plural to express the superlative usually involves a construct form. See קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים (*qodesh haqqodoshim*, “the holy of holies,” i.e., “the most holy place”; Exod 26:33); שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים (*shir hashirim*, “the song of songs,” i.e., “the most excellent song”; Song 1:1); אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (*elohi ha'elohim va'adone ha'adonim*, “the God of gods and Lord of lords,” i.e., “the Highest God and the Supreme Lord”; Deut 10:17); עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים (*eved'avadim*, “a slave of slaves,” i.e., “the most abject slave”; Gen 9:25). See GKC 431 §133j; R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 17-18, §80; *IBHS* 154 §9.5.3j. If the semantic meaning of the terms שָׂדֵה וְשִׂדָּה denotes “a breast (among) breasts” or “a lady (among) ladies” (Eccl 2:8, but see the previous note on the phrase “a man’s sensual delights”), the superlative construction may connote “the most beautiful breasts” (metonymy of part for the whole) or “the most beautiful woman.” This might refer to a harem of concubines or to one woman (the wife of the king?) who was the most beautiful woman in the land.

**sn** Concubines were slave women in ancient Near Eastern societies who were the legal property of their master, but who could have legitimate sexual relations with their master. A concubine’s status was more elevated than a mere servant, but she was not free and did not have the legal rights of a free wife. The children of a concubine could, in some instances, become equal heirs with the children of the free wife. After the period of the Judges concubines may have become more of a royal prerogative (2 Sam 21:10-14; 1 Kgs 11:3).

**1** **tn** The *vav* prefixed to וְגִדְלֵתִי (*vav gadalti*, *vav* + Qal perfect first common singular from *gadal*, “to be great; to increase”) functions in a final summarizing sense, that is, it introduces the concluding summary of 2:4-9.

**2** **tn** *Heb* “I became great and I surpassed” (וְגִדְלֵתִי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי). This is a verbal hendiadys in which the second verb functions adverbially, modifying the first: “I became far greater.” Most translations miss the hendiadys and render the line in a woodenly literal sense (KJV, ASV, RSV, NEB, NRSV, NAB, NASB, MLB, Moffatt), while only a few recognize the presence of hendiadys here: “I became greater by far” (NIV) and “I gained more” (NJPS).

**3** **tn** *Heb* “yet my wisdom stood for me,” meaning he retained his wise perspective despite his great wealth.

**4** **tn** *Heb* “all which my eyes asked for, I did not withhold from them.”

**5** **tn** *Heb* “I did not refuse my heart any pleasure.” The term לִבִּי (*libbi*, “my heart”) is a synecdoche of part (i.e., heart) for the whole (i.e., whole person); see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 648. The term is repeated twice in 2:10 for emphasis.

**6** **tn** *Heb* “So my heart was joyful from all my toil.”

**7** **tn** *Heb* “and this was my portion from all my toil.”

**8** **tn** *Heb* “all my works that my hands had done.”

**9** **tn** *Heb* “and all the toil with which I had toiled in doing it.” The term עָמַל (*amal*, “toil”) is repeated to emphasize the burden and weariness of the labor which Qoheleth exerted in his accomplishments.

**10** **tn** *Heb* “Behold!”

**11** **tn** The term הַכֹּל (*hakkol*, “everything” or “all”) must be qualified and limited in reference to the topic that is dealt with in 2:4-11. This is an example of synecdoche of general for the specific; the general term “all” is used only in reference to the topic at hand. This is clear from the repetition of כֹּל (*kol*, “everything”) and (“all these things”) in 2:11.

**12** **tn** The phrase “achievements and possessions” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in translation for clarity.

**13** **tn** The term “ultimately” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**14** **tn** The parallelism with יִתְרוֹן (*yitron*), “profit; advantage; gain”) indicates that הֵבֵל (*hevel*) should be nuanced as “profitless, fruitless, futile” in this context. While labor offers some relative and temporal benefits, such as material acquisitions and the enjoyment of the work of one’s hands, there is no ultimate benefit to be gained from secular human achievement.

**15** **tn** The noun יִתְרוֹן (*yitron*, “profit”) has a two-fold range of meanings: (1) “what comes of [something]; result” (Eccl 1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10) and (2) “profit; advantage” (Eccl 2:13; 10:11); see HALOT 452-53 s.v. יִתְרוֹן. It is derived from the noun יָתַר (*yeter*, “what is left behind; remainder”; HALOT 452 s.v. יָתַר). The related verb יָתַר (*yatar*) denotes “to be left over; to survive” (Niphal) and “to have left over” (Hiphil); see HALOT 451-52 s.v. יָתַר. When used literally, יִתְרוֹן refers to what is left over after expenses (gain or profit); when used figuratively, it refers to what is advantageous or of benefit. Though some things have relative advantage over others (e.g., light over darkness, and wisdom over folly in 2:13), there is no ultimate profit in man’s labor due to death.

**16** **tn** The phrase “from them” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**17** **tn** *Heb* “under the sun.”

Wisdom is Better than Folly

2:12 Next, I decided to consider<sup>1</sup> wisdom, as well as foolish behavior and ideas.<sup>2</sup>

For what more can the king's successor do than what the king<sup>3</sup> has already done?

2:13 I realized that wisdom is preferable to folly,<sup>4</sup>

just as light is preferable to darkness:

2:14 The wise man can see where he is going,<sup>5</sup> but the fool walks in darkness.

Yet I also realized that the same fate<sup>6</sup> happens to them both.<sup>7</sup>

2:15 So I thought to myself, "The fate of the fool will happen even to me!<sup>8</sup>

Then what did I gain by becoming so excessively<sup>9</sup> wise"<sup>10</sup>

So I lamented to myself,<sup>11</sup>

"The benefits of wisdom<sup>12</sup> are ultimately<sup>13</sup> meaningless!"

2:16 For the wise man, like<sup>14</sup> the fool, will not be remembered for very long,<sup>15</sup> because<sup>16</sup> in the days to come, both will already have been forgotten.<sup>17</sup>

Alas,<sup>18</sup> the wise man dies – just like<sup>19</sup> the fool!

2:17 So I loathed<sup>20</sup> life<sup>21</sup> because what

<sup>1</sup> tn Heb "and I turned to see."

<sup>2</sup> sn See 1:17 for the same expression. Throughout 2:1-11, Qoheleth evaluated the merits of merrymaking (2:1-3), accomplishing grand things (2:4-6), amassing great wealth (2:7-8), and secular acquisitions and accomplishments (2:9-10). Now, he reflects on the benefit in life in living wisely and not giving oneself over to frivolous self-indulgence.

<sup>3</sup> tc The Hebrew text reads עשירי ('asahu, "they have done it"); Qal perfect 3rd person masculine plural from עשה ['asah] + 3rd person masculine singular suffix). However, many medieval Hebrew MSS read עשירי ('asahu, "he has done"); Qal perfect 3rd person masculine singular from עשה, reflected in the LXX and Syriac. The error was caused by dittography (ו, vav, written twice) or by orthographic confusion between ו and ה (hey) in וי (confused as וי) at the end of 2:12 and beginning of 2:13. The 3rd person masculine singular referent of עשירי "what he has done" is the king, that is, Qoheleth himself. The referent (the king) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>4</sup> tn Heb "and I saw that there is profit for wisdom more than for folly."

<sup>5</sup> tn Heb "has his eyes in his head." The term עין ('ayin, "eye") is used figuratively in reference to mental and spiritual faculties (BDB 744 s.v. עין 3.a). The term "eye" is a metonymy of cause (eye) for effect (sight and perception).

<sup>6</sup> sn The common fate to which Qoheleth refers is death.

<sup>7</sup> tn The term כולם (kullam, "all of them") denotes "both of them." This is an example of synecdoche of general ("all of them") for the specific ("both of them," that is, both the wise man and the fool).

<sup>8</sup> tn The emphatic use of the 1st person common singular personal pronoun אני ('ani, "me") with the emphatic particle of association גם (gam, "even, as well as"; HALOT 195-96 s.v. גם) appears to emphasize the 1st person common singular suffix on יקרני (yiqreni) "it will befall [or "happen to"] me" (Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular + 1st person common singular suffix from קרה, qaraha, "to befall; to happen to"); see GKC 438 §135.e. Qoheleth laments not that the fate of the wise man is the same as that of the fool, but that even he himself – the wisest man of all – would fare no better in the end than the most foolish.

<sup>9</sup> tn The adjective יותר (yoter) means "too much; excessive," e.g., 7:16 "excessively righteous" (HALOT 404 s.v. יותר; BDB 452 s.v. יותר). It is derived from the root יתר (yeter, "what is left over"); see HALOT 452 s.v. יתר. It is related to the verbal root יתר (Niphal "to be left over"; Hiphil "to have left over"); see HALOT 451-52 s.v. יתר. The adjective is related to יתרון (yitron, "advantage; profit") which is a key-term in this section, creating a word-play: The wise man has a relative "advantage" (יתרון) over the fool (2:13-14a); however, there is no ultimate advantage because both share the same fate, i.e., death (2:14b-15a). Thus, Qoheleth's acquisition of tremendous wisdom (1:16; 2:9) was "excessive" because it exceeded its relative advantage over folly: it could not deliver him from the same fate as the fool. He had striven to obtain wisdom, yet it held no ultimate advantage.

<sup>10</sup> tn Heb "And why was I wise (to) excess?" The rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: "I gained nothing!" (E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949).

<sup>11</sup> tn Heb "So I said in my heart."

<sup>12</sup> tn Heb "and also this," referring to the relative advantage of wisdom over folly.

<sup>13</sup> tn The word "ultimately" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>14</sup> tn The preposition עם ('im, "with") may occasionally function in a comparative sense, meaning "together with; even as; like" (e.g., Eccl 1:11; 2:16; 7:11; Job 9:26; 1 Chr 14:10; 20:6; 25:8; see HALOT 839 s.v. עם 2). When used to describe a common lot, it connotes "together with" (Gen 18:23, 25; 1 Chr 24:5; Job 3:14, 15; 30:1; Pss 26:9; 28:3; 69:29; Isa 38:11), hence "like" (Pss 73:5; 106:6; Eccl 2:16; see BDB 767-68 s.v. עם 1.e).

<sup>15</sup> tn As HALOT 798-99 s.v. עולם and BDB 762-64 s.v. עולם note, עולם ('olam) has a wide range of meanings: (1) indefinite time: "long time; duration;" (2) unlimited time: "eternal; eternity;" (3) future time: "things to come," and (4) past time: "a long time back," that is, the dark age of prehistory. The context here suggests the nuance "a long time."

<sup>16</sup> tn The preposition ב (bet) in בשיקרי (beshakk'var, the adverb ביקר [k'var, "already"] + relative pronoun ש [she] + preposition ב) is probably best classified as causal: "Because...already."

<sup>17</sup> tn The verb נשכח (nishkakh) is a future perfect – it describes an event that is portrayed as a past event from the perspective of the future: "they will have been forgotten." The emphasis of the past perfect is not simply that the future generations will begin to forget him, but that he will already have been forgotten long ago in the past by the time of those future generations. This past perfect situation is brought out by the emphatic use of the temporal adverb ביקר (k'var) "already" (HALOT 459 s.v. ביקר; BDB 460 s.v. ביקר); see, e.g., Eccl 1:10; 2:12, 16; 3:15; 4:2; 6:10; 9:6-7.

<sup>18</sup> tn The particle אֵיךְ ('ekh, "Alas!") is an exclamation of lamentation and mourning (e.g., 2 Sam 1:19; Isa 14:4, 12; Jer 2:21; 9:18; Ezek 26:17; Mic 2:4; see HALOT 39 s.v. אֵיךְ 5; BDB 32 s.v. אֵיךְ 2; also E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 955).

<sup>19</sup> tn The preposition עם ('im, "with") may occasionally function in a comparative sense, meaning "together with; even as; like" (e.g., Eccl 1:11; 2:16; 7:11; Job 9:26; 1 Chr 14:10; 20:6; 25:8; see HALOT 839 s.v. עם 2). When used to describe a common lot, it connotes "together with" (Gen 18:23, 25; 1 Chr 24:5; Job 3:14, 15; 30:1; Ps 26:9; 28:3; 69:29; Isa 38:11), hence "like" (Pss 73:5; 106:6; Eccl 2:16); see BDB 767-68 s.v. עם 1.e.

<sup>20</sup> tn Or "I hated."

<sup>21</sup> tn The term הַחַיִּים (hakhayyim, "life") functions as a metonymy of association, that is, that which is associated with life, that is, the profitlessness and futility of human secular achievement.

happens<sup>1</sup> on earth<sup>2</sup> seems awful to me;  
for all the benefits of wisdom<sup>3</sup> are futile  
– like chasing the wind.

*Futility of Being a Workaholic*

2:18 So I loathed all the fruit of<sup>4</sup> my effort,<sup>5</sup>  
for which I worked so hard<sup>6</sup> on earth,<sup>7</sup>  
because<sup>8</sup> I must leave it<sup>9</sup> behind<sup>10</sup> in the  
hands of my successor.<sup>11</sup>

2:19 Who knows if he will be a wise man  
or a fool?  
Yet<sup>12</sup> he will be master over all the fruit

of<sup>13</sup> my labor<sup>14</sup>  
for which I worked so wisely<sup>15</sup> on earth!<sup>16</sup>  
This also is futile!  
2:20 So I began to despair<sup>17</sup> about all the  
fruit of<sup>18</sup> my labor<sup>19</sup>  
for which I worked so hard<sup>20</sup> on earth.<sup>21</sup>  
2:21 For a man may do his work with wis-  
dom, knowledge, and skill;  
however, he must hand over<sup>22</sup> the fruit of  
his labor<sup>23</sup> as an inheritance<sup>24</sup>

**1 tn** Heb “the deed that is done.” The root עָשָׂה (*‘asah*, “to do”) is repeated in חַמְמָא אֲשֶׁר שֶׁנְּעָשָׂה (*hamma’aseh shenna’asah*, “the deed that is done”) for emphasis. Here, the term “deed” does not refer to human accomplishment, as in 2:1-11, but to the fact of death that destroys any relative advantage of wisdom over folly (2:14a-16). Qoheleth metaphorically describes death as a “deed” that is “done” to man.

**2 tn** Heb “under the sun.”

**3 tn** Heb “all,” referring here to the relative advantage of wisdom.

**4 tn** The phrase “the fruit of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity (see the following note on the phrase “hard labor”).

**5 tn** Heb “I hated all my toil for which I had toiled.” The term עָמַלְתִּי (*‘amali*, “my toil”) is repeated throughout 2:18-21. In each case, it functions as a metonymy of cause (i.e., toil) for effect (i.e., fruit of labor). See, e.g., Ps 105:44; BDB 765 s.v. עָמַל 3. The metonymy is indicated by several factors: (1) The 3rd person masculine singular suffix (“it”) אָנִיחֶנּוּ (*‘annikhennu*, “I must leave it”) in 2:18, and on יָתֵנּוּ (*yittenu*, “I must give it”) in 2:21 refer to his wealth, that is, the fruit of his labor. (2) In 2:21 the 3rd person masculine singular suffix on שֶׁלֹא עָמַלְתָּ (*shello’ amal-bo*, “who did not work for it”) refers to the inheritance that Qoheleth must turn over to his successor, namely, the fruit of his labor. (3) While he himself enjoyed the fruit of his labor, he despaired that he had to turn the fruit of his labor over to his successor: “So I loathed all the [fruit of] my labor” (2:18a) and “I began to despair about the [fruit of] my labor” (2:20a). Although most translations render עָמַלְתִּי as “my toil” in 2:18, the metonymy is recognized by several English translations: “So I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored” (NASB); “So I detested all the fruits of my labor” (NAB); “I hated all the things I had toiled for” (NIV); and “So I loathed all the wealth that I was gaining” (NJPS).

**6 tn** Qoheleth uses an internal cognate accusative construction (accusative noun and verb from the same root) for emphasis: עָמַלְתִּי שֶׁאֲנִי עָמַלְתִּי (*‘amali she’ani ‘amel*, “my toil for which I had toiled”). See *IBHS* 167 §10.2.1g.

**7 tn** Heb “under the sun.”

**8 tn** The relative pronoun שֶׁ (*she*) אָנִיחֶנּוּ (*she’annikhennu*, relative pronoun שֶׁ + Hiphil imperfect 1st person common singular from נָחַ, *nuakh*, “to leave” + 3rd person masculine singular suffix) is causal: “Because I must leave it behind.”

**9 tn** The 3rd person masculine singular suffix on אָנִיחֶנּוּ (*‘annikhennu*, “I must leave it”) refers to Qoheleth’s wealth, that is, the fruit of his labor (see the note on the phrase “hard labor” in 2:18). The suffix is rendered literally by nearly all translations; however, a few make its referent explicit: “I have to leave its fruits” (NEB), “I must leave them [= all the fruits of my labor]” (NAB).

**10 tn** The verb נָחַ (*nuakh*, “to rest”) denotes “to leave [something] behind” in the hands of someone (e.g., Ps 119:121; Eccl 2:18); see *HALOT* 680 s.v. נָחַ B.2.c. The imperfect functions in a modal sense of obligation or necessity. At death, Qoheleth will be forced to pass on his entire estate and the fruit of his labors to his successor.

**11 tn** Heb “to a man who will come after me.”

**12 tn** The *vav* וְהִשָּׁלַח, conjunction + Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from שָׁלַח, *shalat*, “to be master”) is adversative (“yet”).

**13 tn** The phrase “the fruit of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity (see the following note on the word “labor”).

**14 tn** Heb “my labor.” As in 2:18, the term עָמַלְתִּי (*‘amali*, “my labor”) is a metonymy of cause (i.e., my labor) for effect (i.e., fruit of my labor). The metonymy is recognized by several translations: “he will control all the wealth that I gained” (NJPS); “he will have control over all the fruits of my labor” (NAB); “he will have mastery over all the fruits of my labor” (NEB); “he will have control over all the fruit of my labor” (NASB); “he will be master over all my possessions” (MLB).

**15 tn** An internal cognate accusative construction (accusative and verb from same root) is used for emphasis: שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי עָמַלְתִּי (*‘amali she’amalti*, “my toil for which I had toiled”); see *IBHS* 167 §10.2.1g. The two verbs שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי וְהָרַבְתִּי (*she’amalti v’shekhakhamti*, “for which I had labored and for which I had acted wisely”) form a verbal hendiadys (two separate verbs used in association to communicate one idea): “for I had labored so wisely.” The second verb is used adverbially to modify the first verb, which functions in its full verbal sense.

**16 tn** Heb “under the sun.”

**17 tn** Heb “I turned aside to allow my heart despair.” The term לִבִּי (*libbi*, “my heart”) is a synecdoche of part (i.e., heart) for the whole (i.e., whole person); see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 648.

**18 tn** The phrase “the fruit of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity (see the following note on the word “labor”).

**19 tn** Heb “all my toil.” As in 2:18-19, the term עָמַלְתִּי (*‘amali*, “my labor”) is a metonymy of cause (i.e., my labor) for effect (i.e., the fruit of my labor). The metonymy is recognized by several translations: “all the fruits of my labor” (NAB); “all the fruit of my labor” (NASB); “all the gains I had made” (NJPS).

**20 tn** Here the author uses an internal cognate accusative construction (accusative noun and verb from the same root) for emphasis: הִקְבַּלְתִּי שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי (*he’amal she’amalti*, “the toil for which I had toiled”); see *IBHS* 167 §10.2.1g.

**21 tn** Heb “under the sun.”

**22 tn** Heb “he must give.” The 3rd person masculine singular suffix on יָתֵנּוּ (*yittenu*, Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from נָתַן, *natan*, “to give” + 3rd person masculine singular suffix) refers back to עָמַלְתִּי (*‘amalo*, “his labor”) which is treated in this line as a metonymy of cause for effect, that is, “he must give it” = “he must give his labor” = “he must give the fruit of his labor.”

**23 tn** As in 2:18-19, Qoheleth laments the injustice that a person who works diligently in wisdom must one day hand over the fruit of his labor (i.e., his fortune and the care of his achievements) to his successor. There is no guarantee that one’s heir will be wise and be a good steward of this wealth, or be foolish and squander it – in which case, the former man’s entire life’s work would be in vain.

**23 tn** Heb “it”; the referent (“the fruit of his labor”) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

**24 tn** Or “he must turn over an inheritance”; or “he must turn it over, namely, an inheritance.” There are two approaches to the syntax הִרְתִּיךָ (*khelqo*, “his inheritance”): (1) The 3rd person masculine singular suffix is a subjective genitive: “his inheritance” = the inheritance which he must give to his heir. The referent of the 3rd person masculine singular suffix is Qoheleth in 2:21a who worked hard to amass the fortune. The noun הִרְתִּיךָ (*khelqo*, “inheritance”) functions as an adverbial accusative of state (GKC 372 §118.a) or a predicate accusative (R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 12-13, §57): “He must give it

to someone else who did not work for it. This also is futile, and an awful injustice!<sup>14</sup>

### *Painful Days and Restless Nights*

**2:22** What does a man acquire from all his labor and from the anxiety that accompanies his toil on earth?<sup>2</sup>

**2:23** For all day long<sup>3</sup> his work produces pain and frustration,<sup>4</sup> and even at night his mind cannot relax!<sup>5</sup> This also is futile!

### *Enjoy Work and its Benefits*

**2:24** There is nothing better for<sup>6</sup> people<sup>7</sup> than<sup>8</sup> to eat and drink, and to find enjoyment<sup>9</sup> in their<sup>10</sup> work. I also perceived that this ability to find enjoyment<sup>11</sup> comes from God.<sup>12</sup>

**2:25** For no one<sup>13</sup> can eat and drink<sup>14</sup>

[i.e., his fortune] as an inheritance.” (2) The 3rd person masculine singular suffix is an objective genitive: “his inheritance” = the inheritance which the heir will receive from Qoheleth. The referent of the 3rd person masculine singular suffix is the heir in 2:21b. The noun הִלְקָה (“inheritance”) functions as the accusative direct object in apposition (R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 15-16, §71) to the 3rd person masculine singular suffix on יִתְּנֵנוּ (“he must give it”); Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from נתן, *natan*, + 3rd person masculine singular suffix): “He must give it, namely, his inheritance, to one who did not work for it.”

**1 tn** The noun הָרָעָה (*ra'ah*, “evil”) probably means “misfortune” (HALOT 1263 s.v. רָעָה 4) or “injustice; wrong” (HALOT 1262 s.v. רָעָה 2.b). The phrase רָעָה רַבָּה (*ra'ah rabbah*) connotes “grave injustice” or “great misfortune” (e.g., Eccl 2:17; 5:12, 15; 6:1; 10:5). It is expressed well as: “This too is...a great misfortune” (NAB, NIV, MLB) and “utterly wrong!” (NEB).

**sn** Verses 18-21 are arranged into two sub-units (2:18-19 and 2:20-21). Each contains a parallel structure: (1) Introductory lament: “I hated all my toil” and “I began to despair about all my toil.” (2) Reason for the lament: “I must turn over the fruit of my labor to the hands of my successor” and “he must hand over the fruit of his work as an inheritance.” (3) Description of successor: “who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool?” and “he did not work for it.” (4) Concluding statement: “This also is fruitless!” and “This also is profitless and an awful injustice!”

**2 tn** Heb “under the sun.” The rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “Man acquires nothing” (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949-51).

**3 tn** Heb “all his days.”

**4 tn** The syntax of this verse has been interpreted in two different ways: (1) The phrase “all his days” (כָּל־יְמָיו, *khol-yamayv*) is the subject of a verbless clause, and the noun “pain” (כִּבְיָה־בוֹם, *makh'ovim*) is a predicate nominative or a predicate of apposition (see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 15-16, §71). Likewise, the noun “his work” (עֲמָלוֹ, *im'vano*) is the subject of a second verbless clause, and the vexation” (כְּחָאֵס, *kha'as*) is a predicate nominative: “All his days are pain, and his work is vexation.” (2) The noun “his work” (עֲמָלוֹ) is the subject of both nouns, “pain and vexation” (כִּבְיָה־וְכְחָאֵס, *makh'ovim vakh'as*), which are predicate nominatives, while the phrase “all his days” (כָּל־יְמָיו) is an adverbial accusative functioning temporally: “All day long, his work is pain and vexation.” The latter option is supported by the parallelism between “even at night” and “all day long.” This verse draws out an ironic contrast/comparison between his physical toil/labor during the day and his emotional anxiety at night. Even at night, he has no break!

**5 tn** Heb “his heart (i.e., mind) does not rest.”

**6 tn** The preposition בְּ (*bet*) on בְּאָדָם (*ba'adam*) has been taken in two ways: (1) locative with טוֹב (*tov*, “good”) in reference to man’s moral nature: “There is nothing [inherently] good in man.” (2) advantage with טוֹב (“good”) in reference to the enjoyment theme of 2:24-26: “There is nothing better for a man than...” (this assumes a comparative *min*, on מִן, *min*, on מִשְׁעֵיכֶם, *mishey'okhal*); see text critical note on the word “than” below). The latter is preferred for two reasons: (1) The preposition בְּ is used with a similar idiom in 3:12 in collocation with the particle phrase כִּי...יִמְ (*ki...im*, “except”): “There is nothing better...than to rejoice/be happy” (NASB, NIV). (2) The theme of 2:1-26 focuses on the futility of human toil, concluding that the only real reward that man has in his labor is to find enjoyment in it (e.g., 2:10, 24-26). The section says nothing about man’s inherent sinful nature.

**7 tn** Heb “man.”

**8 tc** The MT reads שְׂיֵאכַל (*shey'okhal*, “that he should eat”); Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from אָכַל, *'akhal*, “to eat,” with relative pronoun שֶׁ, *she*, “that”). However, the variant textual tradition of מִשְׁעֵיכֶם (*mishey'okhal*, “than he should eat”) (comparative preposition מִן, *min*, “than” + Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from אָכַל “to eat”) is reflected in the LXX, Coptic, Syriac, Aramaic Targum, Old Latin, and Jerome. The textual error, an example of haplography, arose from a single writing of *m* (*mem*) from בְּאָדָם מִשְׁעֵיכֶם (*ba'adam mishey'okhal*). The same idiom appears in the expanded form כִּי...יִמְ followed by אֵין־טוֹב (*'en tov ... ki 'im*, “there is nothing better for man than...”) in Eccl 3:12; 8:15.

**9 tn** Heb “to cause his soul to see good.” The idiom רָאָה טוֹב (*ra'ah tov*, “to see good”) is a metonymy of association, meaning “to find enjoyment” (e.g., 3:13; 5:17; 6:6). In 3:12-13 and 5:17-18 it is in collocation and/or parallelism with בְּ (*bet*) + שָׂמַח (*samakh*, “to rejoice in,” or “to find satisfaction or pleasure in” something). Here, it is used in collocation with *khush*, “to enjoy”). The term נַפְשׁוֹ (*nafsho*, “his soul”) is a metonymy of part (i.e., soul) for the whole (i.e., whole person), e.g., Num 23:10; Judg 16:30; Pss 16:10; 35:13; 103:1 (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 640-41).

**10 tn** Heb “his.”

**11 tn** The phrase “ability to find enjoyment” is not in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**12 tn** Heb “is from the hand of God.”

**sn** The phrase “from the hand of God” is an anthropomorphism (depicting God, who is an invisible spirit, in the form of man with hands) or anthropopatheia (depicting God performing human-like actions). The “hand of God” is a figure often used to portray God’s sovereign providence and benevolence (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 878). The phrase “the hand of God” is often used to connote the favor or grace of God (2 Chr 30:12; Ezra 7:9; 8:18; Neh 2:8, 18; see BDB 390 s.v. יָד 1.e.2).

**13 tn** Heb “For who can...?” The rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “No one can!” (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949-51).

**14 tn** The phrase “and drink” is not in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for stylistic harmonization with v. 24.



or experience joy<sup>1</sup> apart from him.<sup>2</sup>  
**2:26** For to the one who pleases him,<sup>3</sup> God  
 gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy,  
 but to the sinner, he gives the task of  
 amassing<sup>4</sup> wealth<sup>5</sup> –  
 only to give<sup>6</sup> it<sup>7</sup> to the one who pleases  
 God.

This<sup>8</sup> task of the wicked<sup>9</sup> is futile – like  
 chasing the wind!

*A Time for All Events in Life*

**3:1** For everything<sup>10</sup> there is an appointed  
 time,<sup>11</sup>

**1 tn** The verb II רוּשׁ (*khush*, “to enjoy”) is a *hapax legomenon* which BDB defines as “to feel; to enjoy [with the senses]” on the basis of the context, and the cognates: Arabic “to feel; to perceive [by senses]”; Aramaic רוּשׁ “to feel pain,” and New Hebrew רוּשׁ “to feel pain” (BDB 301 s.v. II רוּשׁ). HALOT relates the Hebrew root to Akkadian *havavu* “to be delighted with” (HALOT 300 s.v. II רוּשׁ 1). The Vulgate renders this term as “to enjoy.” The Greek versions (LXX, Theodotion) and the Syriac Peshitta, however, did not understand this *hapax*; they rendered it as “to drink,” making some sense of the line by filling out the parallelism “to eat [and drink]” (e.g., Eccl 8:15).

**2 tc** The MT reads מִמֶּנִּי (*mimmenni*, “more than I”). However, an alternate textual tradition of מִמֶּנּוּ (*mimmennu*, “apart from him [= God]”) is preserved in several medieval Hebrew MSS, and is reflected in most of the versions (LXX, Syriac, Syro-Hexapla, and Jerome). The textual deviation is a case of simple orthographic confusion between י (*yod*) and ו (*vav*) as frequently happened, e.g., MT צוּ לִי צוּ לִי צוּ לִי (*tsv tsv tsv tsv*) versus 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> 28:10 צוּ לִי צוּ לִי צוּ לִי (*tsy tsv tsv tsv*); see P. K. McCarter, Jr., *Textual Criticism*, 47. It is difficult to determine which reading is original here. The MT forms a parenthetical clause, where Qoheleth refers to himself: no one had more of an opportunity to experience more enjoyment in life than he (e.g., 2:1-11). The alternate textual tradition is a causal clause, explaining why the ability to enjoy life is a gift from God: no one can experience enjoyment in life “apart from him,” that is, apart from “the hand of God” in 2:24. It is possible that internal evidence supports the alternate textual tradition. In 2:24-26, Qoheleth is not emphasizing his own resources to enjoy life, as he had done in 2:1-11, but that the ability to enjoy life is the gift of God. On the other hand, the Jerusalem Hebrew Bible project retains the MT reading with a “B” rating; see D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:570. The English versions are split on the textual problem: a few retain MT מִמֶּנִּי (“more than I”), e.g., KJV, ASV, YLT, Douay, NJPS, while others adopt the alternate reading מִמֶּנּוּ, “apart from him” (NEB, NAB, MLB, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, Moffatt).

**3 tn** Heb “for to a man who is good before him.”

**4 sn** The phrase *the task of amassing wealth* (Heb “the task of gathering and heaping up”) implicitly compares the work of the farmer reaping his crops and storing them up in a barn, to the work of the laborer amassing wealth as the fruit of his labor. However, rather than his storehouse being safe for the future, the sinner is deprived of it.

**5 tn** The word “wealth” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**6 sn** The three-fold repetition of the Hebrew word translated “give” in the first part of this verse creates irony: God “gives” the righteous the ability to prosper and to find enjoyment in his work, but to the wicked He “gives” the task of “giving” his wealth to the righteous.

**7 tn** The word “it” (an implied direct object) does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**8 tn** The antecedent of the demonstrative pronoun זֶה (*zeh*, “this”) is debated: (1) Some refer it to the enjoyment which Qoheleth had just commended in 2:24-26. However, this is inconsistent with the enjoyment theme found elsewhere in the book. It also ignores the fact that 2:24-26 states that such enjoyment is a good gift from God. (2) Others refer it to the term “toil” (עָמַל, *amal*) which is repeated throughout 2:18-26. However, Qoheleth affirmed that if one is righteous, he can find enjoyment in his toil, even though so much of it is ultimately futile. (3) Therefore, it seems best to refer it to the grievous “task” (עֵינָן, *inyan*) God has given to the sinner in 2:26b. Consistent with the meaning of הֶבֶל (*hevel*, “futile; profitless; fruitless”), 2:26b emphasizes that the “task” of the sinner is profitless: he labors hard to amass wealth, only to see the fruit of his labor given away to someone else. The righteous man’s enjoyment of his work and the fruit of his labor under the blessing of God (2:24-26a) is not included in this.

**9 tn** The phrase “task of the wicked” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**10 tn** Verse 1 is arranged in an ABB'A' chiasm (לְכֹל יְמֵי הַיּוֹם לְכֹל יְמֵי הַיּוֹם; *lakkol zeman v'et l'kol-khefets*): (A) “for everything”; (B) “a season”; (B') “a time”; (A') “for every matter.” The terms “season” (יְמֵי, *zeman*) and “time” (עֵת, *et*) are parallel. In the light of its parallelism with “every matter” (כְּלֵי-הַיּוֹם, *kol-khefets*), the term “everything” (כֹּל, *kol*) must refer to events and situations in life.

**11 tn** The noun זְמַן (*zeman*) denotes “appointed time” or “appointed hour” (HALOT 273 s.v. זְמַן; BDB 273 s.v. זְמַן; see Eccl 3:1; Esth 9:27, 31; Neh 2:6; Sir 43:7), e.g., the appointed or designated time for the Jewish feasts (Esth 9:27, 31), the length of time that Nehemiah set for his absence from Susa (Neh 2:6), and the appointed times in the Jewish law for the months to begin (Sir 43:7). It is used in parallelism with מוֹעֵד (“appointed time”), i.e., מוֹעֵד יְהוָה (“the appointed times of the law”; Sir 43:7). The related verb, a Pual of זָמַן (*zaman*), means “to be appointed” (HALOT 273 s.v. זָמַן; e.g. Ezra 10:14; Neh 10:35; 13:31. These terms may be related to the noun זִמְמָה (*zimmah*, “plan; intention”; Job 17:11; HALOT 272 s.v. I זִמְמָה) and זִמְמָה (*m<sup>e</sup>zimmah*, “purpose; plan; project”), e.g., the purposes of God (Job 42:2; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 51:11) and man’s plan (Isa 5:12); see HALOT 566 s.v. זִמְמָה; BDB 273 s.v. זִמְמָה).

**sn** Verses 1-8 refer to God’s appointed time-table for human activities or actions whose most appropriate time is determined by men. Verses 9-15 state that God is ultimately responsible for the time in which events in human history occur. This seems to provide a striking balance between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Man does what God has willed, but man also does what he “pleases” (see note on the word “matter” in 3:1).

and an appropriate time<sup>4</sup> for every activity<sup>2</sup> on earth:<sup>3</sup>

**3:2** A time to be born,<sup>4</sup> and a time to die;<sup>5</sup> a time to plant, and a time to uproot what was planted;

**3:3** A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

**3:4** A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

**3:5** A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

**3:6** A time to search, and a time to give something up as lost;<sup>6</sup>

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

**3:7** A time to rip, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silent, and a time to speak.

**3:8** A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

#### *Man is Ignorant of God's Timing*

**3:9** What benefit can a worker<sup>7</sup> gain from his toil?<sup>8</sup>

**3:10** I have observed the burden that God has given to people<sup>9</sup> to keep them occupied.

**3:11** God has made everything fit beautifully<sup>10</sup> in its appropriate time,

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The noun עֵת (*et*, “point in time”) has a basic two-fold range of meanings: (1) “time of an event” and (2) “time for an event” (BDB 773 s.v. עֵת). The latter has subcategories: (a) “usual time,” (b) “the proper, suitable or appropriate time,” (c) “the appointed time,” and (d) “uncertain time” (Eccl 9:11). Here it connotes “a proper, suitable time for an event” (HALOT 900 s.v. עֵת 6; BDB s.v. עֵת 2.b). Examples: “the time for rain” (Ezra 10:13), “a time of judgment for the nations” (Ezek 30:3), “an appropriate time for every occasion” (Eccl 3:1), “the time when mountain goats are born” (Job 39:1), “the rain in its season” (Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24), “the time for the harvest” (Hos 2:11; Ps 1:3), “food in its season” (Ps 104:27), “no one knows his hour of destiny” (Eccl 9:12), “the right moment” (Eccl 8:5); cf. HALOT 900 s.v. עֵת 6.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** The noun מְעִשֵׂה (*khefets*, here “matter, business”) has a broad range of meanings: (1) “delight; joy,” (2) “desire; wish; longing,” (3) “the good pleasure; will; purpose,” (4) “precious stones” (i.e., jewelry), i.e., what someone takes delight in, and (5) “matter; business,” as a metonymy of adjunct to what someone takes delight in (Eccl 3:1, 17; 5:7; 8:6; Isa 53:10; 58:3, 13; Pss 16:3; 111:2; Prov 31:13); see HALOT 340 s.v. מְעִשֵׂה 4; BDB 343 s.v. מְעִשֵׂה 4. It is also sometimes used in reference to the “good pleasure” of God, that is, his sovereign plan, e.g., Judg 13:23; Isa 44:28; 46:10; 48:14 (BDB 343 s.v. מְעִשֵׂה). While the theme of the sovereignty of God permeates Eccl 3:1–4:3, the content of 3:1–8 refers to human activities that are planned and purposed by man. The LXX translated it with πράγματα (*pragmati*, “matter”). The term is translated variously by modern English versions: “every purpose” (KJV, ASV), “every event” (NASB), “every delight” (NASB margin), “every affair” (NAB), “every matter” (RSV, NRSV), “every activity” (NEB, NIV), “every project” (MLB), and “every experience” (NIPS).

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Heb “under heaven.”

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The verb יָלַד (*yalad*, “to bear”) is used in the active sense of a mother giving birth to a child (HALOT 413 s.v. יָלַד; BDB 408 s.v. יָלַד). However, in light of its parallelism with “a time to die,” it should be taken as a metonymy of cause (i.e., to give birth to a child) for effect (i.e., to be born).

<sup>5</sup> **sn** In 3:2–8, Qoheleth uses fourteen sets of merisms (a figure using polar opposites to encompass everything in between, that is, totality), e.g., Deut 6:6–9; Ps 139:2–3 (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 435).

<sup>6</sup> **tn** The term לָאָבַד (*l'abbed*, Piel infinitive construct from אָבַד, *avad*, “to destroy”) means “to lose” (e.g., Jer 23:1) as the contrast with בָּקַשׁ (*baqash*, “to seek to find”) indicates (HALOT 3 s.v. לָאָבַד; BDB 2 s.v. אָבַד 3). This is the declarative or delocutive-estimative sense of the Piel: “to view something as lost” (R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 28, §145; *IBHS* 403 §24.2g).

<sup>7</sup> **tn** The term הַעֹשֶׂה (*ha'oseh*, article + Qal active participle ms from עָשָׂה, *asah*, “to do”) functions substantively (“the worker”); see BDB 794 s.v. עָשָׂה II.1. This is a figurative description of man (metonymy of association), and plays on the repetition of עָשָׂה (verb: “to do,” noun: “work”) throughout the passage. In the light of God’s orchestration of human affairs, man’s efforts cannot change anything. It refers to man in general with the article functioning in a generic sense (see *IBHS* 244–45 §13.5.1f; Joüon 2:511 §137.m).

<sup>8</sup> **sn** This rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “Man gains nothing from his toil!” (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949–51). Any *advantage* that man might *gain from his toil* is nullified by his ignorance of divine providence.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** Heb “the sons of man.”

<sup>10</sup> **sn** The Hebrew adjective translated *beautifully* functions as a metonymy of effect (i.e., to appear beautiful) for cause (i.e., to make it fit): “to fit beautifully.” It is used in parallelism with Qoheleth’s term for evaluation: טוֹב (*tov*, “good”) in 5:17.

but<sup>4</sup> he has also placed ignorance<sup>2</sup> in the

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The word “but” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** *Heb* “darkness”; perhaps “eternity” or “the future.” The meaning of the noun עֲלָמִים (*olam*) is debated. It may mean: (1) “ignorance”; (2) time reference: (a) “eternity” or (b) “the future”; or (3) “knowledge” (less likely). The arguments for these options may be summarized: (1) Most suggest that עֲלָמִים is the defectively written form of עוֹלָמִים “duration; eternity” (e.g., Eccl 1:4; 2:16; 3:14; 9:6; 12:5); see BDB 762 s.v. III עוֹלָמִים 2.k. Within this school of interpretation, there are several varieties: (a) BDB 762 s.v. III עוֹלָמִים 2.k suggests that here it denotes “age [i.e., duration] of the world,” which is attested in postbiblical Hebrew. The term III עוֹלָמִים “eternity” = “world” (Jastrow 1084 s.v. עוֹלָמִים III) is used in this sense in postbiblical Hebrew, mostly in reference to the Messianic age, or the world to come (e.g., *Tg. Genesis* 9:16; *Tg. Onq. Exodus* 21:6; *Tg. Psalms* 61:7). For example, “the world (עוֹלָמִים) shall last six thousand years, and after one thousand years it shall be laid waste” (*b. Rosh Ha-Shanah* 31a) and “the world (עוֹלָמִים) to come” (*b. Sotah* 10b). The LXX and the Vulgate took the term in this sense. This approach was also adopted by several English translations: “the world” (KJV, Douay, ASV margin). (b) HALOT 799 s.v. עוֹלָמִים 5 and THAT 2:242 suggest that the term refers to an indefinite, unending future: “eternity future” or “enduring state referring to past and future” (see also BDB 762 s.v. III עוֹלָמִים 2.i). In this sense, the noun עוֹלָמִים functions as a metonymy of association: “a sense of eternity,” but not in a philosophical sense (see J. Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* [SBT], 117, n. 4). This approach is supported by three factors: (i) the recurrence of עוֹלָמִים (“eternity”) in 3:14, (ii) the temporal qualification of the statement in the parallel clause (“from beginning to end”), and (iii) by the ordinary meaning of the noun as “eternity” (HALOT 798–799 s.v. עוֹלָמִים). The point would be that God has endowed man with an awareness of the extra-temporal significance of himself and his accomplishments (D. R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” *BKCOT*, 984). This is the most frequent approach among English versions: “the timeless” (NAB), “eternity” (RSV, MLB, ASV, NASB, NIV, NJPS), “a sense of time past and time future” (NEB), and “a sense of past and future” (NRSV). (3) Other scholars suggest that עוֹלָמִים simply refers to the indefinite future: “the future,” that is, things to come (e.g., HALOT 799 s.v. עוֹלָמִים 2; BDB 762 s.v. III עוֹלָמִים 2.a; THAT 2:241). The plural עוֹלָמִים (*olamim*, “things to come”) was used in this sense in Eccl 1:10 (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:13 = 2 Chr 6:2; Pss 61:5; 77:8; 145:13; Dan 9:24; cf. HALOT 799 s.v. עוֹלָמִים 2). The point would simply be that God has not only ordained all the events that will take place in man’s life (3:1–8), but also preoccupies man with the desire to discover what will happen in the future in terms of the orchestration or timing of these events in his life (3:9–11). This fits well with the description of God’s orchestration of human events in their most appropriate time (3:1–10) and the ignorance of man concerning his future (3:11b). Elsewhere, Qoheleth emphasizes that man cannot learn what the future holds in store for him (e.g., 8:7, 17). This approach is only rarely adopted: “the future” (NJPS margin). (2) The second view is that עוֹלָמִים is not defectively written עוֹלָמִים (“eternity”) but the segholate noun II עֲלָמִים (*’elem*) that means “dark” (literal) or “ignorance; obscurity; secrecy” (figurative). The related noun תְּהַלְמֶנָּה (*ta’alumah*) means “hidden thing; secret,” and the related verb עֲלָמִים (*’alam*) means “to hide; to conceal” (BDB 761 s.v. I עֲלָמִים; HALOT 834–35 s.v. עֲלָמִים). This is related to the Ugaritic noun “dark” and the Akkadian verb “to be black; to be dark” (see HALOT 834–35 s.v. עֲלָמִים). In postbiblical Hebrew the root II עֲלָמִים means (i) “secret” and (ii) “forgetfulness” (Jastrow 1084 s.v. עֲלָמִים I). Thus the verse would mean that God has “obscured” man’s knowledge so that he cannot discover certain features of God’s program. This approach is adopted by Moffatt which uses the word “mystery.” Similarly, the term may mean “forgetfulness,” that is, God has plagued man with “forgetfulness” so that he cannot understand what God has done from the beginning to the end (e.g., Eccl 1:11). (3) The third view (Delitzsch) is to relate עֲלָמִים to a cognate Arabic root meaning “knowledge.” The point would be that God has endowed man with “knowledge,” but not enough for man to discover God’s eternal plan. This approach is only rarely adopted: “knowledge” (YLT).

human heart<sup>3</sup>  
so that<sup>4</sup> people<sup>5</sup> cannot discover what  
God has ordained,<sup>6</sup>  
from the beginning to the end<sup>7</sup> of their  
lives.<sup>8</sup>

### Enjoy Life in the Present

3:12 I have concluded<sup>9</sup> that there is nothing better for people<sup>10</sup> than<sup>11</sup> to be happy and to enjoy

<sup>3</sup> **tn** *Heb* “in their heart.” The Hebrew term translated *heart* functions as a metonymy of association for man’s intellect, emotions, and will (BDB 524–25 s.v. לֵב 3–6, 9). Here, it probably refers to man’s intellectual capacities, as v. 11 suggests.

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The compound preposition מִבְּלִי (*mibb’li*, preposition בְּלִי [min] + negative particle בְּלִי [b’li]) is used as a conjunction here. Elsewhere, it can express cause: “because there is no [or is not]” (e.g., Deut 9:28; 28:55; Isa 5:13; Ezek 34:5; Lam 1:4; Hos 4:6), consequence: “so that there is no [or is not]” (e.g., Ezek 14:5; Jer 2:15; 9:9–11; Zeph 3:6), or simple negation: “without” (e.g., Job 4:11, 20; 6:6; 24:7–8; 31:19). BDB 115 s.v. בְּלִי 3.c.β suggests the negative consequence: “so that not,” while HALOT 133 s.v. בְּלִי 5 suggests the simple negation: “without the possibility of.”

<sup>5</sup> **tn** *Heb* “man.”

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the work that God has done.” The phrase אֲתֵּי-יְהוָה עָשָׂה (*’et-hamma’aseh ’asher-’asah*, “the work which he [i.e., God] has done”) is an internal cognate accusative (direct object and verb are from the same root), used for emphasis (see *IBHS* 167 §10.2.g). The repetition of the verb עָשָׂה (“to do”) in 3:11 and 3:14 suggests that this phrase refers to God’s foreordination of all the events and timing of human affairs: God has “made” (= “foreordained”; עָשָׂה) everything appropriate in his sovereign timing (3:11a), and all that God has “done” (= “foreordained”; עָשָׂה) will come to pass (3:14). Thus, the verb עָשָׂה functions as a metonymy of effect (i.e., God’s actions) for cause (i.e., God’s sovereign foreordination). The temporal clause “from beginning to end” (3:11) supports this nuance.

<sup>7</sup> **tn** Traditionally, “what God has done from the beginning to the end.” The temporal clause מֵרֵאשִׁית וְעַד אַחֵרִית (*mero’sh v’ad-’asof*, “from the beginning to the end”) is traditionally taken in reference to “eternity” (the traditional understanding of הָעֲלָמִים [*ha’olam*] earlier in the verse; see the note on “ignorance”), e.g., KJV, NEB, NAB, ASV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV. However, if הָעֲלָמִים simply denotes “the future” (e.g., HALOT 799 s.v. עוֹלָמִים 2; BDB 762 s.v. III עוֹלָמִים 2.a; THAT 2:241), this temporal clause would refer to the events God has ordained to transpire in an individual’s life, from beginning to end. This approach is adopted by one English version: “but without man ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass” (NJPS). This would fit well in the context begun in 3:1 with the fourteen merisms encompassing man’s life, starting with “a time to be born” (i.e., from the beginning in 3:11) and concluding with “a time to die” (i.e., to the end in 3:11). This approach is also supported by the admonition of 3:12–13, namely, since no one knows what will happen to him in the future days of his life, Qoheleth recommends that man enjoy each day as a gift from God.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** The phrase “of their lives” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** *Heb* “I know.”

<sup>10</sup> **tn** *Heb* “for them”; the referent (people, i.e., mankind) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>11</sup> **tn** Qoheleth uses the exceptive particle כִּי...יִמֵּן (*ki...im*, “except”) to identify the only exception to the futility within man’s life (BDB 474 s.v. כִּי 2).

themselves<sup>4</sup> as long as they live,  
**3:13** and also that everyone should eat and  
 drink, and find enjoyment in all his toil,  
 for these things<sup>2</sup> are a gift from God.

*God's Sovereignty*

**3:14** I also know that whatever God does  
 will endure forever;  
 nothing can be added to it, and nothing  
 taken away from it.  
 God has made it this way, so that men  
 will fear him.  
**3:15** Whatever exists now has already  
 been, and whatever will be has already  
 been;  
 for God will seek to do again<sup>3</sup> what has  
 occurred<sup>4</sup> in the past.<sup>5</sup>

*The Problem of Injustice and Oppression*

**3:16** I saw something else on earth.<sup>6</sup>

In the place of justice, there was wicked-  
 ness,  
 and in the place of fairness,<sup>7</sup> there was  
 wickedness.

**3:17** I thought to myself, "God will judge  
 both the righteous and the wicked;  
 for there is an appropriate time for every  
 activity,  
 and there is a time of judgment<sup>8</sup> for ev-  
 ery deed.

**3:18** I also thought to myself, "It is<sup>9</sup> for  
 the sake of people,<sup>10</sup>  
 so God can clearly<sup>11</sup> show<sup>12</sup> them that  
 they are like animals.

**3:19** For the fate of humans<sup>13</sup> and the fate  
 of animals are the same:  
 As one dies, so dies the other; both have  
 the same breath.

There is no advantage for humans over  
 animals,  
 for both are fleeting.

**3:20** Both go to the same place,  
 both come from the dust,  
 and to dust both return.

**3:21** Who really knows if the human  
 spirit<sup>14</sup> ascends upward,

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Heb "to do good." The phrase לעשות טוב (*la'asot tov*) functions idiomatically for "to experience [or see] happiness [or joy]." The verb עשה (*asah*) probably denotes "to acquire; to obtain" (BDB 795 s.v. עשה II.7), and טוב (*tov*) means "good; pleasure; happiness," e.g., Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:17 (BDB 375 s.v. טוב 1).

<sup>2</sup> **tn** Heb "for it." The referent of the 3rd person feminine singular independent person pronoun ("it") is probably the preceding statement: "to eat, drink, and find satisfaction." This would be an example of an anacoluthon (GKC 505-6 §167.b). Thus the present translation uses "these things" to indicate the reference back to the preceding.

<sup>3</sup> **tn** The phrase "to do again" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>4</sup> **tn** Heb "God will seek that which is driven away." The meaning of אֶת־נִרְדָּף (*vāqqaqesh 'et-nirdaf*) is difficult to determine: יִבְקֵשׁ (*vāqqaqesh*) is Piel imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from בָּקַשׁ (*baqash*, "to seek") and נִרְדָּף (*nirdaf*) is a Niphal participle 3rd person masculine singular from רָדַף (*radaf*, "to drive away"). There are several options: (1) God watches over the persecuted: יִבְקֵשׁ ("seeks") functions as a metonymy of cause for effect (i.e., to protect), and אֶת־נִרְדָּף ("what is driven away") refers to "those who are persecuted." But this does not fit the context. (2) God will call the past to account: יִבְקֵשׁ functions as a metonymy of cause for effect (i.e., to hold accountable), and אֶת־נִרְדָּף is a metonymy of attribute (i.e., the past). This approach is adopted by several English translations: "God requires that which is past" (KJV), "God will call the past to account" (NIV) and "God summons each event back in its turn" (NEB). (3) God finds what has been lost: יִבְקֵשׁ functions as a metonymy of cause for effect (i.e., to find), and אֶת־נִרְדָּף refers to what has been lost: "God restores what would otherwise be displaced" (NAB). (4) God repeats what has already occurred: יִבְקֵשׁ functions as a metonymy of effect (i.e., to repeat), and אֶת־נִרְדָּף is a metonymy (i.e., that which has occurred). This fits the context and provides a tight parallel with the preceding line: "That which is has already been, and that which will be has already been" (3:15a) parallels "God seeks [to repeat] that which has occurred [in the past]." This is the most popular approach among English versions: "God restores that which has passed" (Douay), "God seeks again that which is passed away" (ASV), "God seeks what has passed by" (NASB), "God seeks what has been driven away" (RSV), "God seeks out what has passed by" (MLB), "God seeks out what has gone by" (NRSV), and "God is ever bringing back what disappears" (Moffatt).

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The phrase "in the past" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>6</sup> **tn** Heb "under the sun."

<sup>7</sup> **tn** Or "righteousness."

<sup>8</sup> **tn** The phrase "a time of judgment" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** The phrase "it is" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Heb "the sons of man." The phrase בְּנֵי הָאָדָם (*al-divrat b'ne ha'adam*) is handled variously: (1) introduction to the direct discourse: "I said to myself concerning the sons of men" (NASB), (2) direct discourse: "I thought, 'As for men, God tests them'" (NIV), (3) indirect discourse: "I said in my heart concerning the estate of the sons of men" (KJV), and (4) causal conjunction: "I said, '[It is] for the sake of the sons of men.'" Since the phrase "sons of men" is contrasted with "animals" the translation "humans" has been adopted.

<sup>11</sup> **tn** The meaning of לְבָרֵךְ (*l'varam*, preposition + Qal infinitive construct from בָּרַךְ *barar*, + 3rd person masculine plural suffix) is debated because the root has a broad range of meanings: (1) "to test; to prove; to sift; to sort out" (e.g., Dan 11:35; 12:10); (2) "to choose; to select" (e.g., 1 Chr 7:40; 9:22; 16:41; Neh 5:18); (3) "to purge out; to purify" (e.g., Ezek 20:38; Zeph 3:9; Job 33:3); and (4) "to cleanse; to polish" (Isa 49:2; 52:1.1); see HALOT 163 s.v. בָּרַךְ; BDB 141 s.v. בָּרַךְ. The meanings "to prove" (Qal), as well as "to cleanse; to polish" (Qal), "to keep clean" (Niphal), and "to cleanse" (Hiphil) might suggest the meaning "to make clear" (M. A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes* [TOTC], 85-86). The meaning "to make clear; to prove" is well attested in postbiblical Mishnaic Hebrew (Jastrow 197-98 s.v. בָּרַךְ). For example, "they make the fact as clear (bright) as a new garment" (*b. Ketubbot* 46a) and "the claimant must offer clear evidence" (*b. Sanhedrin* 23b). The point would be that God allows human injustice to exist in the world in order to make it clear to mankind that they are essentially no better than the beasts. On the other hand, the LXX adopts the nuance "to judge," while Targum and Vulgate take the nuance "to purge; to purify." BDB 141 s.v. בָּרַךְ 4 suggests "to test, prove," while HALOT 163 s.v. בָּרַךְ 2 prefers "to select, choose."

<sup>12</sup> **tn** The two infinitives לְבָרֵךְ (*l'varam*, "to make it clear to them") and וְלִירוֹת (*v'lirot*, "and to show") function as a verbal hendiadys (the two verbs are associated with one another to communicate a single idea). The first verb functions adverbially and the second retains its full verbal force: "to clearly show them."

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Heb "of the sons of man."

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Heb "the spirit of the sons of man."



and the animal's spirit descends into the earth?

**3:22** So I perceived there is nothing better than for people<sup>1</sup> to enjoy their work,<sup>2</sup> because that is their<sup>3</sup> reward; for who can show them what the future holds?<sup>4</sup>

### Evil Oppression on Earth

**4:1** So<sup>5</sup> I again considered<sup>6</sup> all the oppression<sup>7</sup> that continually occurs<sup>8</sup> on

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Heb "man."

<sup>2</sup> **tn** Heb "his works."

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Heb "his."

<sup>4</sup> **tn** Heb "what will be after him" (cf. KJV, NASB, NIV) or "afterward" (cf. NJPS).

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The prefixed *vav* וַ (vav + perfect 1st person common singular from שׁוּב *shuv*, "to turn") might be: (1) introductory (and left untranslated): "I observed again"; (2) consequence of preceding statement: "So I observed again"; or (3) continuation of preceding statement: "And I observed again."

**sn** This section is closely related to the preceding: Qoheleth's observation of oppression (4:1-3) links back to his previous observation of oppression and injustice (3:16). It stands in stark contrast with his admonition for man to enjoy life on earth as the reward for one's work (3:22). Now, Qoheleth turns his attention to consider the sorry fate of those who are not able to enjoy life on earth and their work because of oppression (4:1-3), over-obsessive competitiveness (4:4-6), and loneliness (4:7-12).

<sup>6</sup> **tn** Heb "I turned and I saw." The phrase וָאֵרָאָה... וָשָׁבְתִי (*vav + shavti... va'er'eh*, "I turned and I saw") is a verbal hendiadys (the two verbs represent one common idea). Normally in a verbal hendiadys, the first verb functions adverbially, modifying the second verb which retains its full verbal force. The verb וָשָׁבְתִי (*vav + perfect 1st person common singular from שׁוּב "to turn"*) is used idiomatically to denote repetition: "to return and do" = "to do again" (e.g., Gen 26:18; 30:31; 43:2) or "to do repeatedly" (e.g., Lam 3:3); see HALOT 1430 s.v. שׁוּב 5; BDB 998 s.v. שׁוּב 8; GK 386 §120.e: "I observed again" or "I repeatedly observed." On the other hand, the shift from the perfect וָאֵרָאָה to the preterite וָאֵרָאָה (*vav + Qal preterite 1st person common singular from רָאָה, ra'ah, "to see"*) might indicate a purpose clause: "I turned [my mind] to consider." The preterite וָאֵרָאָה follows the perfect וָשָׁבְתִי. When a *vayyiqtol* form (*vav + preterite*) follows a perfect in reference to a past-time situation, the preterite also represents a past-time situation. Its aspect is based on the preceding perfect. In this context, the perfect and preterite may denote definite past or indefinite past action ("I turned and considered" as hendiadys for "I observed again" or "I repeatedly observed") or past telic action ("I turned [my mind] to consider"). See IBHS 554-55 §33.3.1a.

<sup>7</sup> **tn** Heb "all the oppressions" or "all the oppression"; alternatively, "all the various kinds of oppression." The term עֲשָׂוִים (*osheq*) denotes "oppression," e.g., Jer 6:6; 22:17; Ezek 18:18; 22:7; 12, 29; Pss 73:8; 119:134 (see HALOT 897 s.v. עֲשָׂוִים 1; BDB 799 s.v. עֲשָׂוִים 1). It occurs several times in the book, always in reference to personal rather than national oppression (4:1; 5:8 ET [5:7 HT]; 7:7). The noun עֲשָׂוִים (*ha'asvuqim*) is plural and articular (Heb "the oppressions"). The article indicates a generic class ("oppression"). The plural may be classified in one of two ways: (1) a plural of number, which refers to specific kinds of oppression that occur on earth: "the various kinds of oppression"; (2) an abstract plural, which is used to refer to abstract concepts: "the oppression"; or (3) a plural of intensity, which describes the oppression at hand as particularly grievous: "awful oppression" or "severe oppression." The LXX renders it as a plural of number: συκοφαντίας (*sukophantias*, "oppressions"), as does the Vulgate. Most English versions treat it as a plural of number: "the oppressions" (KJV, ASV, NAB, RSV, NRSV, MLB, YLT); however, a few treat it as an abstract plural: "the oppression" (NJPS, NIV, Moffatt).

<sup>8</sup> **tn** Heb "is done." The term נַעֲשִׂים (*na'asim*, Niphal participle mpl from עָשָׂה, *asah*, "to do") is a probably a verbal use

earth.<sup>9</sup>

This is what I saw:<sup>10</sup>

The oppressed<sup>11</sup> were in tears,<sup>12</sup> but no one was comforting them; no one delivers<sup>13</sup> them from the power of their oppressors.<sup>14</sup>

of the participle rather than a substantival use (NEB: "all the acts of oppression"). This verbal use of the participle depicts durative or universal gnomic action. It emphasizes the lamentable continuity of oppression throughout human history. The English versions translate it variously: "[all the oppressions that] are done" (KJV, ASV, Douay, YLT), "[all the oppression] that goes on" (NJPS, Moffatt), "[all the oppressions] that are practiced" (RSV, NRSV), "[all the oppressions] that occur" (MLB), "[all the acts of oppression] which were being done" (NASB), "[all the oppressions] that take place" (NAB), "[all the oppression] that was taking place" (NIV).

<sup>9</sup> **tn** Heb "under the sun."

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Heb "and behold." The deictic particle וְהִנֵּה (*v'hinneh*, "and behold!") often occurs after verbs of perceiving, such as רָאָה, *ra'ah*, "to see" (e.g., Gen 19:28; 22:13; Exod 3:2; Lev 13:8). It introduces the content of what the character or speaker saw (HALOT 252 s.v. רָאָה 8). It is used for rhetorical emphasis, to draw attention to the following statement (e.g., Gen 1:29; 17:20; Num 22:32; Job 1:19; cf. HALOT 252 s.v. 5). It often introduces something surprising or unexpected (e.g., Gen 29:6; Num 25:6; cf. HALOT 252 s.v. 6).

<sup>11</sup> **tn** The term עֲשָׂוִים (*ha'asvuqim*, Qal passive participle mpl from עָשָׂה, *asah*, "to oppress") is a passive form, emphasizing that they are the objects of oppression at the hands of their oppressors. The participle functions as a noun, emphasizing the durative aspect of their condition and that this was the singular most characteristic attribute of this group of people: Their lives were marked by oppression.

<sup>12</sup> **tn** Heb "the tear of the oppressed." Alternately, "the oppressed [were in] tears." The singular noun דִּמְעָה (*dim'ah*, "tear") is used as a collective for "tears" (2 Kgs 20:5; Isa 16:9; 25:8; 38:5; Jer 8:23 HT [9:1 ET]; 9:7 HT [9:18 ET]; 13:17; 14:17; 31:16; Ezek 24:16; Mal 2:13; Pss 6:7; 39:13; 42:4; 56:9; 80:6; 116:8; 126:5; Lam 1:2; 2:18; Eccl 4:1); see HALOT 227 s.v. דִּמְעָה; BDB 199 s.v. דִּמְעָה. It is often used in reference to lamentation over calamity, distress, or oppression (e.g., Ps 6:7; Lam 1:2; 2:11; Jer 9:17; 13:17; 14:17). The LXX translated it as singular δάκρυον (*dakroun*, "the tear"); however, the Vulgate treated it as a collective ("the tears"). Apart from the woodenly literal YLT ("the tear"), the major English versions render this as a collective: "the tears" or "tears" (KJV, ASV, NEB, NAB, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NJPS, MLB, NIV). The term דִּמְעָה functions as a metonymy of association for "weeping" (e.g., Isa 16:9; Jer 8:23 HT [9:1 ET]): "the oppressed [were weeping with] tears." The genitive construct דִּמְעַת הָעֲשָׂוִים (*dim' at ha'asvuqim*, literally, "tear of the oppressed") is a subjective genitive construction, that is, the oppressed are weeping. The singular דִּמְעָה (*dim'at*, "tear") is used as a collective for "tears." This entire phrase, however, is still given a woodenly literal translation by most English versions: "the tears of the oppressed" (NEB, NAB, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, MLB, NIV, NJPS). Some paraphrases attempt to fill out the meaning, e.g., "the oppressed were in tears" (Moffatt).

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Heb "comforts." The verb נָחַם (*nakhham*, "to comfort") is used as a metonymy of effect (i.e., comfort) for cause (i.e., deliverance), e.g., it is used in parallelism with גָּאֵל (*ga'al*, "to deliver") in Isa 52:9 (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 560-67).

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Heb "from the hand of their oppressors is power."

4:2 So I considered<sup>1</sup> those who are dead and gone<sup>2</sup> more fortunate than those who are still alive.<sup>3</sup>

4:3 But better than both is the one who has not been born<sup>4</sup> and has not seen the evil things that are done on earth.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Labor Motivated by Envy*

4:4 Then I considered<sup>6</sup> all the skillful work<sup>7</sup> that is done: Surely it is nothing more than<sup>8</sup> competition<sup>9</sup> between one person and another.<sup>10</sup> This also is profitless – like<sup>11</sup> chasing the wind.

4:5 The fool folds his hands and does no work,<sup>12</sup> so he has nothing to eat but his own flesh.<sup>13</sup>

4:6 Better is one handful with some rest

than two hands full of toil<sup>14</sup> and chasing the wind.

#### *Labor Motivated by Greed*

4:7 So<sup>15</sup> I again considered<sup>16</sup> another<sup>17</sup> futile thing on earth:<sup>18</sup>

4:8 A man who is all alone with no companion,<sup>19</sup>

he has no children nor siblings;<sup>20</sup> yet there is no end to all his toil, and he<sup>21</sup> is never satisfied with riches. He laments,<sup>22</sup> “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself<sup>23</sup> of pleasure?”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The verb שָׁבַח (*shavakh*) has a two-fold range of meaning: (1) “to praise; to laud”; and (2) “to congratulate” (*HALOT* 1387 s.v. שָׁבַח; BDB 986 s.v. II שָׁבַח). The LXX translated it as ἐπιηύεσα (*epēnesa*, “I praised”). The English versions reflect the range of possible meanings: “praised” (KJV, ASV, Douay); “congratulated” (MLB, NASB); “declared/judged/accounted-of/thought...fortunate/happy” (NJPS, NEB, NIV, RSV, NRSV, NAB).

<sup>2</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the dead who had already died.”

<sup>3</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the living who are alive.”

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The word “born” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** *Heb* “under the sun.”

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* “saw.”

<sup>7</sup> **tn** *Heb* “all the toil and all the skill.” This Hebrew clause (וְכָל־עֲמָלִים וְכָל־מְלָכָה וְכָל־יָדֵי־עָמָל וְכָל־יָדֵי־מְלָכָה) is a nominal hendiadys (a figurative expression in which two independent phrases are used to connote the same thing). The second functions adverbially, modifying the first, which retains its full nominal function: “all the skillful work.”

<sup>8</sup> **tn** The phrase “nothing more than” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** The noun קִנְיָה (*qini’ah*, “competition”) has a wide range of meanings: “zeal; jealousy; envy; rivalry; competition; suffering; animosity; anger; wrath” (*HALOT* 1110 s.v.; BDB 888 s.v.). Here, as in 9:6, it denotes “rivalry” (BDB 888 s.v. 1) or “competitive spirit” (*HALOT* 1110 s.v. 1.b). The LXX rendered it ζήλος (*zelos*, “envy; jealousy”). The English versions reflect this broad range: “rivalry” (NEB, NAB, NASB), “envy” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV, MLB, NIV, NJPS), and “jealousy” (Moffatt).

<sup>10</sup> **tn** *Heb* “a man and his neighbor.”

<sup>11</sup> **tn** The word “like” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>12</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the fool folds his hands.” The Hebrew idiom means that he does not work (e.g., Prov 6:10; 24:33). In the translation the words “and does no work” (which do not appear in the Hebrew text) have been supplied following the idiom to clarify what is meant.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** *Heb* “and eats his own flesh.” Most English versions render the idiom literally: “and eats/consumes his flesh” (KJV, AS, NASB, NAB, RSV, NRSV, NJPS). However, a few versions attempt to explain the idiom: “and lets life go to ruin” (Moffatt), “and wastes away” (NEB), “and ruins himself” (NIV).

<sup>14</sup> **sn** Qoheleth lists three approaches to labor: (1) the competitive workaholic in 4:4, (2) the impoverished sluggard in 4:5, and (3) the contented laborer in 4:6. The balanced approach rebukes the two extremes.

<sup>15</sup> **tn** The prefixed *vav* on וָשָׁבַח (*v<sup>e</sup>shavti*, *vav* + perfect 1st person common singular from שָׁבַח, *shuv*, “to turn”) might be: (1) introductory (and left untranslated): “I observed again...”; (2) consequence of preceding statement: “So I observed again...”; or (3) continuation of preceding statement: “And I observed again...”

<sup>16</sup> **tn** *Heb* “I turned and I saw...”; or “I again considered.” The Hebrew phrase וָשָׁבַח וָרָאָה (*v<sup>e</sup>shavti...va’er’eh*, “I turned and I saw”) is a verbal hendiadys (the two verbs represent one common idea). Normally in a verbal hendiadys, the first verb functions adverbially, modifying the second verb which retains its full verbal force. The verb שָׁבַח (*shuv*, “to turn”) is used idiomatically to denote repetition: “to return and do” = “to do again” (e.g., Gen 26:18; 30:31; 43:2) or “to do repeatedly” (e.g., Lam 3:3); see *HALOT* 1430 s.v. שָׁבַח 5; BDB 998 s.v. שָׁבַח 8; GKC 386 §120.e: “I observed again” or “I repeatedly observed.” On the other hand, the shift from the perfect וָשָׁבַח (*vav* + perfect 1st person common singular from שָׁבַח, “to turn”) to the preterite וָרָאָה (*vav* + Qal preterite 1st person common singular from רָאָה, *ra’ah*, “to see”) might indicate a purpose clause: “I turned [my mind] to consider...” The preterite וָרָאָה follows the perfect וָשָׁבַח. When a *wayyiqtol* form (*vav* + preterite) follows a perfect in reference to a past-time situation, the preterite also represents a past-time situation. Its aspect is based on the preceding perfect. In this context, the perfect and preterite may denote definite past or indefinite past action (“I turned and considered ...” as hendiadys for “I observed again” or “I repeatedly observed”) or past telic action (“I turned [my mind] to consider...”). See *IBHS* 554-55 §33.3.1a.

<sup>17</sup> **tn** The word “another” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>18</sup> **tn** *Heb* “under the sun.”

<sup>19</sup> **tn** *Heb* “There is one and there is not a second.”

<sup>20</sup> **tn** *Heb* “son nor brother.” The terms “son” and “brother” are examples of synecdoche of specific (*species*) for the general (*genus*). The term “son” is put for offspring, and “brother” for siblings (e.g., Prov 10:1).

<sup>21</sup> **tn** *Heb* “his eye.” The term “eye” is a synecdoche of part (i.e., the eye) for the whole (i.e., the whole person); see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 647.

<sup>22</sup> **tn** The phrase “he laments” is not in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. The direct discourse (“For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?”) is not introduced with an introductory structure. As in the LXX, some translations suggest that these words are spoken by a lonely workaholic, e.g., “He says...” (NAB, NEB, ASV, NIV, NRSV). Others suggest that this is a question that he never asks himself, e.g., “Yet he never asks himself...” (KJV, RSV, MLB, YLT, Douay, NASB, Moffatt).

<sup>23</sup> **tn** *Heb* “my soul.”

<sup>24</sup> **tn** This rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, that is, it expects a negative answer: “No one!” (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949-51).

This also is futile and a burdensome task!<sup>1</sup>

*Labor is Beneficial When Its Rewards Are Shared*

**4:9** Two people are better than one, because they can reap<sup>2</sup> more benefit<sup>3</sup> from their labor.

**4:10** For if they fall, one will help his companion up, but pity<sup>4</sup> the person who falls down and has no one to help him up.

**4:11** Furthermore, if two lie down together, they can keep each other warm, but how can one person keep warm by himself?

**4:12** Although an assailant may overpower<sup>5</sup> one person, two can withstand him. Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.

*Labor Motivated by Prestige-Seeking*

**4:13** A poor but wise youth is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive advice.

**4:14** For he came out of prison<sup>6</sup> to become king, even though he had been born poor in what would become his<sup>7</sup> kingdom.

**4:15** I considered all the living who walk on earth,<sup>8</sup> as well as the successor<sup>9</sup> who would arise<sup>10</sup> in his place.

**4:16** There is no end to all the people<sup>11</sup> nor to the past generations,<sup>12</sup> yet future generations<sup>13</sup> will not rejoice in him.

This also is profitless and like<sup>14</sup> chasing the wind.

*Rash Vows*

**5:1 (4:17)<sup>15</sup>** Be careful what you do<sup>16</sup> when you go to the temple<sup>17</sup> of God;

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The adjective רע (*ra'*, "evil") here means "misfortune" (HALOT 1263 s.v. רעה 4) or "injustice, wrong" (HALOT 1262 s.v. רע 2.b). The phrase ענין רע (*'inyan ra'*, "unhappy business; rotten business; grievous task") is used only in Ecclesiastes (1:13; 2:23, 26; 3:10; 4:8; 5:2, 13; 8:16). It is parallel with הֶבֶל (*hevel*, "futile") in 4:8, and describes a "grave misfortune" in 5:13. The noun ענין (*'inyan*, "business") refers to something that keeps a person occupied or busy: "business; affair; task; occupation" (HALOT 857 s.v. ענין; BDB 775 s.v. ענין). The related verb עָנַה (*'anah*) means "to be occupied; to be busy with (ב, *bet*)," e.g., Eccl 1:13; 3:10; 5:19 (HALOT 854 s.v. III ענה); BDB 775 s.v. II ענה. The noun is from the Aramaic loanword עִנְיָא (*'inyana*, "concern; care." The verb is related to the Aramaic verb "to try hard," the Arabic verb "to be busily occupied; to worry; to be a matter of concern," and the Old South Arabic root "to be troubled; to strive with" (HALOT 854 s.v. III ענה). HALOT 857 s.v. ענין renders the phrase as "unhappy business" here. The phrase ענין רע, is treated creatively by English versions: KJV, ASV "sore travail"; YLT "sad travail"; Douay "grievous vexation"; RSV, NRSV, NJPS "unhappy business"; NEB, Moffatt "sorry business"; NIV "miserable business"; NAB "worthless task"; NASB "grievous task"; MLB "sorry situation"; NLT "depressing."

<sup>2</sup> **tn** *Heb* "they have."

<sup>3</sup> **tn** *Heb* "a good reward."

<sup>4</sup> **tn** *Heb* "woe to him."

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The verbal root תָּקַח means "to overpower; to prevail over" e.g., Job 14:20; 15:24; Eccl 4:12; 6:10 (HALOT 1786 s.v. תָּקַח).

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* "came from the house of bonds."

<sup>7</sup> **tn** The phrase "what would become" is not in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. However, it is not altogether clear whether the 3rd person masculine singular suffix ("his") in בְּמַלְכוּתוֹ (*b<sup>m</sup>malkhuto*, "his kingdom") refers to the old foolish king or to the poor but wise youth of 4:13.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Heb* "under the sun."

<sup>9</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the second youth." It is not clear whether "the second" (רֵשֶׁתִּי, *hasheni*) refers to the young man who succeeds the old king or a second youthful successor.

<sup>10</sup> **tn** The verb עָמַד (*'amad*, "to stand") may denote "to arise; to appear; to come on the scene" (e.g., Ps 106:30; Dan 8:22, 23; 11:2-4; 12:1; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65); cf. BDB 764 s.v. עָמַד 6.a; HALOT 840 s.v. עָמַד 1.a.

<sup>11</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the people." The term עַם (*'am*, "people") can refer to the subjects of the king (BDB 766 s.v. עַם 2).

<sup>12</sup> **tn** *Heb* "those who were before them."

<sup>13</sup> **tn** *Heb* "those coming after." The Hebrew term הַאֲחֵרִים נִיב (*ha'akharonim*, "those coming after") is derived from the preposition אַחֵר (*'akhar*, "behind"). When used in reference to time, it refers to future generations (e.g., Deut 29:21; Pss 48:14; 78:4, 6; 102:19; Job 18:20; Eccl 1:11; 4:16); cf. HALOT 36 s.v. אַחֵר B.3; BDB 30 s.v. אַחֵר 2.b).

<sup>14</sup> **tn** The word "like" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>15</sup> **sn** Beginning with 5:1, the verse numbers through 5:20 in the English Bible differ by one from the verse numbers in the Hebrew text (BHS), with 5:1 ET = 4:17 HT, 5:2 ET = 5:1 HT, etc., through 5:20 ET = 5:19 HT. Beginning with 6:1 the verse numbers in the English Bible and the Hebrew Bible are again the same.

<sup>16</sup> **tn** *Heb* "Guard your feet." The *Kethib* is the plural רַגְלֵיךָ (*raglekhā*, "your feet"), while the *Qere* is the singular רַגְלֶיךָ (*raglekhā*, "your foot"), which is preserved in several medieval Hebrew MSS and is reflected in the versions (LXX, Aramaic Targum, Vulgate, Syriac Peshitta). For example, the LXX reads ποδά σου (*podā sou*, "your foot") which reflects רַגְלֶיךָ.

<sup>17</sup> **sn** The exhortation, "Guard your feet" is an idiom for "Watch your steps," i.e., "Be careful what you do." This is a compound figure: "foot" is a metonymy for "step," and "step" is a metonymy for "action" (e.g., Job 12:5; 23:11; 31:5; Pss 119:59, 101, 105; Prov 1:16; 3:23; 4:26-27; 6:18; 19:2; Isa 58:13; 59:7; Jer 14:10). For example, "I have refrained my feet from every evil way" (Ps 119:101); see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 648.

<sup>17</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the house of God." The term "house" (בַּיִת, *bayit*) is a synecdoche of general (i.e., house) for specific (i.e., temple), e.g., 1 Kgs 6:3; 7:12; 1 Chr 9:11; 2 Chr 3:8; 28:11. See E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 620.

draw near to listen<sup>1</sup> rather than to offer a sacrifice<sup>2</sup> like fools,<sup>3</sup> for they do not realize that they are doing wrong.

5:2 (5:1) Do not be rash with your mouth or hasty in your heart to bring up a matter before God,

for God is in heaven and you are on earth! Therefore, let your words be few.

5:3 Just as dreams come when there are many cares,<sup>4</sup>

so<sup>5</sup> the rash vow<sup>6</sup> of a fool occurs<sup>7</sup> when there are many words.

5:4 When you make a vow<sup>8</sup> to God, do

not delay in paying it.<sup>9</sup> For God<sup>10</sup> takes no pleasure in fools: Pay what you vow!

5:5 It is better for you not to vow than to vow and not pay it.<sup>11</sup>

5:6 Do not let your mouth cause you<sup>12</sup> to sin,

and do not tell the priest,<sup>13</sup> “It was a mistake!”<sup>14</sup>

Why make God angry at you<sup>15</sup> so that he would destroy the work of your hands?”

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Alternately, “to obey.” The term לִשְׁמָעוּ (*lishma’*, preposition + Qal infinitive construct from שָׁמַע, *shama’*, “to hear”) may be taken in one of two ways: (1) literal: “to listen” in contrast to speak or (2) figurative (metonymy of cause for effect) “to obey” in contrast to sacrifice (*HALOT* 1572 s.v. שָׁמַע 4; BDB 1033–34 s.v. שָׁמַע). The LXX took the term in the literal sense: τοῦ ἀκούειν (*tou akouein*, “to listen”). The English versions reflect both literal and figurative options: “obedience” (NJPS, Douay, NAB, NEB) versus “to hear [or listen]” (KJV, ASV, YLT, MLB, RSV, NASB, NIV, NRSV). The section warns against rash vows therefore, the nuance “to listen” is more appropriate: the wise man will be slow to speak and quick to listen in the presence of God; however, the fool is unrestrained and speaks rashly.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** The term “sacrifice” (זֶבַח, *zevakh*) is the general term that refers to the thank offering and free will offering (Lev 7:12, 16). This section focuses on making vows in prayer and fulfilling them, such as the vow offering. The term “sacrifice” functions as a synecdoche of general (i.e., sacrifice) for specific (i.e., vow offering).

<sup>3</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the fools, a sacrifice.” The term “fools” (הַבְּסִילִים, *hakk<sup>3</sup>silim*) is an adverbial accusative of comparison (e.g., GKC 375 §118.r): “rather than giving a sacrifice like fools” (מִתֵּר הַבְּסִילִים, *mittet hakk<sup>3</sup>silim zevakh*). Contextually, the “sacrifice” is a rash vow made to God that is not fulfilled. The rash vow is referred to in 5:2 as the “voice of a fool.” Qoheleth admonishes the fool against making a rash vow that is not paid: “When you make a vow to God, do not delay in paying it; for God takes no pleasure in fools: Pay what you vow! It is better for you not to vow than to vow and not pay it” (vv. 4-5 [3-4 HT]).

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The term עֵינָן (*inyan*) means “business; affair; task; occupation” (*HALOT* 857 s.v. עֵינָן; BDB 775 s.v. עֵינָן). *HALOT* nuances עֵינָן (בְּרֹב עֵינָן) (*b<sup>3</sup>rov inyan*) as “excessive activity” (*HALOT* 857 s.v. עֵינָן). Here, it is used as a metonymy of cause (i.e., tasks) for effect (i.e., cares). The term is nuanced variously: (1) literal sense: “business” (KJV, ASV, YLT, NEB, RSV) and “effort” (NASB), and (2) metonymical: “cares” (NAB, NIV, NRSV), “concerns” (MLB, Douay), “worries” (Moffatt) and “brooding” (NJPS). The LXX mistakenly related עֵינָן to the root אָנַח (*anah*) “to afflict,” and rendered it as πειρασμός (*peirasmou*, “trial”).

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The juxtaposition of the two lines joined by *vav* (“just as...so...”) suggests a comparison (BDB 253 s.v. וַיִּ; see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 71, §437).

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* “voice.” The Hebrew term קוֹל (*qol*, “voice”) is used as a metonymy of cause (i.e., voice) for the contents (i.e., the thing said), e.g., Gen 3:17; 4:23; Exod 3:18; 4:1, 9; Deut 1:45; 21:18, 20; 1 Sam 2:25; 8:7, 9; 2 Sam 12:18; see *HALOT* 1084 s.v. קוֹל 4.b; BDB 877 s.v. קוֹל 3.a; also E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 545–46. Contextually, this refers to a rash vow made by a fool who made a mistake in making it because he is unable to fulfill it.

<sup>7</sup> **tn** The word “occurs” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Heb* “vow a vow.” The phrase תָּדַר נֶדֶר (*tiddar neder*, “to vow a vow”) is a Hebrew idiom in which the root נָדַר is repeated for emphasis. The construction is a cognate accusative (see *IBHS* 166-67 §10.2.1f). The verb נָדַר (*nadar*, “to vow”) refers to the action of making a solemn promise to the

Lord to perform an action or offer a sacrifice, e.g., Lev 27:8; Num 6:21; 30:11; Deut 23:23-24; Jonah 2:10; Mal 1:14; Pss 76:12; 132:2; see *HALOT* 674 s.v. נָדַר. The noun נֶדֶר (“vow”) was a gift or offering promised to be given to the Lord (Num 30:3; Deut 12:11; 23:19; Isa 19:12; Nah 2:1 HT [1:15 ET]; Ps 61:6, 9 HT [61:5, 8 ET]); see *HALOT* 674–75 s.v. נָדַר. It usually was a sacrifice or free-will offering (Deut 12:6; Ps 66:13) that was often promised during times of pressure (Judg 11:30; 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Sam 15:7-8; Pss 22:25; 66:13; 116:14, 18; Jonah 2:9).

<sup>9</sup> **tn** The term לְשַׁלְּמוֹ (*l<sup>3</sup>shallmo*, preposition + Piel infinitive construct from שָׁלַם, *shalam* + 3rd person masculine singular suffix) is derived from the root שָׁלַם which is used in a general sense of paying a debt (2 Kgs 4:7; Ps 37:21; Prov 22:27; Job 41:3), and more specifically of fulfilling a vow to the Lord (Deut 23:22; 2 Sam 15:7; Pss 22:26 HT [22:25 ET]; 50:14; 61:9 HT [61:8 ET]; 66:13; 76:12 HT [76:11 ET]; 116:14, 18; Prov 7:14; Job 22:27; Isa 19:21; Jonah 2:10; Nah 2:1); see *HALOT* 1535 s.v. שָׁלַם 3.a; BDB 1022 s.v. שָׁלַם 4. An Israelite was never required to make a vow, but once made, it had to be paid (Lev 22:18-25; 27:1-13; Num 15:2-10; Nah 1:15 [2:1 HT]).

<sup>10</sup> **tn** *Heb* “he”; the referent (“God”) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>11</sup> **tn** The word “it” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>12</sup> **tn** *Heb* “your flesh.” The term בָּשָׂר (*basar*, “flesh”) is a synecdoche of part (i.e., flesh) for the whole (i.e., whole person), e.g., Gen 2:21; 6:12; Ps 56:4[5]; 65:2[3]; 145:21; Isa 40:5, 6; see *HALOT* 164 s.v. בָּשָׂר; E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 642.

<sup>13</sup> **tc** The MT reads הַמְּלָאָךְ (*hammal<sup>3</sup>akh*, “messenger”), while the LXX reads τοῦ θεοῦ (*tou theou*, “God”), which reflects an alternate textual tradition of הַתְּלִימִים (*ha<sup>3</sup>elohim*, “God”). The textual problem was caused by orthographic confusion between similarly spelled words. The LXX might have been trying to make sense of a difficult expression. The MT is preferred as the original. All the major translations follow the MT except for Moffatt (“God”).

**tn** *Heb* “the messenger.” The term מְלָאָךְ (*mal<sup>3</sup>akh*, “messenger”) refers to a temple priest (e.g., Mal 2:7; cf. *HALOT* 585 s.v. מְלָאָךְ 2.b; BDB 521 s.v. מְלָאָךְ 1.c). The priests recorded what Israelite worshippers vowed (Lev 27:14-15). When an Israelite delayed in fulfilling a vow, a priest would remind him to pay what he had vowed. Although the traditional rabbinic view is that Qoheleth refers to an angelic superintendent over the temple, Rashi suggested that it is a temple-official. Translations reflect both views: “his representative” (NAB), “the temple messenger” (NIV), “the messenger” (RSV, NRSV, NASB, MLB, NJPS), “the angel” (KJV, ASV, Douay) and “the angel of God” (NEB).

<sup>14</sup> **tn** The Hebrew noun שְׁגָגָה (*sh<sup>3</sup>gaqah*) denotes “error; mistake” and refers to a sin of inadvertence or unintentional sin (e.g., Lev 4:2, 22, 27; 5:18; 22:14; Num 15:24-29; 35:11, 15; Josh 20:3, 9; Eccl 5:5; 10:5); see *HALOT* 1412 s.v. שְׁגָגָה; BDB 993 s.v. שְׁגָגָה. In this case, it refers to a rash vow thoughtlessly made, which the foolish worshiper claims was a mistake (e.g., Prov 20:25).

<sup>15</sup> **tn** *Heb* “at your voice.” This is an example of metonymy (i.e., your voice) of association (i.e., you).



5:7 Just as there is futility in many dreams,  
so also in many words.<sup>1</sup>  
Therefore, fear God!

### Government Corruption

5:8 If you see the extortion<sup>2</sup> of the poor,  
or the perversion<sup>3</sup> of justice and fairness  
in the government,<sup>4</sup>  
do not be astonished by the matter.  
For the high official is watched by a  
higher official,<sup>5</sup>  
and there are higher ones over them!<sup>6</sup>  
5:9 The produce of the land is seized<sup>7</sup> by  
all of them,

even the king is served<sup>8</sup> by the fields.<sup>9</sup>

### Covetousness

5:10 The one who loves money<sup>10</sup> will  
never be satisfied with money,<sup>11</sup>  
he who loves wealth<sup>12</sup> will never be

**1 tn** The syntax of this verse is difficult. Perhaps the best approach is to classify the *vav* on הַבְּלִיּוֹת (*vahavalim*, “futilities”) as introducing the predicate (e.g., Gen 40:9; 2 Sam 23:3; Prov 10:25; Isa 34:12; Job 4:6; 36:26); BDB 255 s.v. 1.5.c.γ: “There is futility....” The phrase הַרְבֵּי הַלֹּמֹת (*halomot*) is an adverbial modifier (“in many dreams”), as is הַרְבֵּי הַדְּבָרִים (*dʿvarim harbeh*, “many words”). The *vav* prefixed to הַרְבֵּי הַדְּבָרִים (*udʿvarim*) and the juxtaposition of the two lines suggests a comparison: “just as...so also...” (BDB 253 s.v. 1.1.ן). The English versions reflect a variety of approaches: “In the multitude of dreams and many words there are also diverse vanities” (KJV); “In the multitude of dreams there are vanities, and in many words” (ASV); “When dreams increase, empty words grow many” (RSV); “In many dreams and follies and many words” (MLB); “In the abundance of dreams both vanities and words abound” (YLT); “Where there are many dreams, there are many vanities, and words without number” (Douay); “Many dreams and words mean many a vain folly” (Moffatt); “Much dreaming leads to futility and to superfluous talk” (NPS); “In many dreams and in many words there is emptiness” (NASB); “Much dreaming and many words are meaningless” (NIV); “With many dreams comes vanities and a multitude of words” (NRSV).

**2 tn** Alternately, “oppression.” The term עִשְׂקָה (*ʿosheq*) has a basic two-fold range of meaning: (1) “oppression; brutality” (e.g., Isa 54:14); and (2) “extortion” (e.g., Ps 62:11); see HALOT 897 s.v. עִשְׂקָה; BDB 799 s.v. עִשְׂקָה. The LXX understands the term as “oppression,” as the translation σαυκοφαντία (*sukophantian*, “oppression”) indicates. Likewise, HALOT 897 s.v. עִשְׂקָה 1 classifies this usage as “oppression” against the poor. However, the context of 5:8-9 [7-8 HT] focuses on corrupt government officials robbing people of the fruit of their labor through extortion and the perversion of justice.

**3 tn** Heb “robbery.” The noun גֵּזֶל (*gezel*, “robbery”) refers to the wresting away of righteousness or the perversion of justice (HALOT 186 s.v. גֵּזֶל). The related forms of the root גִּזַּל mean “to rob; to loot” (HALOT 186 s.v. גִּזַּל). The term “robbery” is used as a figure for the perversion of justice (hypocatastasis); just as a thief robs his victims through physical violence, so corrupt government officials “rob” the poor through the perversion of justice.

**4 tn** Heb “in the province.”

**5 tn** The word “official” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**6 sn** And there are higher ones over them! This may describe a corrupt system of government in which each level of hierarchy exploits its subordinates, all the way down to the peasants: “Set in authority over the people is an official who enriches himself at their expense; he is watched by a more authoritative governor who also has his share of the spoils; and above them are other officers of the State who likewise have to be satisfied”; see A. Cohen, *The Five Megilloth* (SoBB), 141.

**7 tn** The phrase “is seized” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**8 tn** The function of the term עָבַד (*ʿavad*, Niphal participle ms from עָבַד, “to serve”) has been understood in four ways: (1) adjectival use of the participle, modifying the noun שָׂדֵה (*sadeh*, “field”): “cultivated field” (RSV, NRSV, NJPS, NAB); (2) adjectival use of the participle, modifying מֶלֶךְ (*melekh*, “king”): “the king who cultivates” (NASB); (3) verbal use of the participle, taking שָׂדֵה (“field”) as the subject: “field is cultivated” (NEB); and (4) verbal use of the participle, taking מֶלֶךְ (“king”) as the subject: “the king is served” (KJV, NASB); also “the king profits” (NIV). BDB 713 s.v. עָבַד 2 lists both the adjectival and verbal options: “a king for [i.e., devoted to] the cultivated field” and “a king that makes himself servant to the field [i.e., devoted to agriculture].” HALOT 774 s.v. עָבַד suggests the line be rendered as “a king who serves the land.” In the Qal stem the verb עָבַד (*ʿavad*) is sometimes used in reference to tribute imposed upon a king’s subjects (e.g., Jer 25:14; 27:7; 30:8; Ezek 34:27) and in reference to subjects serving a king (e.g., Judg 9:28, 38; 1 Sam 11:1; 1 Kgs 5:1; 2 Sam 22:44; Jer 27:7; 28:14; 2 Kgs 25:24); cf. BDB 713 s.v. עָבַד 3; HALOT 773 s.v. עָבַד 3. Likewise, it is also used in reference to tilling the ground (e.g., Gen 2:5; 4:2, 12; 2 Sam 9:10; Isa 30:24; Jer 27:11; Zech 13:5; Prov 12:11; 28:19) and a vineyard or garden (Gen 2:15; Deut 28:39); cf. HALOT 773 s.v. עָבַד 3; BDB 713 s.v. עָבַד 3.

**9 tn** The syntax and exegesis of the line is difficult. There are three basic interpretive options: (1) the king takes care of the security of the cultivated land: “in any case, the advantage of a country is that there is a king for the cultivated land”; (2) the king is in favor of a prosperous agricultural policy: “in any case, the advantage of a country is that there is a king who is obeyed for the sake of the agriculture”; and (3) the king exploits the poor farmers: “the produce of the land is [seized] by all, even the king is served by the fields.” Perhaps the best option in the light of the context is to take the referent of כֹּל (*kol*, “all”) to the government officials of 5:8 rather than to the people as a whole. The verse depicts the exploitation of the poor farmers by corrupt government officials. This is reflected in two English versions: “the increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields” (NIV); “the profit of the land is among all of them; a cultivated field has a king” (RSV margin). On the other hand, the LXX treated the syntax so the king is viewed in a neutral sense: και περισεια γης επι παντι εστι, βασιλευς του αγρου ειργασμενου (“The abundance of the earth is for everyone; the king is dependent on the tilled field”). Most English versions deal with the syntax so that the king is viewed in a neutral or positive sense: “the profit of the earth is for all; the king himself is served by the field” (KJV); “a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land” (NASB); “this is an advantage for a land: a king for a plowed field” (NRSV); “the greatest advantage in all the land is his: he controls a field that is cultivated” (NJPS); “a country prospers with a king who has control” (Moffatt); “a king devoted to the field is an advantage to the land” (MLB); “a king is an advantage to a land with cultivated fields” (RSV); “the best thing for a country is a king whose own lands are well tilled” (NEB); and “an advantage for a country in every respect is a king for the arable land” (NAB). See D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:576-77.

**10 tn** Heb “silver.” The Hebrew term כֶּסֶף (*kesef*, “silver”) refers to “money” (HALOT 490-91 s.v. כֶּסֶף 3). It is a synecdoche of specific (i.e., silver) for the general (i.e., money); see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 625-29.

**11 sn** The Hebrew term “silver” (translated “money”) is repeated twice in this line for rhetorical emphasis.

**12 tn** The term הֲבֵוֹן (*hamon*, “abundance; wealth”) has a wide range of meanings: (1) agitation; (2) turmoil; (3) noise; (4) pomp; (5) multitude; crowd = noisy crowd; and (6) abundance; wealth (HALOT 250 s.v. הֲבֵוֹן 1-6). Here, it refers to

satisfied<sup>4</sup> with his<sup>2</sup> income.

This also is futile.

**5:11** When someone's<sup>3</sup> prosperity<sup>4</sup> increases, those who consume it also increase;

so what does its owner<sup>5</sup> gain, except that he gets to see it with his eyes?<sup>6</sup>

**5:12** The sleep of the laborer is pleasant – whether he eats little or much – but the wealth of the rich will not allow him to sleep.

*Materialism Thwarts Enjoyment of Life*

**5:13** Here is<sup>7</sup> a misfortune<sup>8</sup> on earth<sup>9</sup> that I have seen:

Wealth hoarded by its owner to his own misery.

**5:14** Then that wealth was lost through bad luck;<sup>10</sup>

abundant wealth (related to “pomp”); cf. HALOT 250 s.v. רבוץ 6, that is, lavish abundant wealth (Ezek 29:19; 30:4; 1 Chr 29:16).

**1 tn** The phrase “will never be satisfied” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. Note the previous line.

**2 tn** The word “his” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**3 tn** The word “someone’s” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**4 tn** The term טובה (*tohav*, “good”) connotes “prosperity” (Deut 23:7; Job 9:25; 21:25; Ps 106:5; Lam 3:17; Eccl 4:8; 5:10, 17; 6:3, 6; 7:14; 9:18; Neh 2:10; Sir 6:11; 41:13); cf. HALOT 372 s.v. טובה 2. The related term טוב (*to*, “good”) connotes “prosperity” as well (Prov 11:10; Job 20:21; 21:16); cf. HALOT 372 s.v. טובה 1.b. Here, it refers to the possessions and wealth a person acquires as the fruit of his labors. This nuance is well reflected in several English versions: “The more a man gains, the more there are to spend it” (Moffatt); “When riches multiply, so do those who live off them” (NEB); “As his substance increase, so do those who consume it” (NJPS); and “Where there are great riches, there are also many to devour them” (NAB). The line does not describe the economic law of “supply and demand,” as some versions seem to imply, e.g., “As goods increase, so do those who consume them” (NIV); “When goods increase, so do those who eat them increase” (NRSV); cf. also KJV, ASV, RSV, MLB, NASB.

**5 tn** The form is plural in the Hebrew text, but the plural is one of intensification; it is used here to emphasize the owner’s authority over his wealth. See GKC 399 §124.f. See v 13 as well.

**6 tn** The rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “There is no ultimate advantage!” (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 947-48).

**7 tn** Heb “there is.” The term יש (*yesh*, “there is”) is often used in aphorisms to assert the existence of a particular situation that occurs sometimes. It may indicate that the situation is not the rule but that it does occur on occasion, and may be nuanced “sometimes” (e.g., Prov 11:24; 13:7, 23; 14:12; 16:25; 18:24; 20:15; Eccl 2:21; 4:8; 5:12; 6:1; 7:15 [2x]; 8:14 [3x]).

**8 tn** The noun רעה (*ra’ah*, “evil”) probably means “misfortune” (HALOT 1263 s.v. רעה 4) or “injustice, wrong” (HALOT 1262 s.v. רעה 2.b). The phrase רעה רבה (*ra’ah rabbah*) connotes “grave injustice” or “great misfortune” (Eccl 2:17; 5:12, 15; 6:1; 10:5).

**9 tn** Heb “under the sun.”

**10 tn** Or “through a bad business deal.” The basic meaning of ענין (*inyan*) is “business; affair” (HALOT 857 s.v. ענין) or “occupation; task” (BDB 775 s.v. ענין). The term is used in a specific sense in reference to business activity (Eccl 8:16), as well as in a more general sense in reference to events that occur on earth (Eccl 1:13; 4:8). BDB suggests that the phrase

although he fathered a son, he has nothing left to give him.<sup>11</sup>

**5:15** Just as he came forth from his mother’s womb, naked will he return as he came,

and he will take nothing in his hand that he may carry away from his toil.

**5:16** This is another misfortune.<sup>12</sup>

Just as he came, so will he go.

What did he gain from toiling for the wind?

**5:17** Surely, he ate in darkness every day of his life,<sup>13</sup>

and he suffered greatly with sickness and anger.

*Enjoy the Fruit of Your Labor*

**5:18** I have seen personally what is the only beneficial and appropriate course of action for people.<sup>14</sup>

to eat and drink,<sup>15</sup> and find enjoyment in all their<sup>16</sup> hard work<sup>17</sup> on earth<sup>18</sup>

during the few days of their life which God has given them,

for this is their reward.<sup>19</sup>

**5:19** To every man whom God has given wealth, and possessions,

he has also given him the ability<sup>20</sup>

ענין רע (*inyan ra’*) in 5:13 refers to a bad business deal (BDB 775 s.v. ענין); however, HALOT suggests that it means “bad luck” (HALOT 857 s.v. ענין). The English versions reflect the same two approaches: (1) bad luck: “some misfortune” (NAB, NIV) and (2) a bad business deal: “a bad investment” (NASB), “a bad venture” (RSV, NRSV, MLB), “some unlucky venture” (Moffatt, NJPS), “an unlucky venture” (NEB), “an evil adventure” (ASV).

**11 tn** Heb “there is nothing in his hand.”

**12 tn** See the note on the phrase “misfortune” in v. 13.

**13 tn** Heb “all his days.” The phrase “of his life” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**14 tn** Heb “Behold, that which I have seen, I, good which is beautiful.” The phrase “for people” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**15 sn** The phrase “to eat and to drink” is a common idiom in Ecclesiastes for a person enjoying the fruit of his labor (e.g., 2:24; 3:13).

**16 tn** Heb “his,” and three times later in the verse.

**17 tn** Heb “the toil which one toils.”

**18 tn** Heb “under the sun.”

**19 tn** The term חלק (*khaleq*, “lot”) has a wide range of meanings: (1) “share of spoils” (Gen 14:24; Num 31:36; 1 Sam 30:24), (2) “portion of food” (Lev 6:10; Deut 18:8; Hab 1:16), (3) “portion [or tract] of land” (Deut 10:9; 12:12; Josh 19:9), (4) “portion” or “possession” (Num 18:20; Deut 32:9), (5) “inheritance” (2 Kgs 9:10; Amos 7:4), (6) “portion” or “award” (Job 20:29; 27:13; 31:2; Isa 17:14) or “profit; reward” (Eccl 2:10, 21; 3:22; 5:17-18; 9:6, 9); see HALOT 323 s.v. חלק II. BDB 324 s.v. חלק. Throughout Ecclesiastes, the term is used in reference to man’s temporal profit from his labor, his reward from God (e.g., Eccl 3:22; 9:9).

**20 tn** The syntax of this verse is difficult. The best approach is to view הישגית (*hishlito*, “he has given him the ability”) as governing the three following infinitives: לִאכֹל (*le’ekhol*, “to eat”), וְלָרִיב (*v<sup>l</sup>ase’et*, “and to lift” = “to accept [or receive]”), and וְלִשְׂמֹחַ (*v<sup>l</sup>ishmoakh*, “and to rejoice”). This statement parallels 2:24-26 which states that no one can find enjoyment in life unless God gives him the ability to do so.

to eat from them, to receive his reward  
and to find enjoyment in his toil;  
these things<sup>1</sup> are the gift of God.  
5:20 For he does not think<sup>2</sup> much about  
the fleeting<sup>3</sup> days of his life  
because God keeps him preoccupied<sup>4</sup>  
with the joy he derives from his activ-  
ity.<sup>5</sup>

### Not Everyone Enjoys Life

6:1 Here is<sup>6</sup> another misfortune<sup>7</sup> that I  
have seen on earth,<sup>8</sup>  
and it weighs<sup>9</sup> heavily on people;<sup>10</sup>  
6:2 God gives a man riches, property, and  
wealth

so that he lacks nothing that his heart<sup>11</sup>  
desires,<sup>12</sup>  
yet God does not enable<sup>13</sup> him to enjoy<sup>14</sup>  
the fruit of his labor<sup>15</sup> –  
instead, someone else<sup>16</sup> enjoys<sup>17</sup> it!<sup>18</sup>  
This is fruitless and a grave misfortune.<sup>19</sup>  
6:3 Even if a man fathers a hundred chil-  
dren and lives many years –  
even if he lives a long, long time,<sup>20</sup> but  
cannot enjoy his prosperity –  
even if he were to live forever<sup>21</sup> –  
I would say, “A stillborn child<sup>22</sup> is better  
off than he is!”<sup>23</sup>

**1 tn** Heb “this.” The feminine singular demonstrative pronoun זה (*zoh*, “this”) refers back to all that preceded it in the verse (e.g., GKC 440-41 §135.p), that is, the ability to enjoy the fruit of one’s labor is the gift of God (e.g., Eccl 2:24-26). The phrase “these things” is used in the translation for clarity.

**2 tn** The verb זָכַר (*zakhar*, “to remember”) may be nuanced “to call to mind; to think about,” that is, “to reflect upon” (e.g., Isa 47:7; Lam 1:9; Job 21:6; 36:24; 40:32 HT [41:8 ET]; Eccl 11:8); cf. BDB 270 s.v. זָכַר 5; HALOT 270 s.v. זָכַר 2.

**3 tn** The word “fleeting” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**4 tn** The term מְעֻבְּדָה (*ma’aneh*, Hiphil participle ms from II עָבַד, ‘*anah*, “to be occupied”) refers to activity that keeps a person physically busy and mentally preoccupied, e.g., Eccl 1:13; 3:10; 5:19 (HALOT 854; BDB 775 s.v. עָבַד II). The related noun עֵינָן (*inyan*, “business; occupation; task”) refers to activity that keeps man busy and occupies his time, e.g., Eccl 1:13; 2:26; 3:10 (HALOT 857; BDB 775 s.v. עֵינָן). The participle form is used to emphasize durative, uninterrupted, continual action.

**5 tn** Heb “with the joy of his heart.” The words “he derives from his activity” do not appear in the Hebrew, but they are added to clarify the Teacher’s point in light of what he says right before this.

**6 tn** The term ישׁ (*yesh*, “there is”) is often used in aphorisms to assert the existence of a particular situation that occurs sometimes. It may indicate that the situation is not the rule but that it does occur on occasion, and may be nuanced “sometimes” (Prov 11:24; 13:7, 23; 14:12; 16:25; 18:24; 20:15; Eccl 2:21; 4:8; 5:12; 6:1; 7:15 [2x]; 8:14 [3x]).

**7 tn** The noun רָעָה (*ra’ah*, “evil”) probably means “misfortune” (HALOT 1263 s.v. רָעָה 4) or “injustice, wrong” (HALOT 1262 s.v. רָעָה 2.b); see, e.g., Eccl 2:17; 5:12, 15; 6:1; 10:5.

**8 tn** Heb “under the sun.”

**9 tn** The word “weighs” does not appear in Hebrew, but is added in the translation for smoothness.

**10 tn** Heb “it is great upon men.” The phrase הַרְבֵּה הָיָא עָלֵי הָאָדָמָה (*vrabbah hi’ al-ha’adam*) is taken in two basic ways: (1) commonality: “it is common among men” (KJV, MLB), “it is prevalent among men” (NASB), “that is frequent among men” (Douay). (2) oppressiveness: “it lies heavy upon men” (RSV, NRSV), “it weighs heavily upon men” (NEB, NAB, NIV), “it presses heavily on men” (Moffatt), “it is heavy upon men” (ASV), and “a grave one it is for man” (NJPS). The preposition עַל (*al*, “upon”) argues against the first in favor of the second; the notion of commonality would be denoted by the preposition בֵּין (*bet*, “among”). The singular noun אָדָמָה (*adam*) is used as a collective, denoting “men.” The article הַאָדָמָה (*ha’adam*) is used in a generic sense referring to humankind as a whole; the generic article is often used with a collective singular (IBHS 244 §13.5.1f).

**11 tn** Heb “his appetite.”

**12 tn** Heb “There is no lack in respect to his appetite”; or “his desire lacks nothing.”

**13 tn** The verb שָׁלַט (*shalat*) in the Qal stem means “to dominate; to dominate; to lord it over; to be master of” and in the Hiphil stem “to give power to” (BDB 1020 s.v. שָׁלַט) and “to grant” (HALOT 1522 s.v. שָׁלַט). God must grant a person the ability to enjoy the fruit of his labor, otherwise a person will not be able to enjoy his possessions and wealth. The ability to partake of the fruit of one’s labor and to find satisfaction and joy in it is a gift from God (e.g., Eccl 2:24-26; 3:13; 5:18 [19]; 9:7).

**14 tn** Heb “to eat of it.” The verb אָכַל (*’akhal*, “to eat”) functions as a metonymy of association, that is, the action of eating is associated with the enjoyment of the fruit of one’s labor (e.g., Eccl 2:24-26; 3:12-13, 22; 5:17-19; 8:15; 9:9).

**15 tn** The phrase “the fruit of his labor” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**16 tn** Heb “a stranger.” The Hebrew expression אִישׁ נְכַרִי (*ish nokhri*, “stranger”) sometimes refers not to a foreigner or someone that the person does not know, but simply to someone else other than the subject (e.g., Prov 27:2). In the light of 6:3-6, it might even refer to the man’s own heirs. The term is used as a synecdoche of species (foreigner for stranger) in the sense of someone else other than the subject: “someone else” (BDB 649 s.v. נְכַרִי 3).

**17 tn** Heb “eats.”

**18 sn** Instead, someone else enjoys it. A person may be unable to enjoy the fruit of his/her labor due to an unfortunate turn of events that robs a person of his possessions (5:13-14) or a miserly, lifelong hoarding of one’s wealth that robs him of the ability to enjoy what he has worked so hard to acquire (5:15-17). Qoheleth recommends the enjoyment of life and the fruit of one’s labor, as God enables (5:18-20). Unfortunately, the ability to enjoy the fruits of one’s labor is often thwarted by the obstacles described in 6:1-2 and 6:3-9.

**19 tn** Heb “an evil sickness.”

**20 tn** Heb “the days of his years are many.”

**21 tn** Heb “he has no burial.” The phrase הַיָּמִים לֹא-יִקְבְּרוּהָ לֹא-הָיְתָה (*v’gam-q’vurah lo’-haytah*, “he even has no burial”) is traditionally treated as part of a description of the man’s sorry final state, that is, he is deprived of even a proper burial (KJV, NEB, RSV, NRSV, ASV, NASB, NIV, NJPS, MLB, Moffatt). However, the preceding parallel lines suggest that this a hyperbolic protasis: “If he were to live one hundred years...even if he were never buried [i.e., were to live forever]....” A similar idea occurs elsewhere (e.g., Pss 49:9; 89:48). See D. R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” *BKCOT*, 990.

**22 tn** The noun נֶפֶל (*nefel*) denotes “miscarriage” and by metonymy of effect, “stillborn child” (e.g., Ps 58:9; Job 3:16; Eccl 6:3); cf. HALOT 711. The noun is related to the verb נָפַל (*nafal*, “to fall,” but occasionally “to be born”; see Isa 26:18); cf. HALOT 710 s.v. נָפַל 5.

**23 sn** The point of 6:3-6 is that the futility of unenjoyed wealth is worse than the tragedy of being stillborn.

6:4 Though the stillborn child<sup>1</sup> came into the world<sup>2</sup> for no reason<sup>3</sup> and departed into darkness, though its name is shrouded in darkness,<sup>4</sup>  
 6:5 though it never saw the light of day<sup>5</sup> nor knew anything,<sup>6</sup> yet it has more rest<sup>7</sup> than that man –  
 6:6 if he should live a thousand years twice, yet does not enjoy his prosperity. For both of them die!<sup>8</sup>  
 6:7 All of man's labor is for nothing more than<sup>9</sup> to fill his stomach<sup>10</sup> – yet his appetite<sup>11</sup> is never satisfied!  
 6:8 So what advantage does a wise man have over a fool?<sup>12</sup>  
 And what advantage<sup>13</sup> does a pauper gain by knowing how to survive?<sup>14</sup>  
 6:9 It is better to be content with<sup>15</sup> what the eyes can see<sup>16</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Heb “he”; the referent (“the stillborn child”) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** The phrase “into the world” does not appear in Hebrew, but is added in the translation for clarity.

<sup>3</sup> **sn** The birth of the stillborn was in vain – it did it no good to be born.

<sup>4</sup> **sn** The name of the stillborn is forgotten.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** Heb “it never saw the sun.”

<sup>6</sup> **tn** The word “anything” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>7</sup> **sn** The Hebrew term translated *rest* here refers to freedom from toil, anxiety, and misery – part of the miserable misfortune that the miserly man of wisdom must endure.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** Heb “Do not all go to the same place?” The rhetorical question is an example of erotesis of positive affirmation, expecting a positive answer, e.g., Ps 56:13 [14] (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 947). It affirms the fact that both the miserly rich man who lives two thousand years, as well as the stillborn who never lived one day, both go to the same place – the grave. And if the miserly rich man never enjoyed the fruit of his labor during his life, his fate was no better than that of the stillborn who never had opportunity to enjoy any of the blessings of life. In a sense, it would have been better for the miserly rich man to have never lived than to have experienced the toil, anxiety, and misery of accumulating his wealth, but never enjoying any of the fruits of his labor.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** The phrase “for nothing more than” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Heb “All man’s work is for his mouth.” The term “mouth” functions as a synecdoche of part (i.e., mouth) for the whole (i.e., person), substituting the organ of consumption for the person’s action of consumption (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 641-43), as suggested by the parallelism with נפש (nefesh, “his appetite”).

<sup>11</sup> **tn** The term נפש (nefesh, “desire; appetite”) is used as a metonymy of association, that is, the soul is associated with man’s desires and appetites (BDB 660 s.v. נפש 5.c; 6.a).

<sup>12</sup> **sn** So what advantage does the wise man have over a fool? The rhetorical question in Hebrew implies a negative answer: the wise man has no absolute advantage over a fool in the sense that both will share the same fate: death. Qoheleth should not be misunderstood here as denying that wisdom has no relative advantage over folly; elsewhere he affirms that wisdom does yield some relative benefits in life (7:1-22). However, wisdom cannot deliver one from death.

<sup>13</sup> **sn** As in the preceding parallel line, this rhetorical question implies a negative answer (see the note after the word “fool” in the preceding line).

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Heb “What to the pauper who knows to walk before the living”; or “how to get along in life.”

<sup>15</sup> **tn** The phrase “to be content with” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>16</sup> **tn** The expression מראה עיניים (mar’eh ‘enayim, “the see-

ing for one’s heart always to crave more.<sup>17</sup>  
 This continual longing<sup>18</sup> is futile – like<sup>19</sup> chasing the wind.

*The Futile Way Life Works*

6:10 Whatever has happened was foreordained,<sup>20</sup> and what happens to a person<sup>21</sup> was also foreknown. It is useless for him to argue with God about his fate because God is more powerful than he is.<sup>22</sup>  
 6:11 The more one argues with words, the less he accomplishes.<sup>23</sup> How does that benefit him?<sup>24</sup>  
 6:12 For no one knows what is best for a person during his life<sup>25</sup> – during the few days of his fleeting life – for<sup>26</sup> they pass away<sup>27</sup> like a shadow. Nor can anyone tell him what the future will hold for him on earth.<sup>28</sup>

ing of the eyes”) is a metonymy of cause (i.e., seeing an object) for effect (i.e., being content with what the eyes can see); see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 552-54.

<sup>17</sup> **tn** Heb “the roaming of the soul.” The expression מהלך נפש (mehalakh-nefesh, “the roaming of the soul”) is a metonymy for unfulfilled desires. The term “soul” (נפש, nefesh) is used as a metonymy of association for man’s desires and appetites (BDB 660 s.v. נפש 5.c; 6.a). This also involves the personification of the roving appetite as “roving” (מנהלך); see BDB 235 s.v. מנהלך II.3.f; 232 I.3.

<sup>18</sup> **tn** The phrase “continual longing” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>19</sup> **tn** The term “like” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

<sup>20</sup> **tn** Heb “already its name was called.”

<sup>21</sup> **tn** Or “and what a person (Heb “man”) is was foreknown.”

<sup>22</sup> **tn** Heb “he cannot contend with the one who is more powerful than him.” The referent of the “the one who is more powerful than he is” (God) has been specified in the translation for clarity. The words “with God about his fate” have been added for clarity as well.

<sup>23</sup> **tn** Heb “The more the words, the more the futility.”

<sup>24</sup> **tn** Or “What benefit does man have [in that]?”

<sup>25</sup> **tn** Heb “For who knows what is good for a man in life?” The rhetorical question (“For who knows...?”) is a negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “For no one knows...!” (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949-51). The translation renders this rhetorical device as a positive affirmation.

<sup>26</sup> **tn** The *vav* prefixed to ויפשוט (vav’asem, conjunction + Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from נפש, ‘asah, “to do” + 3rd person masculine plural suffix) functions in an explanatory or epexegetical sense (“For ...”).

<sup>27</sup> **tn** The 3rd person masculine plural suffix on the verb ויפשוט (vav’asem, conjunction + Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from נפש, ‘asah, “to do” + 3rd person masculine plural suffix) refers to מִסְפַּר יְמֵי חַיָּו (mispar yemehayye hevlo, “the few days of his fleeting life”). The suffix may be taken as an objective genitive: “he spends them [i.e., the days of his life] like a shadow” (HALOT 891 s.v. מִסְפַּר יְמֵי חַיָּו 8) or as a subjective genitive: “they [i.e., the days of his life] pass like a shadow” (BDB 795 s.v. ויפשוט II.11).

<sup>28</sup> **tn** Heb “Who can tell the man what shall be after him under the sun?” The rhetorical question (“For who can tell him...?”) is a negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “For no one can tell him...!” (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 949-51). The translation renders this rhetorical device as a positive affirmation.



*Life is Brief and Death is Certain!*

7:1 A good reputation<sup>1</sup> is better<sup>2</sup> than precious<sup>3</sup> perfume;<sup>4</sup> likewise,<sup>5</sup> the day of one's<sup>6</sup> death<sup>7</sup> is better than the day of one's birth.<sup>8</sup>  
7:2 It is better to go to a funeral<sup>9</sup> than a feast.<sup>10</sup>

**1 tn** Heb "name." The Hebrew term שֵׁם (*shem*, "name") is used metonymically for a person's reputation (e.g., Prov 22:1; Deut 22:14, 19; Neh 6:13; also Gen 6:4; 12:2; 2 Sam 7:9; 8:13; 23:18, 22; 1 Chr 5:24; 12:31; 2 Chr 26:15; Neh 9:10; Isa 63:12, 14; Jer 32:20; Ezek 16:14; Dan 9:15); cf. HALOT 1549 s.v. שֵׁם D.2; BDB 1028 s.v. שֵׁם 2.b.

**2 tn** The comparative term טוב (*tov*, "better") is repeated throughout 7:1-12. It introduces a series of "Better-than sayings," particularly in 7:1-6 in which every poetic unit is introduced by טוב.

**3 tn** Heb "good." The repetition of טוב (*tov*, "good") forms an inclusion (a structural device that rounds off the unit), while the two internal terms שֵׁם...בִּישְׁמָן (*shem mishemen*, "name ... ointment") create a paronomastic wordplay (see the note on the word "perfume"). The combination of these two sets of literary devices creates an AB:B'A' chiasm: טוב שֵׁם // שֵׁם בִּישְׁמָן טוב (*tov shem // mishemen tov*, e.g., "good name" // "ointment good").

**4 tn** Or "oil"; or "ointment." The term שְׁמָן (*shemen*) refers to fragrant "perfume; cologne; ointment" (Amos 6:6; Eccl 10:1; Song 1:2 [1:3 HT]; 4:10); see HALOT 1568 s.v. שְׁמָן A.2.c. Bodily oils were expensive (1 Kgs 17:12; 2 Kgs 2:4). Possession of oils and perfumes was a sign of prosperity (Deut 32:8; 33:24; Job 29:6; Prov 21:17; Ezek 16:13, 20). Wearing colognes and oils was associated with joy (Ps 45:8; Eccl 9:8; Isa 61:3) because they were worn on festive occasions (Prov 27:9). The similar sounding terms "name" (שֵׁם, *shem*) and "perfume" (שְׁמָן) create a wordplay (paronomasia). See W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup), 242-43; J. J. Glöck, "Paronomasia in Biblical Literature," *Semitics* 1 (1970): 50-78; A. Guillaume, "Paronomasia in the Old Testament," *JSS* 9 (1964): 282-90; J. M. Sasson, "Wordplay in the OT," *IDBSup* 968-70.

**5 tn** The *vav* prefixed to the form יוֹם (*yom*) functions in a comparative sense, e.g., Job 5:7; 12:11; 16:21; Prov 25:25 (see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 71, §437).

**6 tn** The word "one's" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**7 tn** The article prefixed to הַמָּוֶת (*hammavet*, "death") probably functions in an indefinite possessive sense or in a generic sense: "one's death," e.g., Gen 44:2 (see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 19, §86, §92).

**8 sn** There are two ways to understand this proverb: (1) Happy times (characterized by celebration and "fragrant perfume") teach us less than hard times ("the day of one's death") which can bring about moral improvement ("a good reputation"). (2) It is better to come to the end of one's life ("day of one's death") with a good reputation ("a good name") than to merely be starting life ("day of one's birth") in an auspicious manner in joy and wealth ("fine perfume"). Folly and wickedness could foil a good beginning so that a person ends life as a fool. For example, Solomon began as the wisest man who ever lived, only to end life as one of history's greatest fools.

**9 tn** Heb "house of mourning." The phrase refers to a funeral where the deceased is mourned.

**10 tn** Heb "house of drinking"; or "house of feasting." The Hebrew noun מִשְׁתֶּה (*mishteh*) can denote (1) "feast; banquet," occasion for drinking-bouts (1 Sam 25:36; Isa 5:12; Jer 51:39; Job 1:5; Esth 2:18; 5:14; 8:17; 9:19) or (2) "drink" (exilic/postexilic - Ezra 3:7; Dan 1:5, 8, 16); see HALOT 653 s.v. מִשְׁתֶּה 4; BDB 1059 s.v. מִשְׁתֶּה 4.

**sn** Qohleth recommended that people soberly reflect on the brevity of life and the reality of death (*It is better to go to a house of mourning*) than to waste one's life in the foolish pursuit of pleasure (*than to go to a house of banqueting*). Sober reflection on the brevity of life and reality of death has more

For death<sup>11</sup> is the destiny<sup>12</sup> of every person,<sup>13</sup> and the living should<sup>14</sup> take this<sup>15</sup> to heart.

7:3 Sorrow<sup>16</sup> is better than laughter, because sober reflection<sup>17</sup> is good for the heart.<sup>18</sup>

7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of merrymaking.<sup>19</sup>

*Frivolous Living Versus Wisdom*

7:5 It is better for a person to receive<sup>20</sup> a rebuke from those who are wise<sup>21</sup> than to listen to the song<sup>22</sup> of fools.

7:6 For like the crackling of quick-burning thorns<sup>23</sup> under a cooking pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This kind of folly<sup>24</sup> also is useless.<sup>25</sup>

moral benefit than frivolous levity.

**11 tn** Heb "it"; the referent ("death") has been specified in the translation for clarity.

**12 tn** Heb "the end." The noun סוּף (*sof*) literally means "end; conclusion" (HALOT 747 s.v. סוּף 1; BDB 693 s.v. סוּף). It is used in this context in reference to death, as the preceding phrase "house of mourning" (i.e., funeral) suggests.

**13 tn** Heb "all men" or "every man."

**14 tn** The imperfect tense יִתֵּן (*yitten* (from יָתַן, *natan*, "to give") functions in a modal sense, denoting obligation, that is, the subject's obligatory or necessary conduct: "should" or "ought to" (see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 31-32, §172; *IBHS* 508-9 §31.4g).

**15 tn** The word "this" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**16 tn** NEB suggests "grief"; NJPS, "vexation."

**17 tn** Heb "in sadness of face there is good for the heart."

**18 tn** Or possibly "Though the face is sad, the heart may be glad."

**19 sn** The expression the *house of merrymaking* refers to a banquet where those who attend engage in self-indulgent feasting and riotous drinking.

**20 tn** Heb "hear."

**21 tn** Heb "rebuke of the wise," a subjective genitive ("the wise" administer the rebuke).

**22 tn** Or "praise." The antithetical parallelism between "rebuke" (וְעִירָה, *ga'arat*) and "song" (שִׁיר, *shir*) suggests that the latter is figurative (metonymy of association) for praise/flattery which is "music" to the ears: "praise of fools" (NEB, NJPS) and "flattery of fools" (Douay). However, the collocation of "song" (שִׁיר) in 7:5 with "laughter" (שִׂחָה, *s'khoq*) in 7:6 suggests simply frivolous merrymaking: "song of fools" (KJV, NASB, NIV, ASV, RSV, NRSV).

**23 tn** The term "thorns" (הַסִּירִים, *hassirim*) refers to twigs from wild thorn bushes which were used as fuel for quick heat, but burn out quickly before a cooking pot can be properly heated (e.g., Pss 58:9; 118:12).

**24 tn** The word "kind of folly" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**25 tn** It is difficult to determine whether the Hebrew term הֵבֵל (*hevel*) means "fleeting" or "useless" in this context. The imagery of quick-burning thorns under a cooking pot is ambiguous and can be understood in more than one way: (1) It is useless to try to heat a cooking pot by burning thorns because they burn out before the pot can be properly heated; (2) the heat produced by quick-burning thorns is fleeting - it produces quick heat, but lasts only for a moment. Likewise, the "laughter of a fool" can be taken in both ways: (1) In comparison to the sober reflection of the wise, the laughter of fools is morally useless: the burning of thorns, like the laughter of fools, makes a lot of noise but accomplishes nothing; (2) the laughter of fools is fleeting due to the brevity of life and

## Human Wisdom Overturned by Adversity

7:7 Surely oppression<sup>1</sup> can turn a wise person into a fool;<sup>2</sup>  
likewise,<sup>3</sup> a bribe corrupts<sup>4</sup> the heart.<sup>5</sup>  
7:8 The end of a matter<sup>6</sup> is better than its beginning;  
likewise, patience<sup>7</sup> is better than pride.<sup>8</sup>  
7:9 Do not let yourself be quickly provoked,<sup>9</sup>  
for anger resides in the lap<sup>10</sup> of fools.  
7:10 Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these days?”<sup>11</sup>

certainly of death. Perhaps this is an example of intentional ambiguity.

**1 tn** Or “extortion.” Scholars debate whether the noun עֶשֶׂק (*oshēq*, “oppression; extortion”) in this context denotes “oppression” (HALOT 897 s.v. עֶשֶׂק 1) or “gain of extortion” (BDB 799 s.v. עֶשֶׂק 3). The parallelism between עֶשֶׂק and מַתָּנָה (*matanah*, “bribe”) seems to suggest the latter, but the prominence of the theme of oppression in 7:8-10 argues for the former. Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, the noun עֶשֶׂק denotes “oppression” (Eccl 4:1) and “extortion” (Eccl 5:8 [Heb 5:7]). The LXX rendered it as σαυκοφαντία (*sukophantia*, “oppression”). English translations are split between these two options: “extortion” (ASV, MLB, NIV), “oppression” (KJV, NAB, NASB, RSV, NRSV, YLT, Douay, Moffatt), as well as “cheating” (NJPS) and “slander” (NEB).

**2 tn** Or “Oppression drives a wise person crazy”; or “Extortion drives a wise person crazy.” The verb III הִלַּל (“to be foolish”) denotes “to make foolish; to make a fool out of someone; to make into a madman” (Job 12:17; Isa 44:25); cf. HALOT 249 s.v. III הִלַּל; BDB 239 s.v. II הִלַּל. It has been handled variously: “makes a wise man mad” (KJV, NASB); “drives a wise man crazy” (NEB); “can make a fool of a wise man” (NAB); “makes the wise man foolish” (RSV, NRSV); and “turns a wise man into a fool” (NIV).

**3 tn** The *vav* prefixed to וַיֵּאבֵד (*vi’abbed*, “corrupts”) may function in a comparative sense, e.g., Job 5:7; 12:11; 16:21; Prov 25:25 (see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 71, §437).

**4 tc** The text has וַיֵּאבֵד (*vi’abbed*, conjunction + Piel imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from אָבַד, *avad*, “to destroy”), but the Dead Sea Scrolls text 4Q109 (Qoh<sup>a</sup>), which reads וַיִּטְוֶה וַיִּפְרַט assumes וַיִּטְוֶה “twists” or “perverts” (conjunction + Piel imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from טָוָה I, *avah*, “to bend; to twist.” See J. Mulienburg, “A Qoheleth Scroll from Qumran,” BASOR 135 [1954]: 27). The verb יִטְוֶה (“to bend; to twist”) is used in reference to moral perversion (e.g., 2 Sam 7:14; 19:20; 24:17; 1 Kgs 8:47; Job 33:27; Prov 12:8; Jer 9:4); cf. HALOT 796–97 s.v. טָוָה; BDB 730 s.v. I טָוָה. The verb וַיֵּאבֵד is used similarly in reference to moral corruption, e.g., Eccl 3:6; 9:18; Jer 23:1 (HALOT 3 s.v. I אָבַד; BDB 2 s.v. אָבַד 2).

**5 tn** Or “and a bribe drives a person mad.” The noun לֵב (*lev*, “heart”) may be taken as a synecdoche of part (i.e., heart) for the whole (i.e., a person). HALOT 3 s.v. I אָבַד suggests that לֵב וַיֵּאבֵד (*vi’abbed lev*, “destroys the heart”) is an idiom meaning, “drives a person mad.” The B-line is taken as a comparison with the preceding A-line. On the other hand, the A-line and B-line might be in synonymous parallelism in which case the two lines could be rendered: “Surely [the gain of] extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.” On the other hand, the lines could be rendered, “Surely oppression drives a wise man crazy, and a bribe drives a person mad.”

**6 tn** The term דָּבָר (*davar*) denotes “matter; thing” here rather than “speech; word,” as the parallelism with “patience” suggests. The term was misunderstood as “speech; word” by the Vulgate (so also Douay).

**7 tn** Heb “the patient of spirit.”

**8 tn** Heb “the proud of spirit.”

**9 tn** Heb “Do not be hasty in your spirit to become angry.”

**10 tn** Heb “bosom.”

**11 tn** Heb “these.” “Days” does not appear in the Hebrew

for it is not wise to ask that.<sup>12</sup>

## Wisdom Can Lengthen One’s Life

7:11 Wisdom, like<sup>13</sup> an inheritance, is a good thing;  
it benefits those who see the light of day.<sup>14</sup>  
7:12 For wisdom provides<sup>15</sup> protection,<sup>16</sup>  
just as<sup>17</sup> money provides protection.<sup>18</sup>  
But the advantage of knowledge is this:  
Wisdom preserves the life<sup>19</sup> of its owner.

text as second time, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**12 tn** Heb “It is not from wisdom that you ask about this.”

**13 tn** Or “Wisdom with an inheritance, is good”; or “Wisdom is as good as an inheritance.” This use of the preposition בְּ (*im*) may denote: (1) accompaniment: “together with,” or (2) comparison: “as good as; like; in comparison to” (HALOT 839–40 s.v. בְּ; BDB 767–69 s.v. בְּ). BDB 767 s.v. 1 suggests the accompaniment nuance “together with,” while HALOT 840 s.v. 2.c suggests the comparative sense “in comparison to.” The translations are also divided: “wisdom with an inheritance is good” (KJV, ASV margin, RSV, NASB, YLT); “wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing” (NIV); “wisdom is as good as an inheritance” (ASV, NRSV, MLB, NJPS, Moffatt); “wisdom is better than an inheritance” (NEB). Because v. 12 compares wisdom with money (i.e., an inheritance), v. 11 is probably making a comparison as well: “Wisdom, like an inheritance, is good” (7:11a) = “Wisdom provides protection, just as money provides protection” (7:12a). The “good thing” that wisdom – like an inheritance or money – provides is protection.

**14 tn** Heb “see the sun.”

**15 tn** Heb “wisdom is a shade.” When used with a predicate nominative in a verbless clause, the preposition בְּ (*bet*) which appears twice in the line בְּצֵל הַחַיִּים בְּצֵל הַחַיִּים (*b<sup>e</sup>tsel hakhokhmah b<sup>e</sup>tsel hakkasef*) denotes identity, the so-called *bet of emmah* (HALOT 104 s.v. בְּ 3; BDB 88 s.v. בְּ 1.7; see also R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 45, §249).

**16 tn** The term צֵל (*tsel*, “shade, shadow”) refers to that which provides protection or a shelter from the sun (Gen 19:8; Judg 9:36; Isa 25:5; 32:2; Jer 48:45; Jonah 4:5). It is used often in a figurative sense (hypocatastasis) to connote “protection” from calamity (Num 14:9; Isa 49:2; Hos 14:8; Pss 17:8; 36:8; 57:2; 63:8; 91:1; 121:5; Lam 4:20).

**17 tn** The phrase “just as” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness and clarity.

**18 tn** Heb “Wisdom is a shade, money is a shade.” The repetition of בְּצֵל (*b<sup>e</sup>tsel*, “shade; protection”) suggests that the A-line and B-line function as comparisons. Thus the Hebrew phrases “Wisdom is a shade, money is a shade” may be nuanced, “Wisdom [provides] protection [just as] money [provides] protection.” This approach is adopted by several translations: “wisdom is a defense, as money is a defense” (ASV), “wisdom is protection just as money is protection” (NASB), “wisdom like wealth is a defense” (Moffatt), “the protection of wisdom is as the protection of money” (NAB), “the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money” (RSV, NRSV), “wisdom protects as wealth protects” (MLB), and “wisdom is a shelter, as money is a shelter” (NIV). The comparison is missed by KJV: “wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense.” Less likely is taking בְּ (*bet*) in a locative sense: “to be in the shelter of wisdom is to be in the shelter of money” (NJPS).

**19 tn** The verb תָּיִה (*khayah*, “to live”) in the Piel denotes (1) “to let live; to keep alive; to preserve alive; to allow to live happily” (Gen 12:12; Exod 1:17; Num 31:15; Deut 6:24; Josh 9:15; Isa 7:21; Jer 49:11) and (2) “to bring back to life” persons who are ill (Ps 30:4) or deceased (Hos 6:2); HALOT 309 s.v. תָּיִה. Its parallelism with צֵל (*tsel*, “protection”) indicates that it means “to preserve someone’s life” from premature death or calamity. Therefore, “preserves the life” (RSV, NAB, ASV, NASB, NIV, NJPS) is preferable to “gives life to” (KJV, Douay, NRSV, YLT).

*Wisdom Acknowledges God's Orchestration of Life*

**7:13** Consider the work of God:  
For who can make straight what he has bent?

**7:14** In times of prosperity<sup>1</sup> be joyful,  
but in times of adversity<sup>2</sup> consider this:  
God has made one as well as the other,<sup>3</sup>  
so that no one can discover what the future holds.<sup>4</sup>

*Exceptions to the Law of Retribution*

**7:15** During the days of my fleeting life<sup>5</sup> I  
have seen both<sup>6</sup> of these things:  
Sometimes<sup>7</sup> a righteous person dies prematurely<sup>8</sup>  
in spite of<sup>9</sup> his righteousness,  
and sometimes<sup>10</sup> a wicked person lives long<sup>11</sup>  
in spite of his evil deeds.

**7:16** So do not be excessively righteous or  
excessively<sup>12</sup> wise;<sup>13</sup>  
otherwise<sup>14</sup> you might<sup>15</sup> be disappointed.<sup>16</sup>  
**7:17** Do not be excessively wicked and do  
not be a fool;  
otherwise<sup>17</sup> you might die before your  
time.

<sup>12</sup> **tn** The adjective יוֹתֵר (yoter) means "too much; excessive," e.g., 2:15 "excessively wise" (HALOT 404 s.v. יוֹתֵר 2; BDB 452 s.v. יוֹתֵר). It is derived from the root יָתַר (yeter, "what is left over"; cf. HALOT 452 s.v. יָתַר) and related to the verb יָתַר (yatar, Niphal "to be left over" and Hiphil "to have left over"; cf. HALOT 451-52). In 2:15 the adjective יוֹתֵר is used with the noun יִתְרוֹן (yitron, "advantage; profit") in a wordplay or pun: The wise man has a relative "advantage" (יִתְרוֹן) over the fool (2:13-14a); however, there is no ultimate advantage because both share the same fate - death (2:14b-15a). Thus, Qoheleth's acquisition of tremendous wisdom (1:16; 2:9) was "excessive" because it exceeded its relative advantage over folly: it could not deliver him from the same fate as the fool. He strove to obtain wisdom, yet it held no ultimate advantage. Likewise, in 7:16, Qoheleth warns that wisdom and righteous behavior do not guarantee an advantage over wickedness and folly, because the law of retribution is sometimes violated.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** *Heb* "So do not be overly righteous and do not be overly wise." The Hitpael verb תִּיְחַכְּמֵךְ (tiykhakkam, from חָכַם, khakham, "to be wise") means "to make or show yourself wise" (HALOT 314 s.v. חָכַם; BDB 314 s.v. חָכַם). The Hitpael may be understood as: (1) benefactive reflexive use which refers to an action done for one's own behalf (e.g., Gen 20:7; Josh 9:12; 1 Kgs 8:33; Job 13:27); because the law of retribution is sometimes violated, it is not wise for a person to be overly dependent upon wisdom or righteousness for his own benefit; (2) estimative-declarative reflexive which denotes esteeming or presenting oneself in a certain state, without regard to the question of truthfulness (e.g., 2 Sam 13:5; Prov 13:6; Esth 8:17); it is useless to overly esteem oneself as wise or to falsely present oneself as wiser than he really is because the law of retribution sometimes fails to reward the wise. The enigma of this line - "overly righteous and overly wise" - may be resolved by proper classification of the Hitpael stem of this verb.

<sup>14</sup> **tn** *Heb* "Why?" The question is rhetorical.

<sup>15</sup> **tn** The imperfect of שָׁמַם (shamem) functions in a modal sense, denoting possibility: "you might be..." (see *IBHS* 508 §31.4e).

<sup>16</sup> **tn** Or "Why should you ruin yourself?" or "Why should you destroy yourself?" The verb שָׁמַם (shamem) is traditionally taken as "to destroy; to ruin oneself." For its use here HALOT 1566 s.v. שָׁמַם 2 has "to cause oneself ruin"; BDB 1031 s.v. שָׁמַם 2 has "cause oneself desolation, ruin." Most English versions take a similar approach: "Why destroy yourself?" (KJV, ASV, NEB, NRSV, MLB, NIV); "Why ruin yourself?" (NAB, NASB). However, in the Hitpael stem the root שָׁמַם never means this elsewhere, but is always nuanced elsewhere as "to be appalled; to be astonished; to be dumbfounded; to be confounded; to be horrified" (e.g., Ps 143:4; Isa 59:16; 63:5; Dan 8:27); cf. BDB 1031 s.v. שָׁמַם 1; HALOT 1566 s.v. שָׁמַם 1. It is taken this way in the English version of the Tanakh: "or you may be dumbfounded" (NJPS). Likewise, Cohen renders, "Why should you be overcome with amazement?" (A. Cohen, *The Five Megilloth* [SoBB], 154). If a person was trusting in his own righteousness or wisdom to guarantee prosperity, he might be scandalized by the exceptions to the doctrine of retribution that Qoheleth had observed in 7:15. D. R. Glenn ("Ecclesiastes," *BKCOT*, 994) notes: "This fits in nicely with Solomon's argument here. He urged his readers not to be over-righteous or over-wise 'lest they be confounded or astonished.' He meant that they should not depend on their righteousness or wisdom to guarantee God's blessing because they might be confounded, dismayed, or disappointed like the righteous people whom Solomon had seen perishing in spite of their righteousness [in 7:15]." See *GKC* 149 §54.c.

<sup>17</sup> **tn** *Heb* "Why?" The question is rhetorical.

<sup>1</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the day of good."

<sup>2</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the day of evil."

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Less probable renderings of this line are "God hath made the one side by side with the other" (ASV) and "God has set the one alongside the other" (NEB).

<sup>4</sup> **tn** *Heb* "anything after him." This line is misinterpreted by several versions: "that man may not find against him any just complaint" (Douay); "consequently, man may find no fault with Him" (NJPS); "so that man cannot find fault with him in anything" (NAB).

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The word "life" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness and clarity.

<sup>6</sup> **tn** As is the case throughout Ecclesiastes, the term הַכֹּל (hakkol) should be nuanced "both" rather than "all."

<sup>7</sup> **tn** *Heb* "There is." The term ישׁ (yesh, "there is") is often used in aphorisms to assert the existence of a particular situation that occurs sometimes. It may indicate that the situation is not the rule but that it does occur on occasion, and may be nuanced "sometimes" (Prov 11:24; 13:7, 23; 14:12; 16:25; 18:24; 20:15; Eccl 2:21; 4:8; 5:12; 6:1; 7:15 [2x]; 8:14 [3x]).

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Heb* "perishes."

<sup>9</sup> **tn** Or "in his righteousness." The preposition בְּ (bet) on the terms בְּצִדְקוֹ (betsirgo, "his righteousness") and בְּרָעוֹתָיו (b'ra'oto, "his evil-doing") in the following line are traditionally taken in a locative sense: "in his righteousness" and "in his wickedness" (KJV, NASB, NIV). However, it is better to take the בְּ (bet) in the adversative sense "in spite of" (e.g., Lev 26:27; Num 14:11; Deut 1:32; Isa 5:25; 9:11, 16, 20; 10:4; 16:14; 47:9; Pss 27:3; 78:32; Ezra 3:3); cf. HALOT 104 s.v. בְּ 7; BDB 90 s.v. בְּ 3.7. NJPS renders it well: "Sometimes a good man perishes in spite of his goodness, and sometimes a wicked one endures in spite of his wickedness." In a similar vein, D. R. Glenn ("Ecclesiastes," *BKCOT*, 993-94) writes: "The word 'in' in the phrases 'in his righteousness' and 'in his wickedness' can here mean 'in spite of.' These phrases...argue against the common view that in 7:16 Solomon was warning against legalistic or Pharisaic self-righteousness. Such would have been a sin and would have been so acknowledged by Solomon who was concerned about true exceptions to the doctrine of retribution, not supposed ones (cf. 8:10-14 where this doctrine is discussed again)."

<sup>10</sup> **tn** *Heb* "There is." The term ישׁ (yesh, "there is") is often used in aphorisms to assert the existence of a particular situation that occurs sometimes. It may indicate that the situation is not the rule but that it does occur on occasion, and may be nuanced "sometimes" (Prov 11:24; 13:7, 23; 14:12; 16:25; 18:24; 20:15; Eccl 2:21; 4:8; 5:12; 6:1; 7:15 [2x]; 8:14 [3x]).

<sup>11</sup> **tn** *Heb* "a wicked man endures."

7:18 It is best to take hold of one warning<sup>1</sup> without letting go of the other warning;<sup>2</sup> for the one who fears God will follow<sup>3</sup> both warnings.<sup>4</sup>

*Wisdom Needed Because No One is Truly Righteous*

7:19 Wisdom gives a wise person more protection<sup>5</sup> than ten rulers in a city.  
7:20 For<sup>6</sup> there is not one truly<sup>7</sup> righteous

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The word “warning” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation two times in this line for clarity.

<sup>2</sup> **sn** *The other warning.* Qoheleth is referring to the two words of advice in 7:16-17. He is not, as some suggest, urging his readers to grasp righteousness without letting go of wickedness. His point is not that people should live their lives with a balance of modest righteousness and modest wickedness. Because he urges the fear of God in 7:18b, he cannot be inconsistent in suggesting that his readers offend the fear of God by indulging in some degree of sin in order to counterbalance an overly righteous life. Rather, the proper fear of God will prevent a person from trusting in righteousness and wisdom alone for his security, and it will also prevent indulgence in wickedness and folly.

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Or “will escape both”; or “will go forth in both.” The Hebrew phrase יָצָא אֶת־בְּיָמָיו (yetse’ *et-kullam*, “he will follow both of them”) has been interpreted in several ways: (1) To adopt a balanced lifestyle that is moderately righteous while allowing for self-indulgence in moderate wickedness (“to follow both of them,” that is, to follow both righteousness and wickedness). However, this seems to unnecessarily encourage an antinomian rationalization of sin and moral compromise. (2) To avoid the two extremes of being over-righteous and over-wicked. This takes יָצָא in the sense of “to escape,” e.g., Gen 39:12, 15; 1 Sam 14:14; Jer 11:11; 48:9; cf. HALOT 426 s.v. יָצָא 6.c; BDB 423 s.v. יָצָא 1.d. (3) To follow both of the warnings given in 7:16-17. This approach finds parallels in postbiblical rabbinic literature denoting the action of discharging one’s duty of obedience and complying with instruction. In postbiblical rabbinic literature the phrase יָצָא בְּיָד (yetse’ *yade*, “to go out of the hands”) is an idiom meaning “to comply with the requirements of the law” (Jastrow 587 s.v. יָצָא; Hif.5.a). This fits nicely with the context of 7:16-17 in which Qoheleth issued two warnings. In 7:18a Qoheleth exhorted his readers to follow both of his warnings: “It is best to grasp the first warning without letting go of the second warning.” The person who fears God will heed both warnings. He will not depend upon his own righteousness and wisdom, but upon God’s sovereign bestowal of blessings. Likewise, he will not exploit the exceptions to the doctrine of retribution to indulge in sin, rationalizing sin away just because the wicked sometimes do not get what they deserve.

<sup>4</sup> **tn** *Heb* “both.” The term “warnings” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. Alternately, “both [extremes]” or “both [fates].” The point of this expression is either (1) “he achieves both things,” (2) “he escapes all these misfortunes,” (3) “he does his duty by both,” or (4) “he avoids both extremes.” See D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:580–81.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** *Heb* “gives strength.”

<sup>6</sup> **tn** The introductory particle כִּי (*ki*) is rendered variously: “for” (KJV); “indeed” (NASB); not translated (NIV); “for” (NJPS). The particle functions in an explanatory sense, explaining the need for wisdom in v. 19. Righteousness alone cannot always protect a person from calamity (7:15-16); therefore, something additional, such as wisdom, is needed. The need for wisdom as protection from calamity is particularly evident in the light of the fact that no one is truly righteous (7:19-20).

<sup>7</sup> **tn** The term “truly” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. Qoheleth does not

person on the earth who continually does good and never sins.

7:21 Also, do not pay attention to everything that people<sup>8</sup> say; otherwise,<sup>9</sup> you might even hear<sup>10</sup> your servant cursing you.

7:22 For you know in your own heart<sup>11</sup> that you also have cursed others many times.

*Human Wisdom is Limited*

7:23 I have examined all this by wisdom; I said, “I am determined<sup>12</sup> to comprehend this”<sup>13</sup> – but it was beyond my grasp.<sup>14</sup>

7:24 Whatever has happened is beyond human<sup>15</sup> understanding;<sup>16</sup> it is far deeper than anyone can fathom.<sup>17</sup>

*True Righteousness and Wisdom Are Virtually Nonexistent*

7:25 I tried<sup>18</sup> to understand, examine, and comprehend<sup>19</sup> the role of<sup>20</sup> wisdom in the scheme of things,<sup>21</sup> and to understand the stupidity of wickedness<sup>22</sup> and the insanity of folly.<sup>23</sup>

deny the existence of some people who are relatively righteous.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Heb* “they”; the referent (people) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** *Heb* “so that you do not hear...”; or “lest you hear...”

<sup>10</sup> **tn** The imperfect tense verb תִּשְׁמָע (tishma; from שָׁמַע [shama], “to hear”]) functions in a modal sense, denoting possibility: “you might hear” (see *IBHS* 508 §31.4e).

<sup>11</sup> **tn** *Heb* “your heart knows.”

<sup>12</sup> **tn** The cohortative אֶחְכְּמָה (ekhkamah, from חָכַם, khakham, “to be wise”) emphasizes the resolve (determination) of Qoheleth to become wise enough to understand the perplexities of life.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Or “I am determined to become wise”

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Or “but it eluded me”; *Heb* “but it was far from me.”

<sup>15</sup> **tn** The word “human” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for stylistic reasons.

<sup>16</sup> **tn** *Heb* “is far away.”

<sup>17</sup> **tn** *Heb* “It is deep, deep – who can find it?” The repetition of the word “deep” emphasizes the degree of incomprehensibility. See *IBHS* 233-34 §12.5a.

<sup>18</sup> **tn** *Heb* “I turned, I, even my heart.”

<sup>19</sup> **tn** *Heb* “to seek.”

<sup>20</sup> **tn** The phrase “the role of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

<sup>21</sup> **tn** The phrase חִכְמוֹת וְהַשְׁבוֹן (khokhmah v<sup>o</sup>kheshbon, “wisdom and the scheme of things”) is a hendiadys (a figure of speech in which two nouns connote one idea): “wisdom in the scheme of things.” This is similar to the hendiadys עֲבוֹרֵי־כַּבֵּל וְהַיָּרֵךְ (its<sup>o</sup>vonekh v<sup>o</sup>heronekh, “pain and childbearing”) which connotes “pain in childbearing” (Gen 3:16).

<sup>22</sup> **tn** Or “the evil of folly” The genitive construct phrase רֵשָׁע כֶּסֶל (resha’ kesel) may be taken as a genitive of attribution (“the wickedness of folly”) or as a genitive of attribute (“the folly of wickedness”). The English versions treat it in various ways: “wickedness of folly” (KJV); “wrong of folly” (YLT); “evil of folly” (NASB); “stupidity of wickedness” (NIV); “wickedness, stupidity” (NJPS); “wickedness is folly [or foolish]” (ASV, NAB, NRSV, MLB, Moffatt), and “it is folly to be wicked” (NEB).

<sup>23</sup> **tn** Or “the folly of madness” The genitive construct phrase חֵלְוַת הַיָּלִידוֹת (v<sup>o</sup>shassikhlut holelot) may be taken as a genitive of attribution (“the stupidity of wickedness”) or a



7:26 I discovered this:<sup>1</sup>  
 More bitter than death is the kind of<sup>2</sup>  
 woman<sup>3</sup> who is like a hunter's snare;<sup>4</sup>  
 her heart is like a hunter's net and her  
 hands are like prison chains.  
 The man who pleases God escapes her,  
 but the sinner is captured by her.  
 7:27 The Teacher says:  
 I discovered this while trying to discover  
 the scheme of things, item by item.  
 7:28 What I have continually sought, I  
 have not found;  
 I have found only<sup>5</sup> one upright<sup>6</sup> man  
 among a thousand,  
 but I have not found one upright woman  
 among all of them.  
 7:29 This alone have I discovered: God  
 made humankind upright,  
 but they have sought many evil schemes.

*Human Government Demonstrates Limitations of Wisdom*

8:1 Who is<sup>7</sup> a<sup>8</sup> wise person? Who knows  
 the solution<sup>9</sup> to a problem?<sup>10</sup>

genitive of attribute (“the evil of folly”). The phrase is rendered variously: “foolishness and madness” (KJV); “foolishness of madness” (NASB); “madness of folly” (NIV); “madness and folly” (NUPS); “the foolishness which is madness” (NEB); and “foolishness [or folly] is madness” (ASV, NAB, NRSV, MLB, Moffatt).

**1 tn** The word “this” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**2 tn** The phrase “kind of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity (see the following note on the word “woman”).

**3 tn** The article on הַאִשָּׁה (*ha'ishah*) functions in a particularizing sense (“the kind of woman”) rather than in a generic sense (i.e., “women”).

**4 tn** *Heb* “is snares.” The plural form מְצוּדִים (*m'tsodim*, from the noun *מצוד*, *mitsod*, “snare”) is used to connote either intensity, repeated or habitual action, or moral characteristic. For the function of the Hebrew plural, see *IBHS* 120-21 §7.4.2. The term *מצוד* “snare” is used in a concrete sense in reference to the hunter's snare or net, but in a figurative sense of being ensnared by someone (Job 19:6; Prov 12:12; Eccl 7:26).

**5 tn** The word “only” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**6 tn** The word “upright” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation twice, here and in the following line, for clarity.

**7 tn** The preposition article כִּי (*kaf*) prefixed to הַחֲכָמִים (*h'ekhakhham*, “wise man”) is traditionally taken in a comparative sense: “Who is like [or as] the wise man?” On the other hand, it may denote identity, e.g., Gen 1:26; Num 11:1; 1 Sam 20:3; 2 Sam 9:8; Neh 7:2; Job 10:9; Nah 3:6 (see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 47, §261; *IBHS* 202-4 §11.2.9b).

**8 tn** The definite article הַחֲכָמִים (*h'ekhakhham*, “wise man”) may be taken in an individualizing (“the wise man”) or generic sense (“a wise man”).

**9 tn** Or “the explanation.” The noun פֶּשֶׁר (*pesher*) denotes “solution; explanation; interpretation; meaning” (*HALOT* 982-83 s.v. פֶּשֶׁר; BDB 833 s.v. פֶּשֶׁר). The Hebrew term is an Aramaic loanword from פִּשְׁרָא (*pishra*, “diagnosis; meaning; solution”). The Aramaic noun פִּשְׁרָא (*p'shar*, “interpretation of a dream or prophecy”) and verb פִּשְׁרָא (*p'shar*, “to interpret a dream or prophecy”) reflect a later meaning not present in Ecclesiastes, but current at the time of Daniel (Dan 2:5-7; 4:3, 15, 16; 5:12, 15, 16; 7:16) and Qumran (e.g., 1QpHab).

**10 tn** *Heb* “a thing.”

A person's wisdom brightens his appearance,<sup>11</sup> and softens<sup>12</sup> his harsh countenance.<sup>13</sup>

8:2 Obey the king's command,<sup>14</sup>  
 because you took<sup>15</sup> an oath before God<sup>16</sup>  
 to be loyal to him.<sup>17</sup>

8:3 Do not rush out of the king's presence  
 in haste – do not delay when the matter  
 is unpleasant,<sup>18</sup>

for he can do whatever he pleases.

8:4 Surely the king's authority<sup>19</sup> is absolute,<sup>20</sup>

no one can say<sup>21</sup> to him, “What are you  
 doing?”

8:5 Whoever obeys his<sup>22</sup> command will  
 not experience harm,  
 and a wise person<sup>23</sup> knows the proper  
 time<sup>24</sup> and procedure.

**11 tn** *Heb* “makes his face shine.”

**12 tc** The MT vocalizes the consonantal form יִשְׁנֵא as אִשְׁנֵא (*y'shunnē*, Pual imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from יִשְׁנֵא, *shana*, “to change”). However, the LXX μισθῆσαι (*misthēsetai*) reflects an alternate vocalization tradition of יִשְׁנֵא (*yissane*), Niphal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from שָׂנֵא, *sane*, “to hate”), while the Vulgate's *commutabit* reflects יִשְׁנֵא (*y'shanneh*, Piel imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from שָׁנָה, *shannah*, “to repeat”).

**tn** *Heb* “the strength of his face is changed.”

**13 tn** *Heb* “the strength of his face is changed.” The expression עֹז פָּנָיו (*oz panayv*, “strength of his face”) is an idiom for “boldness; impudence” (BDB 739 s.v. עֹז 4) or “hard face” = harsh countenance (*HALOT* 805 s.v. עֹז 1.c).

**14 tc** The Leningrad Codex (the basis of *BHS*) reads אֲנִי (*ani*, 1st person common singular independent personal pronoun): “I obey the king's command.” Other medieval Hebrew MSS and all the versions (LXX, Vulgate, Targum, Syriac Peshitta) preserve an alternate textual tradition of the definite accusative marker אֶת (*et*) introducing the direct object: אֶת־פִּי מִלִּיךְ שְׂבוּר (*et-pi-melekh sh'v'mor*, “Obey the command of the king”). External evidence supports the alternate textual tradition. The MT is guilty of simple orthographic confusion between similar looking letters. The *BHS* editors and the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project adopt אֶת as the original reading. See D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:582-83.

**15 tn** The phrase “you took” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**16 tn** The genitive-construct שְׂבוּתֵי אֱלֹהִים (*sh'vut'at 'elohim*, “an oath of God”) functions as a genitive of location (“an oath before God”) or an adjectival genitive of attribute (“a supreme oath”).

**17 tn** The words “to be loyal to him” do not appear in the Hebrew text, but are supplied in the translation for clarification.

**18 tn** Or “do not stand up for a bad cause.”

**19 tn** *Heb* “word.”

**20 tn** *Heb* “supreme.”

**21 tn** *Heb* “Who can say...?”

**22 tn** The word “his” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness and clarity.

**23 tn** *Heb* “the heart of a wise man.”

**24 tn** The term עֵת (*et*, “time”) connotes “a proper, suitable time for an event; the right moment” (*HALOT* 900 s.v. עֵת 6; BDB 773 s.v. עֵת 2.b); e.g., “it was the time for rain” (Ezra 10:13); “a time of judgment for the nations” (Ezek 30:3); “there is an appropriate time for every occasion” (Eccl 3:1); “the time when mountain goats are born” (Job 39:1); “the rain in its season” (Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24); “the time for the harvest” (Hos 2:11; Ps 1:3); “food in its season” (Ps 104:27).

8:6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, for the oppression<sup>1</sup> of the king<sup>2</sup> is severe upon his victim.<sup>3</sup>

8:7 Surely no one knows the future,<sup>4</sup> and no one can tell another person what will happen.<sup>5</sup>

8:8 Just as no one has power over the wind to restrain it,<sup>6</sup> so no one has power over the day of his<sup>7</sup> death.

Just as no one can be discharged during the battle,<sup>8</sup> so wickedness cannot rescue the wicked.<sup>9</sup>

8:9 While applying<sup>10</sup> my mind<sup>11</sup> to everything<sup>12</sup> that happens in this world,<sup>13</sup> I have seen all this:

Sometimes one person<sup>14</sup> dominates<sup>15</sup>

other people<sup>16</sup> to their harm.<sup>17</sup>

*Contradictions to the Law of Retribution*

8:10 Not only that,<sup>18</sup> but I have seen the wicked approaching<sup>19</sup> and entering the temple,<sup>20</sup> and as they left the holy temple,<sup>21</sup> they

**1 tn** Heb “evil”; or “misery.”  
**2 tn** Heb “the man.”  
**3 tn** Heb “upon him.”  
**4 tn** Heb “what will be.”  
**5 tn** Heb “Who can tell him what will be?”  
**6 tn** Heb “There is not a man who has mastery over the wind to restrain the wind.”  
**7 tn** The word “his” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.  
**8 tn** Heb “There is no discharge in war.”  
**9 tn** Heb “its owners.”  
**10 tn** The term נתון (*natan*, Qal infinitive absolute from נתן , *natan*, “to give”) is a verbal use of the infinitive absolute, used with *vav* to indicate an action that took place simultaneous to the main verb (see *IBHS* 596-97 §35.5.2d). Thus, the clause ונתון אֵת לִבִּי (*et-libbi*, “while applying my mind...”) indicates contemporaneous action to the clause, “All this I have seen” (אֵת־כָּל־הַדָּבָרִים אֲנִי־רָאִיתִי, *et-kol-zeh ra’iti*). This is view is taken by several translations: “All this I have seen, having applied my mind to” (NEB); “All this I observed while applying my mind to” (RSV); “All this I saw, as I applied my mind to” (NIV); “All this I saw, as thoughtfully I pondered” (Moffatt). On the other hand, the LXX *vav* is taken in a coordinating sense (“and”) and the infinitive absolute as an independent verb: Καὶ ὄψαμαι ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἐδούκα τῆς ἀκαρίαν μου εἰς (“I saw all this, and I applied my heart to”). This reading is adopted by other English versions: “All this I have seen, and applied my heart” (KJV); “All these things I considered and I applied my mind” (NASB); “All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto” (ASV); “All this I have seen and applied my mind to” (NASB); “All these things I observed; I noted” (NJPS).

**11 tn** Heb “my heart.”  
**12 tn** Heb “every work”; or “every deed.”  
**13 tn** Heb “that is done under the sun.” The phrase “that is done under the sun” (אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשֶׂה תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, *asher na’asah takhat hashamesh*) is an idiom for “what happens in this world” or “on the earth” (BDB 1039 s.v. שָׁמַיִם 4.c). Moffatt renders this idiom, “what goes on within this world.”  
**14 tn** Heb “the man.” The article on האָדָם (*ha’adam*, “the man”) can be taken in a particularizing sense (“one person”) or in a collective sense as humankind as a whole (“human-kind”); see *HALOT* 14 s.v. אָדָם 1; BDB 9 s.v. אָדָם 2. So LXX: “All the things in which man has power over [his fellow] man to afflict him.” This is adopted by the RSV (“man lords it over man to his hurt”); NJPS (“men still had authority over men to treat them unjustly”); Moffatt (“men have power over their fellows, power to injure them”); MLB (“man has mastery over another to harm him”); and YLT (“man hath ruled over man to his own evil”). On the other hand, 8:1-9 focuses on the absolute power of the king, so the referent of האָדָם is probably the king. The article functions in an individualizing, particularizing sense. The particularization of האָדָם is reflected in many English versions: “one man” (KJV, ASV, NEB, NAB, Douay), “a man” (NASB, NIV), and “one person” (NRSV).  
**15 tn** The verb שָׁלַט (*shalat*) denotes “to domineer; to dom-

inate; to lord it over” (*HALOT* 1522 s.v. שָׁלַט; BDB 1020 s.v. שָׁלַט). The English versions have: “rule over” (KJV, YLT, Douay), “have power over” (NEB, ASV), “lord it over” (RSV, NIV), “have authority over” (NJPS), “exercise authority over” (NASB, NRSV); “have mastery over” (MLB); “tyrannize” (NAB).

**16 tn** Heb “man.” The word “other” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. The singular noun אָדָם (*adam*, “man”) functions as a collective singular, connoting “men, people” (cf. *HALOT* 14 s.v. אָדָם 1; BDB 9 s.v. אָדָם 2). The absence of the article might suggest an indefinite rather than an individual, particular sense.

**17 tn** Heb “a man exercises power over [another] man to his harm” [or “to his own harm”]. The 3rd person masculine singular pronominal suffix לוֹ (*lo*, “to his”) may refer to the antecedent אָדָם (*adam*, “man” or “men”), being understood either in a singular sense (so NEB, RSV, NRSV, NAB, ASV, NASB) or in a collective sense (Moffatt, NJPS, NIV margin). However, the antecedent might be הָאָדָם (*ha’adam*, “[one] man” = the king) with the suffix functioning reflexively: “to his own harm” (KJV, ASV margin, YLT, Douay, NIV).

**18 tn** Heb “Then...” The construction בְּכֵן (*v<sup>s</sup>khen*) means “then; thereupon; on this condition” (cf. *Ecc* 8:10; *Esth* 4:16; *Sir* 13:7; see *GKC* 384 §119.ii; BDB 486 s.v. כֵּן 3.b; *HALOT* 483 s.v. כֵּן 8.c). The line could be rendered, “It is was then that I saw.”

**19 tc** There are three textual options: (1) The MT reads קָבְרוּ רֵיחַ וְבָאוּ וּמִקְבוֹרֵיהֶם (q<sup>v</sup>*varim vava’u umimmoqom*, “they were buried, and they came, and from the place”). קָבְרוּ is a Qal passive participle mpl from קָבַר, *qavar*, “to bury.” The MT reading is retained by most translations: “[And so I saw the wicked] buried, who had come and gone from the place [of the holy]” (KJV); “[Then I saw the wicked] buried; they used to go in and out of the [holy] place” (RSV, NRSV); “[I saw how the wicked] were buried, who had gone in and out from the [holy] place” (MLB); “[I have seen the wicked] buried, those who used to go in and out from the [holy] place” (NASB); “[Then too, I saw the wicked] buried – those who used to come and go from the [holy] place” (NIV); and “[And then I saw] scoundrels coming from the [Holy] Site and being brought to burial” (NJPS). (2) The LXX reflects the reading קָבְרוּ מוֹבָאִים וּמִקְבוֹרֵיהֶם (q<sup>v</sup>*varim muva’im umimmoqom*, “to the tombs they are brought, and from the place”). The LXX reflects the consonantal text of קָבְרוּ but τῶν τοῦτοις (*taphous*, “tombs”) reflects a vocalization tradition of קָבְרוּ (“tombs”). (3) Several scholars suggest emending the text to קָרְבִּים וּבָאִים וּמִקְבוֹרֵיהֶם (“approaching and coming to the place”). The emendation involves קָרְבִּים (Qal active participle mpl from קָרַב “to approach; to draw near”). The emendation is adopted by several English versions: “I saw wicked men approach and enter...the sacred place” (NAB); “I saw wicked men approaching and even entering the holy place” (NEB). The emendation makes good sense because קָרַב (*qarav*, “to approach; to draw near”) is a synonym to בָּוֹא (*bo*, “to enter”), and is often used in reference to a person approaching the LORD at the tabernacle or temple. The textual corruption would be due to transposition of ב (*bet*) and ר (*resh*) in קָרַב (*qarav*, “to approach”) and קָבַר (*qavar*, “to bury”). See D. Barthélemy, *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:584.

**20 tn** The phrase “the temple” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness. Note the reference to the sanctuary in the next line.

**21 tn** Heb “the holy place.”

boasted<sup>1</sup> in the city that they had done so. This also is an enigma.<sup>2</sup>  
**8:11** When<sup>3</sup> a sentence<sup>4</sup> is not executed<sup>5</sup> at once against a crime,<sup>6</sup> the human heart<sup>7</sup> is encouraged to do

evil.<sup>8</sup>  
**8:12** Even though a sinner might commit a hundred crimes<sup>9</sup> and still live a long time,<sup>10</sup> yet I know that it will go well with God-fearing people<sup>11</sup> – for they stand in fear<sup>12</sup> before him.  
**8:13** But it will not go well with the wicked, nor will they<sup>13</sup> prolong their<sup>14</sup> days like a shadow,<sup>15</sup> because they<sup>16</sup> do not stand in fear<sup>17</sup> before God.  
**8:14** Here is<sup>18</sup> another<sup>19</sup> enigma<sup>20</sup> that occurs on earth:  
 Sometimes there are righteous people who get what the wicked deserve,<sup>21</sup> and sometimes there are wicked people who get what the righteous deserve.<sup>22</sup> I said, “This also is an enigma.”

**1 tc** The MT reads וישתבחו (ישתבחו *yishṭakku*), “and they were forgotten”; Hitpael imperfect 3rd person masculine plural from שָׁכַח, *shakhakh*, “to forget”). Apart from the MT reading here, the verb שָׁכַח “to forget” never occurs elsewhere in the Hitpael (HALOT 1490 s.v. וישתבחו; BDB 1013 s.v. שָׁכַח). Many medieval Hebrew MSS read וישתבחו “and they boasted” (Hitpael imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from שָׁבַח, *shavakh*, “praise, boast”). This alternate textual tradition is reflected in the Greek versions, e.g., Old Greek: καὶ ἐπῆνεθῆσαν (*kai epēnēthesan*, “and they were praised”), Aquila and Theodotion: καὶ ἐκαυχῆσαντο (*kai ekauchēsanto*, “and they boasted”), and Symmachus: καὶ παῖνοῦμενοι (*kai epainoumenoi*, “and they were praised”). This is also reflected in the Vulgate. The English versions are divided; several follow the MT and translate “they were forgotten” (KJV, ASV, NASB, MLB, NJPS), but a good number adopt the alternate textual tradition and translate either “they were praised” or “they boasted” (NEB, RSV, NAB, NIV, NRSV). The context of 8:10-17, which focuses on the enigmatic contradictions in divine retribution (sometimes the wicked are not punished), favors the alternate tradition. The wicked boast that they can come and go as they please in the temple, flaunting their irreligion without fearing divine retribution (8:10). This thought is continued in v. 11: failure to execute a sentence against a criminal emboldens the wicked to commit more crimes, confident they will not suffer retribution. It is likely that the original reading of וישתבחו was confused for וישתבחו because the root שָׁבַח (“to praise; to boast”) is much rarer than the common root שָׁכַח (“to forget”). The phrase is best rendered “they boasted” (NEB: “priding themselves”) rather than “they were praised” (NAB, RSV, NRSV, NIV) – the verb שָׁבַח means “to praise” in Piel, but “to boast” in Hitpael (Ps 106:47; 1 Chr 16:35; HALOT 1387 s.v. וישתבחו; BDB 986 s.v. שָׁבַח). This approach is adopted by the committee for the Jerusalem Hebrew Bible Project; see D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:584–85.

**2 tn** The term הֶבֶל (*hevel*) here means “enigmatic,” that is, difficult to grasp mentally. This sense is derived from the literal concept of breath, vapor or wind that cannot be seen; thus, the idea of “obscure, dark, difficult to understand, enigmatic” (HALOT 236–37 s.v. הֶבֶל; BDB 210–11 s.v. הֶבֶל). It is used in this sense in reference to enigmas in life (6:2; 8:10, 14) and the future which is obscure (11:8, 10).

**3 tn** The particle אֲשֶׁר (*asher*) is used as a conjunction in a conditional/temporal clause to introduce the protasis (“when” or “if”), and עֵינֵיכֶן (*al-ken*) introduces the apodosis (“then”); cf. BDB 83 s.v. אֲשֶׁר 8.d.

**4 tn** The noun פְּתִיגָה (*fitgam*, “decision; announcement; edict; decree”) is a loanword from Persian *patigama* (HALOT 984 s.v. פְּתִיגָה; BDB 834 s.v. פְּתִיגָה). The Hebrew noun occurs twice in the OT (Eccl 8:11; Esth 1:20), twice in the Apocrypha (Sir 5:11; 8:9), and five times in Qumran (11Q<sup>1</sup> Job 9:2; 29:4; 30:1; 34:3; 1QapGen 22:27). The English versions consistently nuance this as a judicial sentence against a crime: “sentence” (KJV, NEB, NAB, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, MLB, YLT), “sentence for a crime” (NIV), “sentence imposed” (NJPS), “sentence on a crime” (Moffatt).

**5 tn** Heb “is not done.” The verb עָשָׂה (*asah*, “to do”) refers to a judicial sentence being carried out (HALOT 892 s.v. 2). The Niphal can denote “be executed; be carried out” of a sentence (Eccl 8:11) or royal decree (Esth 9:1; BDB 795 s.v. 1.a). Similarly, the Qal can denote “to execute” vengeance (Judg 11:36) or judgment (1 Sam 28:18; Isa 48:14; Ezek 25:11; 28:26; Ps 149:7, 9; BDB 794 s.v.).

**6 tn** Heb “the evil.”

**7 tn** Heb “the heart of the sons of man.” The singular noun לֵב (*lev*, “heart”) is used collectively. The term לֵב is often used figuratively (metonymy) in reference to inclinations and determinations of the will (BDB 525 s.v. 4), moral character

(BDB 525 s.v. 6), and as a synecdoche for the man himself (BDB 525 s.v. 7).

**8 tn** Heb “is full to do evil.” The verb מָלֵא (*male’*, “to fill”) is used figuratively (metonymy): the lack of swift judicial punishment only emboldens the wicked to commit more crimes without fear of retribution. Most English versions translate the term literally: “are filled” (NIV, MLB, YLT), “is fully set” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV). However, several versions nuance it figuratively: “emboldened” (ASV, NJPS) and “boldly” (NEB). Moffatt renders the line, “Because sentence on a crime is not executed at once, the mind of man is prone to evil practices.”

**9 tn** Heb “does evil one hundred [times].”

**10 tn** Heb “and prolongs his [life].”

**11 tn** Heb “those who fear God.”

**12 tn** Heb “they fear.”

**13 tn** Heb “he.”

**14 tn** The word “their” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**15 tn** The phrase “like a shadow” (כִּי־צֶלֶל, *kiṣel*) modifies the verb (“prolong”) rather than the noun (“days”). Several English versions misconstrue the line: “he will not prolong his days, [which are] like a shadow” (KJV, ASV); “the man who does not fear God is like a shadow” (NEB); and “he will not prolong his shadowy days” (NAB). It should be rendered “he will not prolong his days like a shadow” (RSV, NRSV, NASB, MLB, NIV). Unlike a shadow that lengthens at sunset, the wicked do not normally live long.

**16 tn** Heb “he.”

**17 tn** Heb “they do not fear.”

**18 tn** Heb “there is.” The term יֵשׁ (*vesh*, “there is”) is often used in aphorisms to assert the existence of a particular situation that occurs sometimes. It may indicate that the situation is not the rule but that it does occur on occasion, and may be nuanced “sometimes” (Prov 11:24; 13:7, 23; 14:12; 16:25; 18:24; 20:15; Eccl 2:21; 4:8; 5:12; 6:1; 7:15 [2x]; 8:14 [3x]).

**19 tn** The word “another” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

**20 tn** Or “vanity” (again at the end of this verse). The Hebrew term הֶבֶל (*hevel*) here denotes “enigma,” that is, something that is difficult to understand. This sense is derived from the literal referent of breath, vapor or wind that cannot be seen; thus, “obscure; dark; difficult to understand; enigmatic” (see HALOT 236–37 s.v. הֶבֶל; BDB 210–11 s.v. הֶבֶל). It is used in this sense in reference to enigmas in life (6:2; 8:10, 14) and the future which is obscure (11:8, 10).

**21 tn** Heb “to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked”; or “who are punished for the deeds of the wicked.”

**22 tn** Heb “to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous”; or “who are rewarded for the deeds of the righteous.”

*Enjoy Life In Spite of Its Injustices*

**8:15** So I recommend the enjoyment of life,<sup>1</sup> for there is nothing better on earth<sup>2</sup> for a person to do<sup>3</sup> except<sup>4</sup> to eat, drink, and enjoy<sup>5</sup> life.<sup>6</sup> So<sup>7</sup> joy<sup>8</sup> will accompany him in his toil during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.<sup>9</sup>

*Limitations of Human Wisdom*

**8:16** When I tried<sup>10</sup> to gain<sup>11</sup> wisdom and to observe the activity<sup>12</sup> on earth – even though it prevents anyone from sleeping day or night<sup>13</sup> – **8:17** then I discerned all that God has done:<sup>14</sup> No one really comprehends what happens<sup>15</sup> on earth.<sup>16</sup> Despite all human<sup>17</sup> efforts to discover it, no one can ever grasp<sup>18</sup> it.<sup>19</sup>

Even if<sup>20</sup> a wise person claimed<sup>21</sup> that he understood, he would not really comprehend<sup>22</sup> it.<sup>23</sup>

*Everyone Will Die*

**9:1** So I reflected on all this,<sup>24</sup> attempting to clear<sup>25</sup> it all up. I concluded that<sup>26</sup> the righteous and the wise, as well as their works, are in the hand of God; whether a person will be loved or hated<sup>27</sup> – no one knows what lies ahead.<sup>28</sup> **9:2** Everyone shares the same fate<sup>29</sup> – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad,<sup>30</sup>

**1** *tn* Heb “the enjoyment.” The phrase “of life” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

**2** *tn* Heb “under the sun.”

**3** *tn* The phrase “to do” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**4** *tn* The construction כִּי...יִמ (ki...im) is used as a particle of exception to limit the preceding clause (“except; nothing but”). See, e.g., Gen 28:17; 39:9; Lev 21:2; Num 14:30; Deut 10:12; 1 Sam 30:22; 2 Kgs 4:2; 5:15; 2 Chr 21:17; Esth 2:15; 5:12; Eccl 3:12; Isa 42:19; Dan 10:21; Mic 6:8 (cf. HALOT 471 s.v. כִּי B.2; BDB 474 s.v. כִּי 2.a).

**5** *sn* Except to eat, drink, and enjoy life. Qoheleth is not commending a self-indulgent lifestyle of Epicurean hedonism. Nor is he lamenting the absolute futility of life and the lack of eternal retribution. He is submitting to the reality that in a sin-cursed world there is much of human existence marked by relative futility. Since the righteous man cannot assume that he will automatically experience temporal prosperity and blessings on this earth, he should – at the very least – enjoy each day to its fullest as a gift from God. D. R. Glenn (“Ecclesiastes,” *BKCOT*, 997) notes, “Each day’s joys should be received as gifts from God’s hands and be savored as God permits (3:13; 5:19).”

**6** *tn* The term “life” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

**7** *tn* The *vav* introduces a logical conclusion.

**8** *tn* Heb “it”; the referent (enjoyment of life) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

**9** *tn* Heb “under the sun.”

**10** *tn* Heb “I applied my heart.”

**11** *tn* Heb “to know.”

**12** *tn* Heb “and to see the business which is done.”

**13** *tn* Heb “for no one sees sleep with their eyes either day or night.” The construction כִּי...גַם (ki...gam) expresses a concessive sense: “even though” (e.g., Ps 23:4; Prov 22:6; Eccl 4:14; Isa 1:15; Lam 3:8; Hos 8:10; 9:16); cf. HALOT 196 s.v. כִּי 9; BDB 169 s.v. כִּי 6; 473 s.v. כִּי 2.c.

**14** *tn* Heb “all the work of God.”

**15** *tn* Heb “the work that is done.”

**16** *tn* Heb “under the sun.”

**17** *tn* Heb “his”; the referent (man, in a generic sense) has been specified in the translation as the adjective “human” for clarity.

**18** *tn* Heb “find.”

**19** *tn* The term “it” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**20** *tn* The particle יִם (*im*, “even if”) introduces the protasis in a real conditional clause (“If a wise man ...”); see *IBHS* 636-37 §38.2d; R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 74, §45.3.

**21** *tn* The imperfect tense verb יִאמַר (*yo'mar*, “to say”) functions in a modal sense, denoting possibility (see *IBHS* 508 §31.4e; R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 31, §169).

**22** *tn* Heb “he cannot find”; or “he does not find.”

**23** *tn* The term “it” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is an implied direct object and has been supplied in the translation for smoothness and stylistic reasons.

**24** *tn* Heb “I laid all this to my heart.”

**25** *tn* The term לְבַחַר (velavur, conjunction + Qal infinitive construct from בַּחַר, *bur*, “to make clear”) denotes “to examine; to make clear; to clear up; to explain” (*HALOT* 116 s.v. בַּחַר; BDB 101 s.v. בַּחַר). The term is related to Arabic *baraw* “to examine” (G. R. Driver, “Supposed Arabisms in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 55 [1936]: 108). This verb is related to the Hebrew noun בָּר (*bor*, “cleanness”) and adjective בָּר (*bar*, “clean”). The term is used in the OT only in Ecclesiastes (1:13; 2:3; 7:25; 9:1). This use of the infinitive has a connotative sense (“attempting to”), and functions in a complementary sense, relative to the main verb.

**26** *tn* The words “I concluded that” do not appear in the Hebrew text, but are supplied in the translation for clarity.

**27** *tn* Heb “whether love or hatred.”

**28** *tn* Heb “man does not know anything before them.”

**29** *tn* Heb “all things just as to everyone, one fate.”

**30** *tc* The MT reads simply “the good,” but the Greek versions read “the good and the bad.” In contrast to the other four pairs in v. 2 (“the righteous and the wicked,” “those who sacrifice, and those who do not sacrifice,” “the good man...the sinner,” and “those who make vows...those who are afraid to make vows”), the MT has a triad in the second line: לְטוֹב וְלָרָע וְלִטְהוֹרָה וְלִטְמֵאָה (*lattiv v<sup>l</sup>lattahor v<sup>l</sup>lattame*, “the good, and the clean, and the unclean”). This reading in the Leningrad Codex (ca. A.D. 1008) – the basis of the *BHS* and *BHK* publications of the MT – is also supported by the Ben Asher text of the First Rabbinic Bible (“the Soncino Bible”) published in A.D. 1488-94. On the other hand, the Greek version in B (Aquila) has two pairs: τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ κακὸν, καὶ τὸ καθαρὸν καὶ τὸ ἀκαθάρτον (“the good and the bad, and the clean and the unclean”). Either Aquila inserted καὶ τὸ κακὸν (*kai tō kakō*, “and the bad”) to fill out a pair and to create six parallel pairs in v. 2, or Aquila reflects an early Hebrew textual tradition of τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ πονηρὸν (*lattiv v<sup>l</sup>lara*, “the good and the bad”). Since Aquila is well known for his commitment to a literal – at times even a mechanically wooden – translation of the Hebrew, with no room for improvisation, it is more than likely that Aquila is reflecting an authentic Hebrew textual tradition. Aquila dates to A.D. 130, while the Leningrad Codex dates to A.D. 1008; therefore, the *Vorlage* of Aquila might have been the original Hebrew textual tradition, being much earlier than the MT of the Leningrad Codex. The alternate textual tradition of Aquila is also seen in the Syriac and Latin versions (but these are dependent upon the Greek = Aquila). On the other hand, the editors of *BHK* and *BHS* suggest that the presence of the anomalous לְטוֹב was an addition to the Hebrew text, and should be deleted. They also suggest that the Greek pair



the ceremonially clean and unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not.

What happens to the good person, also happens to the sinner;<sup>1</sup>

what happens to those who make vows, also happens to those who are afraid to make vows.

**9:3** This is the unfortunate fact<sup>2</sup> about everything that happens on earth:<sup>3</sup> the same fate awaits<sup>4</sup> everyone.

In addition to this, the hearts of all people<sup>5</sup> are full of evil, and there is folly in their hearts during their lives – then they die.<sup>6</sup>

*Better to Be Poor but Alive than Rich but Dead*

**9:4** But whoever is among<sup>7</sup> the living<sup>8</sup> has hope; a live dog is better than a dead lion.

**9:5** For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything; they have no further reward – and even the memory of them disappears.<sup>9</sup>

**9:6** What they loved,<sup>10</sup> as well as what they hated<sup>11</sup> and envied,<sup>12</sup> perished long ago, and they no longer have a part in anything that happens on earth.<sup>13</sup>

τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ κακὸν (*tō agathō kai tō kakō*, “the good and the bad”) does not reflect an alternate textual tradition, but that their *Vorlage* contained only לטוב: the Greek version intentionally added καὶ τὸ κακὸν (*kai tō kakō*, “and the bad”) to create a pair. The English versions are divided. Several follow the Greek: “the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean” (NEB, NAB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, Moffatt, NLT). Others follow the Hebrew: “the good and the clean and the unclean” (KJV, ASV, MLB, NJPS). None, however, delete “the good” (לטוב) as suggested by the *BHK* and *BHS* editors. If the shorter text were original, the addition of καὶ τὸ κακὸν would be intentional. If the longer text were original, the omission of לְרַע (“and the bad”) could have been caused by unintentional homoioteleuton (“similar beginning”) in the three-fold repetition of לטוב לרע ולטהור ולטבחה ח לטוב לרע ולטהור ולטבחה ח לטוב לרע ולטהור ולטבחה ח (*lattov v<sup>l</sup>lara v<sup>l</sup>lattahor v<sup>l</sup>lattame<sup>l</sup>*, “the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean”). The term לְרַע (“and the bad”) was accidentally omitted when a scribe skipped from the first occurrence of לטוב to its second occurrence in the word לְרַע (“the clean”).

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Heb “As is the good (man), so is the sinner.”

<sup>2</sup> **tn** Heb “evil.”

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Heb “under the sun.”

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The term “awaits” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness and stylistic reasons.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** Heb “also the heart of the sons of man.” Here “heart” is a collective singular.

<sup>6</sup> **tn** Heb “and after that [they go] to [the place of] the dead.”

<sup>7</sup> **tn** The consonantal text (*Kethib*) has “is chosen, selected.” The translation follows the marginal reading (*Qere*), “is joined.” See *BDB* 288 s.v. הָבַר Pu.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** Heb “all the living.”

<sup>9</sup> **tn** Heb “for their memory is forgotten.” The pronominal suffix is an objective genitive, “memory of them.”

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Heb “their love.”

<sup>11</sup> **tn** Heb “their hatred.”

<sup>12</sup> **tn** Heb “their envy.”

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Heb “under the sun.”

*Life is Brief, so Cherish its Joys*

**9:7** Go, eat your food<sup>14</sup> with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, because God has already approved your works.

**9:8** Let your clothes always be white, and do not spare precious ointment on your head.

**9:9** Enjoy<sup>15</sup> life with your beloved wife<sup>16</sup> during all the days of your fleeting<sup>17</sup> life that God<sup>18</sup> has given you on earth<sup>19</sup> during all your fleeting days;<sup>20</sup> for that is your reward in life and in your burdensome work<sup>21</sup> on earth.<sup>22</sup>

**9:10** Whatever you find to do with your hands,<sup>23</sup> do it with all your might, because there is neither work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave,<sup>24</sup> the place where you will eventually go.<sup>25</sup>

*Wisdom Cannot Protect against Seemingly Chance Events*

**9:11** Again,<sup>26</sup> I observed this on the earth:<sup>27</sup> the race is not always<sup>28</sup> won by the swiftest,

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Heb “your bread.”

<sup>15</sup> **tn** Heb “see.”

<sup>16</sup> **tn** Heb “the wife whom you love.”

<sup>17</sup> **tn** As discussed in the note on the word “futile” in 1:2, the term הֶבֶל (*hevel*) has a wide range of meanings, and should not be translated the same in every place (see *HALOT* 236–37 s.v. הֶבֶל; *BDB* 210–11 s.v. הֶבֶל). The term is used in two basic ways in OT, literally and figuratively. The literal, concrete sense is used in reference to the wind, man’s transitory breath, evanescent vapor (Isa 57:13; Pss 62:10; 144:4; Prov 21:6; Job 7:16). In this sense, it is often a synonym for “breath; wind” (Eccl 1:14; Isa 57:13; Jer 10:14). The literal sense lent itself to the metaphorical sense. Because breath/vapor/wind is transitory and fleeting, the figurative connotation “fleeting; transitory” arose (e.g., Prov 31:30; Eccl 6:12; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10; Job 7:16). In this sense, it is parallel to “few days” and “[days] which he passes like a shadow” (Eccl 6:12). It is used in reference to youth and vigor (11:10) or life (6:12; 7:15; 9:9) which are “transitory” or “fleeting.” In this context, the most appropriate meaning is “fleeting.”

<sup>18</sup> **tn** Heb “he”; the referent (God) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>19</sup> **tn** Heb “under the sun”

<sup>20</sup> **tc** The phrase כָּל יְמֵי הֶבֶלְךָ (*kol y<sup>e</sup>me hevlekhā*, “all your fleeting days”) is present in the MT, but absent in the Greek versions, other medieval Hebrew mss, and the Targum. Its appearance in the MT may be due to dittography (repetition: the scribe wrote twice what should have been written once) from כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי הֶבֶלְךָ (*kol y<sup>e</sup>me khayye hevlekhā*, “all the days of your fleeting life”) which appears in the preceding line. On the other hand, its omission in the alternate textual tradition may be due to haplography (accidental omission of repeated words) with the earlier line.

<sup>21</sup> **tn** Heb “in your toil in which you toil.”

<sup>22</sup> **tn** Heb “under the sun.”

<sup>23</sup> **tn** Heb “Whatever your hand finds to do.”

<sup>24</sup> **tn** Heb “Sheol.”

<sup>25</sup> **tn** Or “where you are about to go.”

<sup>26</sup> **tn** Heb “I returned and.” In the Hebrew idiom, “to return and do” means “to do again.”

<sup>27</sup> **tn** Heb “under the sun.”

<sup>28</sup> **tn** The term “always” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation (five times in this version) for clarity.

the battle is not always won by the strongest;  
prosperity<sup>1</sup> does not always belong to those who are the wisest,  
wealth does not always belong to those who are the most discerning,  
nor does success<sup>2</sup> always come to those with the most knowledge –  
for time and chance may overcome<sup>3</sup> them all.

9:12 Surely, no one<sup>4</sup> knows his appointed time!<sup>5</sup>

Like fish that are caught in a deadly<sup>6</sup> net,  
and like birds that are caught in a snare –

just like them, all people<sup>7</sup> are ensnared<sup>8</sup>  
at an unfortunate<sup>9</sup> time that falls upon them suddenly.

*Most People Are Not Receptive to Wise Counsel*

9:13 This is what I also observed about wisdom on earth,<sup>10</sup>  
and it is a great burden<sup>11</sup> to me:

9:14 There was once<sup>12</sup> a small city with a

few men in it,  
and a mighty king attacked it, besieging<sup>13</sup>  
it and building strong<sup>14</sup> siege works  
against it.

9:15 However, a poor but wise man lived in the city,<sup>15</sup>  
and he could have delivered<sup>16</sup> the city by his wisdom,  
but no one listened<sup>17</sup> to that poor man.

9:16 So I concluded that wisdom is better than might,<sup>18</sup>  
but a poor man's wisdom is despised; no one ever listens<sup>19</sup> to his advice.<sup>20</sup>

*Wisdom versus Fools, Sin, and Folly*

9:17 The words of the wise are heard in quiet,  
more than the shouting of a ruler is heard<sup>21</sup> among fools.

9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war,  
but one sinner can destroy much that is good.

<sup>1</sup> tn Heb "bread."

<sup>2</sup> tn Heb "favor."

<sup>3</sup> tn Heb "happen to."

<sup>4</sup> tn Heb "man." The term is used here in a generic sense and translated "no one."

<sup>5</sup> tn Heb "time." BDB 773 s.v. עת 2.d suggests that עת ('et, "time") refers to an "uncertain time." On the other hand, HALOT 901 s.v. נה 6 nuances it as "destined time," that is, "no one knows his destined time [i.e., hour of destiny]." It is used in parallelism with זמן (zman, "appointed time; appointed hour") in 3:1 (HALOT 273 s.v. זמן; BDB 273 s.v. זמן). Eccl 3:9-15 teaches God's sovereignty over the appointed timetable of human events. Similarly, Qoheleth here notes that no one knows what God has appointed in any situation or time. This highlights the limitations of human wisdom and human ability, as 9:11 stresses.

<sup>6</sup> tn Heb "bad, evil." The moral connotation hardly fits here. The adjective would seem to indicate that the net is the instrument whereby the fish come to ruin.

<sup>7</sup> tn Heb "the sons of man."

<sup>8</sup> tn The Masoretes pointed the consonantal form יוקשים ("are ensnared") as יוקשנים (yuqashim, Pual participle mpl from יקש, yaqosh, "to be ensnared"). This is an unusual form for a Pual participle: (1) The characteristic doubling of the middle consonant was omitted due to the lengthening of the preceding short vowel from יוקשים to יוקשנים (GKC 74 §20.n and 143 §52.s), and (2) The characteristic prefix מ (mem) is absent, as in a few other Pual participles, e.g., Exod 3:2; Judg 13:8; 2 Kgs 2:10; Isa 30:24; 54:11 (GKC 143 §52.s). On the other hand, the consonant form יוקשים might actually be an example of the old Qal passive participle which dropped out of Hebrew at an early stage, and was frequently mistaken by the Masoretes as a Pual form (e.g., Jer 13:10; 23:32) (GKC 143 §52.s). Similarly, the Masoretes pointed אכל as אכל ('ukhal, Pual perfect 3rd person masculine singular "he was eaten"); however, it probably should be pointed אכל ('ukhal, old Qal passive perfect 3rd person masculine singular "he was eaten") because אכל ('akhal) only occurs in the Qal (see IBHS 373-74 §22.6a).

<sup>9</sup> tn Heb "evil." The term רעה (ra'ah, "evil; unfortunate") is repeated in v. 12 in the two parts of the comparison: "fish are caught in an evil (רעה) net" and "men are ensnared at an unfortunate (רעה) time."

<sup>10</sup> tn Heb "under the sun."

<sup>11</sup> tn The term "burden" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>12</sup> tn The verbs in this section function either as past defi-

nite actions (describing a past situation) or as hypothetical past actions (describing an imaginary hypothetical situation for the sake of illustration). The LXX uses subjunctives throughout vv. 14-15 to depict the scenario as a hypothetical situation: "Suppose there was a little city, and a few men [lived] in it; and there should come against it a great king, and surround it, and build great siege-works against it; and should find it in a poor wise man, and he should save the city through his wisdom; yet no man would remember that poor man."

<sup>13</sup> tn The two perfect tense verbs וקבב (vav, "he besieged") and וקנה (uvanah, "he built") may be taken in a complementary sense, qualifying the action of the main perfect tense verb וקא (ava, "he attacked it").

<sup>14</sup> tn The root גדל ("mighty; strong; large") is repeated in 9:13b for emphasis: "a mighty (גדול, gadol) king...building strong (גדלים, gdolim) siege works." This repetition highlights the contrast between the vast power and resources of the attacking king, and the meager resources of the "little" (קטנה, qetannah) city with "few" (מעט, me'at) men in it to defend it.

<sup>15</sup> tn Heb "was found in it"; the referent (the city) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>16</sup> tn Or "he delivered." The verb וקלט (umillat, from קלט, malat, "to deliver") is functioning either in an indicative sense (past definite action: "he delivered") or in a modal sense (past potential: "he could have delivered"). The literal meaning of זכר (zakhar, "to remember") in the following line harmonizes with the indicative: "but no one remembered that poor man [afterward]." However, the modal is supported by v. 16: "A poor man's wisdom is despised; no one ever listens to his advice." This approach must nuance זכר ("to remember") as "[no one] listened to [that poor man]." Most translations favor the indicative approach: "he delivered" or "he saved" (KJV, RSV, NRSV, NAB, ASV, NASB, MLB, NIV); however, some adopt the modal nuance: "he might have saved" (NEB, NJPS, NASB margin).

<sup>17</sup> tn Heb "remembered."

<sup>18</sup> tn Or "power."

<sup>19</sup> tn The participle form נשמעים (nishma'im, Niphal participle mpl from שמע, "to listen") is used verbally to emphasize a continual, durative, gnomic action.

<sup>20</sup> tn Heb "his words are never listened to."

<sup>21</sup> tn The phrase "is heard" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness. Note its appearance in the previous line.

10:1 One dead fly<sup>1</sup> makes the perfumer's ointment give off a rancid stench,<sup>2</sup> so a little folly can outweigh<sup>3</sup> much wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

*Wisdom Can Be Nullified By the Caprice of Rulers*

10:2 A wise person's good sense protects him,<sup>5</sup>

but a fool's lack of sense leaves him vulnerable.<sup>6</sup>

10:3 Even when a fool walks along the road he lacks sense,<sup>7</sup>

and shows<sup>8</sup> everyone what a fool he is.<sup>9</sup>

10:4 If the anger<sup>10</sup> of the ruler flares up<sup>11</sup> against you, do not resign<sup>12</sup> from your position.<sup>13</sup>

For a calm<sup>14</sup> response<sup>15</sup> can undo<sup>16</sup> great offenses.

10:5 I have seen another<sup>17</sup> misfortune<sup>18</sup> on the earth.<sup>19</sup>

It is an error a ruler makes.<sup>20</sup>

10:6 Fools<sup>21</sup> are placed in many positions of authority,<sup>22</sup>

while wealthy men sit in lowly positions.

10:7 I have seen slaves<sup>23</sup> on horseback and princes walking on foot<sup>24</sup> like slaves.

<sup>1</sup> **tn** Heb "flies of death." The plural form of "flies" (וּבְיָבִי, *z'vuve*) may be taken as a plural of number ("dead flies") or a distributive plural referring to one little fly ("one dead fly"). The singular form of the following verb and the parallelism support the latter: "one little fly...so a little folly."

<sup>2</sup> **tn** The verb בָּחַשׁ (*ba'ash*) means "to cause to stink; to turn rancid; to emit a stinking odor" (e.g., Exod 16:24; Ps 38:6; Eccl 10:1); see HALOT 107 s.v. בָּחַשׁ 1; BDB 93 s.v. בָּחַשׁ. It is related to the noun בְּחָשׁ (*b'e'osh*, "stench"; Isa 34:3; Joel 2:20; Amos 4:10); cf. HALOT 107 s.v. בָּחַשׁ; BDB 93 s.v. בָּחַשׁ. The verbal root נָבַע means "to ferment" or "to emit; to pour out; to bubble; to belch forth; to cause to gush forth" (HALOT 665 s.v. נָבַע; BDB 615 s.v. נָבַע). The two terms יָבִישׁ יָבִיב (*yav'ish yav'bia*, "to stink" and "to ferment") create a hendiadys: a figurative expression in which two terms are used to connote one idea: "makes a rancid stench." Several versions treat this as a hendiadys (Old Greek, Symmachus, Targum, Vulgate); however, the Syriac treats them as separate verbs. Most translations treat these as a hendiadys: "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor" (KJV); "Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink" (NASB); "dead flies give perfume a bad smell" (NIV); "Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off an evil odor" (RSV); "Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a foul odor" (NRSV); "Dead flies cause a perfumer's perfume to send forth a stink" (YLT); "Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a foul odor" (NRSV). Others render both separately: "Dead flies make the perfumer's sweet ointment rancid and ferment" (NEB); "Dead flies turn the perfumer's ointment fetid and putrid" (NJPS).

<sup>3</sup> **tn** Heb "carries more weight than"; or "is more precious than." The adjective יָקָר (*yaqar*) denotes "precious; valuable; costly" (HALOT 432 s.v. יָקָר 2); or "weighty; influential" (BDB 430 s.v. יָקָר 4). The related verb denotes "to carry weight," that is, to be influential (HALOT 432 s.v. יָקָר 2). The idea is not that a little folly is more valuable than much wisdom, but that a little folly can have more influence than great wisdom. It only takes one little mistake to ruin a life of great wisdom. The English versions understand it this way: "so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor" (NASB); "so a little folly outweighs massive wisdom" (NJPS); "so a little folly outweighs an abundance of wisdom" (MLB); "so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor" (RSV, NRSV, NIV); "so can a little folly make wisdom lose its worth" (NEB); "so a little folly annuls great wisdom" (ASV); "a single slip can ruin much that is good" (NAB); "so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor" (KJV). The LXX rendered the line rather freely: τιμιον ὀλιγον σοφία ὑπερ δόξαν ἀφροσύνης μεγαλην ("a little wisdom is more precious than great glory of folly"). This does not accurately represent the Hebrew syntax.

<sup>4</sup> **tn** Qoheleth creates a wordplay by using two Hebrew words for social honor or influence: "weighty" = honorable (יָקָר, *yaqar*) and "heavy" = honor (כָּבֵד, *cavod*).

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The MT reads מִכְחֹכְמָה מִכְחֹכְמָה (*mekhokhmah mikkavod*, "more than wisdom, more than honor"), but several medieval Hebrew MSS read מִכְחֹכְמָה וּמִכְחֹכְמָה (*mekhokhmah unikkavod*, "more than wisdom and honor"). However the textual problem is resolved, the two nouns form a hendiadys: two terms joined by *vav* that describe one concept. The first noun retains its full nominal sense, while the second functions adjectivally: "heavy wisdom" or better, "great wisdom."

<sup>5</sup> **tn** Heb "a wise man's heart is at his right hand." The phrase "right hand" is a Hebrew idiom for the place of protection (e.g., Pss 16:8; 110:5; 121:5). In ancient warfare, the shield of the warrior on one's right-hand side protected one's

right hand. Qoheleth's point is that wisdom provides protection (e.g., Eccl 7:12).

<sup>6</sup> **tn** Heb "and the heart of a fool is at his left hand." The fool lacks the protection of wisdom which is at the right-hand side of the wise man (see note on "right hand" in the previous line). The wise man's heart (i.e., good sense) protects him, but the fool is always getting into trouble.

<sup>7</sup> **tn** Heb "he lacks his heart."

<sup>8</sup> **tn** Heb "he tells everyone."

<sup>9</sup> **sn** A fool's lack of wisdom is obvious to everyone, even when he is engaged in the simple, ordinary actions of life.

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Heb "spirit."

<sup>11</sup> **tn** Heb "rises up."

<sup>12</sup> **tn** Heb "Do not leave."

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Heb "your place." The term מקום (*maqom*, "place") denotes a position, post or office (1 Kgs 20:24; Eccl 8:3; 10:4; BDB 879 s.v. מָקוֹם 1.c).

<sup>14</sup> **tn** The noun מִרְפָּא (*marpe*, "calmness") is used in reference to keeping one's composure with a peaceful heart (Prov 14:30) and responding to criticism with a gentle tongue (Prov 15:4); cf. HALOT 637 s.v. מִרְפָּא. It is used in reference to keeping one's composure in an emotionally charged situation (BDB 951 s.v. מִרְפָּא 2). The term "calmness" is used here as a metonymy of association, meaning "calm response."

<sup>15</sup> **tn** The term "response" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarification (see preceding note on the word "calm").

<sup>16</sup> **tn** The verbal root נָח means "to leave behind; to leave untouched" (HALOT 680 s.v. נָח 2) in general, and in this passage, "to undo" or "to allay" offenses (HALOT 680 s.v. נָח 3; BDB 629 s.v. נָח 5) or "to avoid" offenses (BDB 629 s.v. נָח 5). The point is either that (1) a composed response can calm or appease the anger of the ruler, or (2) a calm heart will help one avoid great sins that would offend the king. The root נָח ("to rest") is repeated, creating a wordplay: "Do not let ruler (נָח) and "to avoid; to allay" (נָח, *al-tannakh*) and "to avoid; to ally" (נָח, *yanniakh*). Rather than resigning (i.e., leaving), composure can appease a king (i.e., cause the anger of the king to leave).

<sup>17</sup> **tn** The term "another" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation to indicate that this is not the first "misfortune" described by the Teacher. See 5:13, 16; 6:1-2.

<sup>18</sup> **tn** Heb "an evil."

<sup>19</sup> **tn** Heb "under the sun."

<sup>20</sup> **tn** Heb "like an error that comes forth from the presence of a ruler."

<sup>21</sup> **tn** Heb "folly."

<sup>22</sup> **tn** Heb "high places."

<sup>23</sup> **tn** Or "servants," so KJV, ASV, NCV, NLT (also in the following line).

<sup>24</sup> **tn** Heb "upon the earth."

*Wisdom is Needed to Avert Dangers in Everyday Life*

**10:8** One who digs a pit may<sup>4</sup> fall into it, and one who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.<sup>2</sup>

**10:9** One who quarries stones may be injured by them; one who splits logs may be endangered by them.

**10:10** If an iron axhead<sup>3</sup> is blunt and a workman<sup>4</sup> does not sharpen<sup>5</sup> its edge,<sup>6</sup> he must exert a great deal of effort;<sup>7</sup> so wisdom has the advantage of giving success.

**10:11** If the snake should bite before it is charmed,<sup>8</sup> the snake charmer<sup>9</sup> is in trouble.<sup>10</sup>

*Words and Works of Wise Men and Fools*

**10:12** The words of a wise person<sup>11</sup> win him<sup>12</sup> favor,<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The four imperfect verbs in vv. 8-9 may be nuanced as indicatives ("will...") or in a modal sense denoting possibility ("may..."). The LXX rendered them with indicatives, as do many English translations (KJV, RSV, NRSV, ASV, MLB, YLT, NJPS). However, it is better to take them in a modal sense (NEB, NAB, NASB, NIV, NCV, CEV, NLT). One who digs a pit does not necessarily fall into it, but he may under the right conditions.

<sup>2</sup> **tn** Heb "a serpent will bite him." The clause "he who breaks through a wall" (וּפְרוֹץ גֹּדֵר, *uforetz gader*) is a nominative absolute – the *casus pendens* is picked up by the resumptive pronoun in the following clause "a serpent will bite him" (יִשְׁכַּח יִשְׁכַּח, *yish'ekhennu nakhash*). This construction is used for rhetorical emphasis (see *IBHS* 76-77 §4.7c).

<sup>3</sup> **tn** The term "ax head" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. The preceding noun "iron" functions as a metonymy of material (i.e., iron) for the object with which it is associated (i.e., ax head).

<sup>4</sup> **tn** Heb "he"; the referent (the workman) is implied, and has been specified in the translation for clarity.

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The verb *קָלַל* in the Pi'el means "to sharpen; to make a blade sharp" (*HALOT* 1104 s.v. *קָלַל* 1). This denominative verb is derived from the rare noun *קָלַל* II "smooth; shiny" (referring to bronze; Ezek 1:7; Dan 10:6; *HALOT* 1105 s.v.). Sharpening the blade or head of a bronze ax will make it smooth and shiny. It is not derived from *קָלַל* (*qalal*) "to treat light" or the noun *קָלְלָה* (*qalalah*) "curse." Nor is it related to *קָלַל* "to shake" (Ezek 21:26); cf. *HALOT* 1104. BDB 886 s.v. *קָלַל* 2 erroneously relates it to *קָלַל*, suggesting "to whet" or "to move quickly to and fro."

<sup>6</sup> **tn** Heb "face."

<sup>7</sup> **tn** Heb "strength." The term *וַחְיָלִים* (*vakhyalim*, conjunction + plural noun from *חָיַל*, *khayil*, "strength; efficiency") is an example of a plural of intensification (GKC 397-98 §124. e). The point is that it is a waste of a great deal of strength and energy. If a person is not smart, he will have to use a lot of energy and waste his efficiency.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** Heb "without charming."

<sup>9</sup> **tn** Heb "the master of the tongue."

<sup>10</sup> **tn** Heb "has no profit"; ASV, NAB, NRSV "there is no advantage."

<sup>11</sup> **tn** Heb "of a wise man's mouth."

<sup>12</sup> **tn** The phrase "win him" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but has been supplied in the translation for clarity.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** Or "are gracious." The antithetical parallelism suggests that *חֵן* (*khen*) does not denote "gracious character" but "[gain] favor" (e.g., Gen 39:21; Exod 3:21; 11:3; 12:36; Prov 3:4, 34; 13:15; 22:1; 28:23; Eccl 9:11); cf. *HALOT* 332 s.v. *חֵן* 2; BDB 336 s.v. *חֵן* 2. The LXX, on the other hand, rendered *חֵן* with *χάρις* (*charis*, "gracious"). The English versions are di-

but the words<sup>14</sup> of a fool are self-destructive.<sup>15</sup>

**10:13** At the beginning his words<sup>16</sup> are foolish and at the end<sup>17</sup> his talk<sup>18</sup> is wicked madness,<sup>19</sup>

**10:14** yet a fool keeps on babbling.<sup>20</sup> No one knows what will happen; who can tell him what will happen in the future?<sup>21</sup>

**10:15** The toil of a stupid fool<sup>22</sup> wears him out,<sup>23</sup> because he does not even know the way to the city.<sup>24</sup>

*The Problem with Foolish Rulers*

**10:16** Woe to you, O land, when your king is childish,<sup>25</sup>

vided: "are gracious" (KJV, YLT, ASV, NASB, NIV) and "win him favor" (NEB, RSV, NRSV, NAB, MLB, NJPS, Moffatt).

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Heb "lips."

<sup>15</sup> **tn** Heb "consume him"; or "engulf him." The verb *בלע* ("to swallow") creates a striking wordplay on the homonymic root *בלע* II ("to speak eloquently"; *HALOT* 134-35 s.v. *בלע*). Rather than speaking eloquently (II *בלע*, "to speak eloquently"), the fool utters words that are self-destructive (I *בלע*, "to swallow, engulf").

<sup>16</sup> **tn** Heb "the words of his mouth."

<sup>17</sup> **sn** The terms "beginning" and "end" form a merism, a figure of speech in which two opposites are contrasted to indicate totality (e.g., Deut 6:7; Ps 139:8; Eccl 3:2-8). The words of a fool are madness from "start to finish."

<sup>18</sup> **tn** Heb "his mouth."

<sup>19</sup> **tn** Heb "madness of evil."

<sup>20</sup> **tn** Heb "and the fool multiplies words." This line is best taken as the third line of a tricola encompassing 10:13-14a (NASB, NRSV, NJPS, Moffatt) rather than the first line of a tricola encompassing 10:14 (KJV, NEB, RSV, NAB, ASV, NIV). Several versions capture the sense of this line well: "a fool prates on and on" (Moffatt) and "Yet the fool talks and talks!" (NJPS).

<sup>21</sup> **tn** Heb "after him"; or "after he [dies]."

<sup>22</sup> **tn** The plural form *הַכְּסִילִים* (*hakk'esilim*, *כְּסִיל*, *k'esil*, "fool") denotes (1) plural of number: referring to several fools or (2) plural of habitual character or plural of intensity (referring to a single person characterized by a habitual or intense quality of foolishness). The latter is favored because the two verbs in 10:15 are both singular in form: "wears him" (*תֵּינֵן*, *teyenne*, *ʿyaggeʿennu*) and "he does [not] know" (*לֹא־יָדָע*, *lo'-yada'*); see GKC 440-41 §135.p. The article on *הַכְּסִילִים* is used in the generic sense.

<sup>23</sup> **tn** This line may be interpreted in one of three ways: (1) "the labor of fools wears him because he did not know enough to go to a town," referring to the labor of the peasants who had not been able to find a place in town where life was easier; (2) "the labor of the fools so wears everyone of them (singular pronoun taken in a distributive sense) so much that he even does not know how to go to town," that is, he does not even know how to do the easiest thing in the world; (3) "let the labor of fools so weary him that he may not even know how to go to town," taking the verb as a jussive, describing the foolish man described in 10:12-14. See D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:592-93.

<sup>24</sup> **tn** Heb "he does not know to go to the city."

<sup>25</sup> **tn** Or "a child"; or "a servant." The term *נַעַר* (*na'ar*) has a wide range of meanings (*HALOT* 707 s.v. *נַעַר*; BDB 654-55 s.v. II *נַעַר*). Used in reference to age, it may refer to an infant (Exod 2:6; Judg 13:5; 1 Sam 1:22; 4:21; 2 Sam 12:16), a child just weaned (1 Sam 1:24), an adolescent in puberty (1 Sam 16:11), or a young man of marriageable age (Gen 34:19; 2 Sam 14:21; 18:5, 12). Its technical or titular use denotes "servant" (Num 22:22; Judg 7:10-11; 19:3; 1 Sam 3:9;



and your princes feast in the morning!  
**10:17** Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobility,<sup>1</sup> and your princes feast at the proper time<sup>2</sup> – with self-control and not in drunkenness.<sup>3</sup>  
**10:18** Because of laziness the roof<sup>4</sup> caves in, and because of idle hands<sup>5</sup> the house leaks.  
**10:19** Feasts<sup>6</sup> are made<sup>7</sup> for laughter,

and wine makes life merry,<sup>8</sup> but money is the answer<sup>9</sup> for everything.  
**10:20** Do not curse a king even in your thoughts, and do not curse the rich<sup>10</sup> while in your bedroom;<sup>11</sup> for a bird<sup>12</sup> might report what you are thinking,<sup>13</sup> or some winged creature<sup>14</sup> might repeat your<sup>15</sup> words.<sup>16</sup>

2 Sam 16:1; 2 Kgs 4:12, 25; 19:6), “retainer; attendant; follower” (Gen 14:24; 1 Sam 25:5; 2 Sam 2:14; 2 Kgs 19:6; Isa 37:6; Job 1:15-17; Neh 4:10, 17) and “soldier” (1 Kgs 20:15-16). The parallel Ugaritic term is used in reference to physical age (lad; son; youth) and in a technical sense (guild members; servants; soldiers); see UT 19.445. The LXX rendered it with νεώτερος (*neōteros*, “youthful”). The English versions vary: “child,” (KJV, ASV, NASB, MLB, RSV, NRSV margin, NIV margin); “childish” (NIV margin); “servant” or “slave” (NEB, NAB, ASV margin, NRSV, NIV); and “lackey” (NJPS). When used in reference to rulers, it emphasizes incompetence, naiveté, inexperience, and immaturity (Isa 3:4, 9; 1 Kgs 3:7). This use must be understood in the light of the parallel antonym: “son of freemen” (בְּדוֹרוֹרִים, *ben-khorim*). This suggests “servant,” that is, one who was not well trained and prepared by noble birth to ascend to the throne.

**1** **tn** *Heb* “son of nobles”; or “son of freemen.” The term דוֹרוֹרִים (*khorim*) is from (*khor*, “noble one; freeman”); cf. HALOT 348 s.v. דוֹרוֹר; BDB 359 s.v. דוֹרוֹר. It is related to the Aramaic noun כְּחָרָר (*kharar*, “freeman”); Sabean חַר (*“freeman; noble”*); Old South Arabic חַר and Arabic *hurr* (“freedom”); cf. HALOT 348 s.v. חַר; BDB 359 s.v. חַר.

**2** **tn** The noun עֵת (*et*, “point in time”) has a basic two-fold range of meanings: (1) “time of an event” and (2) “time for an event” (BDB 773 s.v. עֵת). The latter has four sub-categories: (a) “usual time,” (b) “the proper, suitable or appropriate time,” (c) “the appointed time,” and (d) “uncertain time.” Here it connotes “a proper, suitable time for an event” (HALOT 900 s.v. עֵת 6; BDB 773 s.v. עֵת 2.b). Examples of this use include: “it was the time for rain” (Ezra 10:13); “a time of judgment for the nations” (Ezek 30:3); “there is an appropriate time for every occasion” (Eccl 3:1); “the rain in its season” (Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24); “the time for the harvest” (Hos 2:11; Ps 1:3); “food in its season” (Ps 104:27); “the right moment” (Eccl 8:5); cf. HALOT 900 s.v. עֵת 6.

**3** **tn** *Heb* “for strength and not for drunkenness”; or “as heroes and not as drunkards”; or “for nourishment and not for drunkenness.” According to HALOT 172 s.v. גְּבוּרָה 1.d the term גְּבוּרָה (*g̃vurah*, “strength”) may here connote “self-control.” This tactic is adopted by a few English versions: “with self-control, and not as drunkards” (NEB) and “with restraint, not with guzzling” (NJPS). On the other hand, most English versions render גְּבוּרָה וְלֹא בִישָׁתִי (*bigvurah v’lo’ vash’eti*) in a woodenly literal sense, “for strength and not for drunkenness” (YLT, KJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV). However, a few attempt to express the idiom clearly: “as stalwarts and not as drunkards” (MLB); “stalwart men, not sots” (Moffatt); “for vigor and not in drinking bouts” (NAB); “for refreshment, and not for riotousness” (Douay).

**4** **tn** Or “the rafters sink.”

**5** **tn** *Heb* “lowering of hands.”

**6** **tn** *Heb* “bread.” The term לֶחֶם (*lekhem*) is used literally of “bread” and figuratively (i.e., by metonymy) for a “feast” (BDB 536–37 s.v. לֶחֶם). BDB suggests that עֹשֶׂיהֶ לֶחֶם (*osih lekhem*) in Eccl 10:19 means “make a feast” (BDB 537 s.v. לֶחֶם 1.a). This obscure line has occasioned numerous proposals: “a feast is made for laughter” (KJV, ASV, NIV); “feasts are made for laughter” (NRSV); “men feast for merrymaking” (Moffatt); “men prepare a meal for enjoyment” (NASB); “the table has its pleasures” (NEB); “they [i.e., rulers of v. 16] make a banquet for revelry” (NJPS); “people prepare a banquet for enjoyment” (MLB); “for laughter they make bread and wine, that the living may feast” (Douay); “bread is made for laughter” (RSV); “bread [and oil] call forth merriment” (NAB).

**7** **tn** The subject of the verb is not specified. When active verbs have an unspecified subject, they are often used in a

*Ignorance of the Future Demands Diligence in the Present*

**11:1** Send<sup>17</sup> your grain<sup>18</sup> overseas,<sup>19</sup> for after many days you will get a return.<sup>20</sup>

passive sense: “Bread [feasts] are made....”

**8** **tn** *Heb* “and wine gladdens life.”

**9** **tn** Or “and [they think that] money is the answer for everything.”

**10** **tn** Perhaps the referent is people who are in authority because of their wealth.

**11** **tn** *Heb* “in chambers of your bedroom.”

**12** **tn** *Heb* “a bird of the air.”

**13** **tn** *Heb* “might carry the voice.” The article is used here with the force of a possessive pronoun.

**14** **tn** The Hebrew phrase בְּעֵל הַכְּנָפִים (*ba’al hakk’nafayim*, “possessor of wings”) is an idiom for a winged creature, that is, a bird (e.g., Prov 1:17; see HALOT 143 s.v. בְּעֵל A.6; BDB 127 s.v. בְּעֵל 5.a). The term בְּעֵל (“master; possessor”) is the construct governing the attributive genitive הַכְּנָפִים (“wings”); see IBHS 149-51 §9.5.3b.

**15** **tn** The term “your” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.

**16** **tn** *Heb* “tell the matter.”

**17** **tn** The verb שָׁלַח (*shalakh*, “to send; to cast”) refers to the action of sending something to someone (e.g., Neh 8:12; HALOT 1995 s.v. שָׁלַח). The term is traditionally rendered here as “cast” (KJV, NAB, RES, ASV, NASB, NIV); however, some render it “send” (NJPS, NRSV, NEB). LXX uses ἀποστείλον (*aposteilon*, “send”).

**18** **tn** *Heb* “your bread.” The term לֶחֶם (*lekhem*) is traditionally rendered “bread” (KJV, NAB, RSV, NRSV, ASV, NASB, NIV, NJPS). However, 11:1-2 seems to deal with exporting goods overseas (D. R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” *BKCOT*, 1002-3). It is better to take לֶחֶם (“bread”) as a metonymy of product, standing for the grain and wheat from which bread is produced (e.g., Gen 41:54-55; 47:13, 15, 17, 19; 49:20; Num 15:19; 2 Kgs 18:32; Isa 28:28; 30:23; 36:17; 55:10; Jer 5:17; Ezek 48:18; Job 28:5; Ps 104:14; Prov 28:3); see HALOT 526 s.v. 1; BDB 537 s.v. 1.b. It is taken this way by several translations: “grain” (NEB) and “goods” (Moffatt). Qoheleth encouraged the export of grain products overseas in international trade.

**19** **tn** *Heb* “upon the surface of the waters.” This is traditionally viewed as extolling generosity from which a reward will be reaped. On the other hand, some scholars suggest that the imagery deals with commercial business through maritime trade. M. Jastrow took this verse as advice to take risks in business by trusting one’s goods or ships that will after many days return with a profit (A. Cohen, *The Five Megilloth* [SoBB], 181). Sea trade was risky in the ancient Near East, but it brought big returns to its investors (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:26-28; 10:22; Ps 107:23); see D. R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” *BKCOT*, 1002-3. The verse is rendered thus: “Send your grain across the seas, and in time you will get a return” (NEB); or “Trust your goods far and wide at sea, till you get a good return after a while” (Moffatt).

**20** **tn** *Heb* “find it.”

11:2 Divide your merchandise<sup>1</sup> among seven or even eight<sup>2</sup> investments,<sup>3</sup> for you do not know<sup>4</sup> what calamity<sup>5</sup> may happen on earth.

11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves on the earth, and whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, the tree will lie wherever it falls.

11:4 He who watches the wind will not sow, and he who observes the clouds will not reap.<sup>6</sup>

11:5 Just as you do not know the path<sup>7</sup> of the wind,

or how the bones form<sup>8</sup> in the womb of a pregnant woman,<sup>9</sup> so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

11:6 Sow your seed in the morning, and do not stop working<sup>10</sup> until the evening;<sup>11</sup> for you do not know which activity<sup>12</sup> will succeed<sup>13</sup> – whether this one or that one, or whether both will prosper equally.<sup>14</sup>

*Life Should Be Enjoyed Because Death is Inevitable*

11:7 Light<sup>15</sup> is sweet,<sup>16</sup> and it is pleasant for a person<sup>17</sup> to see the sun.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** *Heb* “give a portion.”

<sup>2</sup> **tn** The phrase “seven or eight” is a graded numerical saying depicting an indefinite plurality: “The collocation of a numeral with the next above it is a rhetorical device employed in numerical sayings to express a number, which need not, or cannot, be more exactly specified. It must be gathered from the context whether such formulae are intended to denote only an insignificant number (e.g., Is 17:6 “two” or at the most “three”) or a considerable number (e.g., Mi 5:4). Sometimes, however, this juxtaposition serves to express merely an indefinite total, without the collateral idea of intensifying the lower by means of the higher number” (GKC 437 §134.s). Examples: “one” or “two” (Deut 32:30; Jer 3:14; Job 33:14; 40:5; Ps 62:12); “two” or “three” (2 Kgs 9:32; Isa 17:6; Hos 6:2; Amos 4:8; Sir 23:16; 26:28; 50:25); “three” or “four” (Jer 36:23; Amos 1:3-11; Prov 21:19; 30:15, 18; Sir 26:5); “four” or “five” (Isa 17:6); “six” or “seven” (Job 5:19; Prov 6:16); “seven” or “eight” (Mic 5:4; Eccl 11:2).

<sup>3</sup> **tn** The word “investments” is not in the Hebrew text; it is added here for clarity. This line is traditionally understood as an exhortation to be generous to a multitude of people (KJV, NAB, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NJPS); however, it is better taken as shrewd advice to not commit all one’s possessions to a single venture (A. Cohen, *The Five Megilloth* [SoBB], 181). D. R. Glenn (“Ecclesiastes,” *BKCOT*, 1003) writes: “In view of the possibility of disaster, a person should make prudent investments in numerous ventures rather than put all his ‘eggs in one basket’ (e.g., Gen 32:7-8 for a practical example of this advice).” Several translations reflect this: “Divide your merchandise among seven ventures, eight maybe” (NEB); “Take shares in several ventures” (Moffatt).

<sup>4</sup> **sn** The phrase *you do not know* is repeated throughout this section (11:2, 5-6). Human beings are ignorant of the future. This should motivate a person to invest their financial resources wisely (11:1-3) and to work diligently (11:4-6).

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The term רעה (lit. “evil”) refers to calamity (e.g., Eccl 5:13; 7:14; 9:12).

<sup>6</sup> **sn** This proverb criticizes those who are overly cautious. The farmer who waits for the most opportune moment to plant when there is no wind to blow away the seed, and to reap when there is no rain to ruin a ripe harvest, will never do anything but sit around waiting for the right moment.

<sup>7</sup> **tn** *Heb* “what is the way of the wind.” Some take these words with what follows: “how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman.” There is debate whether הַדֶּרֶךְ הַיָּמִינִי (mah-derekh hanuakh) refers to the wind (“the path of the wind”) or the human spirit of a child in the mother’s womb (“how the spirit comes”). The LXX understood it as the wind: “the way of the wind” (ἡ ὁδὸς τοῦ πνεύματος, *hē hodos tou pneumatos*); however, the Targum and Vulgate take it as the human spirit. The English versions are divided: (1) spirit: “the way of the spirit” (KJV, YLT, Douay); “the breath of life” (NAB); “how a pregnant woman comes to have...a living spirit in her womb” (NEB); “how the lifebreath passes into the limbs within the womb of the pregnant woman” (NJPS); “how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child” (RSV); “how the breath comes to the bones in the mother’s womb” (NRSV); and (2) wind: “the way of the wind” (ASV, RSV margin); “the path of the wind” (NASB, NIV); and “how the wind blows” (MLB, Moffatt).

<sup>8</sup> **tn** The term “form” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the one who is full.” The feminine adjective מְלֵאָה (*m<sup>le</sup>’ah*, from מָלֵא, *male’*, “full”) is used as a substantive referring to a pregnant woman whose womb is filled with her infant (HALOT 584 s.v. מְלֵאָה 2; BDB 571 s.v. מָלֵא). This term is used in reference to a pregnant woman in later Hebrew (HALOT 584 s.v. מְלֵאָה). The LXX understood the term in this sense: κυοφορούσας (*kuophorouses*, “pregnant woman”).

<sup>10</sup> **tn** *Heb* “do not let your hand rest.” The Hebrew phrase “do not let your hand rest” is an idiom that means “do not stop working” or “do not be idle” (e.g., Eccl 7:18); cf. BDB 628 s.v. נָחַ B.1. Several English versions capture the sense of the idiom well: “do not stop working” (NEB); “do not be idle” (MLB); “let not your hand be idle” (NAB); “let not your hands be idle” (NIV); “stay not your hand” (Moffatt). The term “hand” is a synecdoche of part (i.e., do not let your hand rest) for the whole person (i.e., do not allow yourself to stop working).

<sup>11</sup> **tn** The terms “morning” (בֹּקֵר, *boqer*) and “evening” (עֶרֶב, *erev*) form a merism (a figure of speech using two polar extremes to include everything in between) that connotes “from morning until evening.” The point is not that the farmer should plant at two times in the day (morning and evening), but that he should plant all day long (from morning until evening). This merism is reflected in several translations: “in the morning...until evening” (NEB, Moffatt).

<sup>12</sup> **tn** The term “activity” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** The verb כָּשַׁר (*kasher*, “to prosper”) is used metonymically to denote “will succeed.” In 11:10, it means “skill in work.”

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Or “together.”

<sup>15</sup> **tn** The term “light” (אֹר, *’or*) is used figuratively (metonymy of association) in reference to “life” (e.g., Job 3:20; 33:30; Ps 56:14 HT [56:13 ET]). By contrast, death is described as “darkness” (e.g., Eccl 11:8; 12:6-7).

<sup>16</sup> **tn** The Hebrew term מָתוֹק (*matog*, “sweet”) is often used elsewhere in reference to honey. The point is that life is sweet and should be savored like honey.

<sup>17</sup> **tn** *Heb* “to the eyes.” The term “eyes” is a synecdoche of part (i.e., eyes) for the whole person. Used with the idiom “to see the sun” (i.e., to be alive), Qoheleth is simply saying that the experience of a life is a pleasant thing that should be savored.

<sup>18</sup> **tn** The expression “to see the sun” (both רָאָה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, *ra’ah hashamesh*, and הָיָה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, *khazah hashamesh*) is an idiom meaning “to be alive” (e.g., Ps 58:9; Eccl 6:5; 7:11; 11:7); cf. BDB 1039 s.v. שָׁחַט 4.b. The opposite idiom, “the sun is darkened,” refers to the onset of old age and death (Eccl 12:2).

11:8 So, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, but let him remember that the days of darkness<sup>4</sup> will be many – all that is about to come is obscure.<sup>2</sup>

*Enjoy Life to the Fullest under the Fear of God*

11:9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young,<sup>3</sup> and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth.

Follow the impulses<sup>4</sup> of your heart and the desires<sup>5</sup> of your eyes, but know that God will judge your motives and actions.<sup>6</sup>

11:10 Banish<sup>7</sup> emotional stress<sup>8</sup> from your mind.<sup>9</sup> and put away pain<sup>10</sup> from your body;<sup>11</sup>

for youth<sup>12</sup> and the prime of life<sup>13</sup> are fleeting.<sup>14</sup>

*Fear God Now Because Old Age and Death Come Quickly*

12:1 So remember<sup>15</sup> your Creator in the days of your youth – before<sup>16</sup> the difficult<sup>17</sup> days come, and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”;

12:2 before the sun and the light<sup>18</sup> of the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds disappear<sup>19</sup> after the rain;

<sup>12</sup> tn Or “childhood.”

<sup>13</sup> tn Or “youth”; Heb “black hair” or “the dawn [of life].” The feminine noun הַשְׁחָרֹת (hashakharut) is a hapax legomenon, occurring only here. There is debate whether it is from שָׁחַר (shakhor) which means “black” (i.e. black hair, e.g., Lev 13:31, 37; Song 5:11; HALOT 1465 s.v. שָׁחַר; BDB 1007 s.v. שָׁחַר and שָׁחַר) or שָׁחַר (shakhar) which means “dawn” (e.g., Gen 19:15; Job 3:9; Song 6:10; HALOT 1466–67 s.v. שָׁחַר). If this term is from שָׁחַר it is used in contrast to gray hair that characterizes old age (e.g., Prov 16:31; 20:29). This would be a figure (metonymy of association) for youthfulness. On the other hand, if the term is from שָׁחַר it connotes the “dawn of life” or “prime of life.” This would be a figure (hypocatastasis) for youthfulness. In either case, the term is a figure for “youth” or “prime of life,” as the parallel term הַיְיָאֲדוּת (hayyaldut, “youth” or “childhood”) indicates. The term is rendered variously in the English versions: “black hair” (NJPS); “the dawn of youth” (NAB); “the dawn of life” (ASV, MLB, RSV, NRSV); “the prime of life” (NEB, NASB); “vigor” (NIV); “youth” (KJV); and “manhood” (Moffatt). The plural forms of הַיְיָאֲדוּת and הַשְׁחָרֹת are examples of the plural of state or condition that a person experiences for a temporary period of time, e.g., זְקֻנִים (zəqunim, “old age”); נְעוּרִים (ne’urim, “youth”); and אֲדוּמִים (adumim, “youthfulness”); see IBHS 121 §7.4.2b.

<sup>14</sup> tn The term הֶבֶל (hevel, “vanity”) often connotes the temporal idea “fleeting” (e.g., Prov 31:30; Eccl 3:19; 6:12; 7:15; 9:9). This nuance is suggested here by the collocation of “youth” (הַיְיָאֲדוּת, hayyaldut) and “the prime of life” (הַשְׁחָרֹת, hashakharut).

<sup>15</sup> tn The imperative זָכֵר (zekhor, “Remember!”) is a figurative expression (metonymy of association) for obeying God and acknowledging his lordship over one’s life (e.g., Num 15:40; Deut 8:18; Pss 42:6-7; 63:6-8; 78:42; 103:18; 106:7; 119:52, 55; Jer 51:50; Ezek 20:43; Jonah 2:7; Mal 4:4). The exhortation to fear God and obey his commands in 12:13-14 spells out what it means to “remember” God.

<sup>16</sup> tn The temporal adjective עֵד (‘ad, “before”) appears three times in 12:1-7 (vv. 1b, 2a, 6a). Likewise, the temporal preposition בַּ (bet, “when”) is repeated (vv. 3a, 4b). These seven verses comprise one long sentence in Hebrew: The main clause is 12:1a (“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth”), while 12:1b-7 consists of five subordinate temporal clauses (“before...before...when...when...before...”).

<sup>17</sup> tn The adjective רָעָה (ra’ah, “evil”) does not refer here to ethical evil, but to physical difficulty, injury, pain, deprivation and suffering (e.g., Deut 31:17, 21; 32:23; 1 Sam 10:19; Neh 1:3; 2:17; Pss 34:20; 40:13; 88:4; 107:26; Eccl 11:10; Jer 2:27; Lam 3:38); see HALOT 1263 s.v. רָעָה 4.b; BDB 949 s.v. רָעָה 2.

<sup>18</sup> tn Heb “the light and the moon and the stars.” The phrase “the light and the moon” is a hendiadys (two separate terms denoting one idea) or perhaps even a hendiadris (three separate terms denoting one idea) for “the light of the moon and stars” (e.g., Gen 1:14).

<sup>19</sup> tn The verb שׁוּב (shuv, “to return”) here denotes “to desist” (HALOT 1430 s.v. שׁוּב 3). It pictures the disappearance of the clouds as a result of the precipitation of their contents.

<sup>1</sup> tn The phrase “the days of darkness” refers to the onset of old age (Eccl 12:1-5) and the inevitable experience of death (Eccl 11:7-8; 12:6-7). Elsewhere, “darkness” is a figure of speech (metonymy of association) for death (Job 10:21-22; 17:13; 18:18).

<sup>2</sup> tn The term הֶבֶל (hevel) here means “obscure,” that is, unknown. This sense is derived from the literal concept of breath, vapor or wind that cannot be seen; thus, the idea of “obscure; dark; difficult to understand; enigmatic” (see HALOT 236–37 s.v. הֶבֶל וּ הֶבֶל; BDB 210–11 s.v. הֶבֶל וּ). It is used in this sense in reference to enigmas in life (6:2; 8:10, 14) and the future which is obscure (11:8).

<sup>3</sup> tn Heb “in your youth”; or “in your childhood.”

<sup>4</sup> tn Heb “walk in the ways of your heart.”

<sup>5</sup> tn Heb “the sight.”

<sup>6</sup> tn Heb “and know that concerning all these God will bring you into judgment.” The point is not that following one’s impulses and desires is inherently bad and will bring condemnation from God. Rather the point seems to be: As you follow your impulses and desires, realize that all you think and do will eventually be evaluated by God. So one must seek joy within the boundaries of God’s moral standards.

<sup>7</sup> tn The verb סָר (sar, “to remove”) normally depicts a concrete action of removing a physical object from someone’s presence (HALOT 748 s.v. סָר 1). Here, it is used figuratively (hypocatastasis) of the emotional/psychological action of banishing unnecessary emotional stress from one’s mind. The Hiphil usage means “to remove; to abolish; to keep away; to turn away; to push aside” (HALOT 748 s.v. 1). The English versions render this term in a variety of ways, none of which is very poetic: “remove” (KJV, RSV, ASV, NASB); “turn aside” (YLT); “ward off” (NAB); and “banish” (NEB, MLB, NIV, NRSV, NJPS, Moffatt).

<sup>8</sup> tn The root “vexation” (בָּעַס, ka’as) has a broad range of meanings: “anger” (Deut 4:25; 9:18), “irritation” (Deut 32:21), “offend” (2 Kgs 23:26; Neh 3:37 HT [4:5 ET]), “vexation” or “frustration” (Ezek 20:28), “grief” (1 Sam 1:6), and “worry” (Pss 112:10; Eccl 7:9); cf. HALOT 491 s.v. בָּעַס. Here, it refers in general to unnecessary emotional stress and anxiety that can deprive a person of the legitimate enjoyment of life and its temporal benefits.

<sup>9</sup> tn Heb “your heart.”

<sup>10</sup> tn In light of the parallelism, רָעָה (ra’ah) does not refer to ethical evil, but to physical injury, pain, deprivation or suffering (e.g., Deut 31:17, 21; 32:23; 1 Sam 10:19; Neh 1:3; 2:17; Pss 34:20; 40:13; 88:4; 107:26; Eccl 12:1; Jer 2:27; Lam 3:38); see HALOT 1263 s.v. רָעָה 4.b; BDB 949 s.v. רָעָה 2. This sense is best captured as “pain” (NASB, RSV, NRSV, MLB, Moffatt) or “the troubles [of your body]” (NEB, NIV), rather than “evil” (KJV, ASV, YLT, Douay) or “sorrow” (NJPS).

<sup>11</sup> tn Heb “your flesh.”

12:3 when those who keep watch over the house<sup>1</sup> begin to tremble,<sup>2</sup> and the virile men begin to stoop over,<sup>3</sup> and the grinders<sup>4</sup> begin to cease because they grow few, and those who look through the windows grow dim,<sup>5</sup> 12:4 and the doors along the street are shut; when the sound of the grinding mill<sup>6</sup> grows low, and one is awakened<sup>7</sup> by the sound of a bird, and all their<sup>8</sup> songs<sup>9</sup> grow faint,<sup>10</sup> 12:5 and they are afraid of heights and the dangers<sup>11</sup> in the street;

the almond blossoms<sup>12</sup> grow white,<sup>13</sup> and the grasshopper<sup>14</sup> drags itself along,<sup>15</sup> and the caper berry<sup>16</sup> shrivels up<sup>17</sup> – because man goes to his eternal home,<sup>18</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **tn** *Heb* “the watchers of the house.”

<sup>2</sup> **tn** The verb זָעַק (*z'ua'*, “to tremble”) probably does not refer to physical tremors but to trembling in fear (e.g., Esth 5:9; Hab 2:7; Sir 48:12); cf. HALOT 267 s.v. זָעַק. At the onset of old age, those who had been the most courageous during their youth suddenly become fearful.

<sup>3</sup> **tn** The verb אָוַת (*avat*, “to bend; to stoop”) means “to be stooped” (HALOT 804 s.v. עָוַת) rather than “to bend themselves” (BDB 736 s.v. עָוַת). The perfect tense may be taken in an ingressive sense (“to begin to stoop over”).

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The term הַמְרִינֹת (*hmrivot*, Qal active participle feminine plural from מָרַן, *takhan*, “to grind”) is a double entendre. In its literal sense, it refers to female mill-grinders; in its figurative sense, it refers to molar teeth (HALOT 374 s.v. \*מְרִינָה). The related Hebrew noun מְרִינָה (*takhanah*) refers to a “mill,” and the related Arabic noun *tahinat* means “molar tooth” (HALOT 374 s.v. \*מְרִינָה).

<sup>5</sup> **tn** The verb הִשְׁחַךְ (*khashakh*, “to grow dim”) is used elsewhere in reference to failing eyesight (e.g., Ps 69:24; Lam 5:17); see HALOT 361 s.v. הִשְׁחַךְ. Therefore, the phrase “those who look through the windows” is probably a figurative description of the eyes, picturing failing eyesight at the onset of old age.

<sup>6</sup> **tn** The noun מְרִינָה (*takhanah*) refers to a “grinding-mill” where grain is ground into flour (HALOT 374 s.v. מְרִינָה). The term is here used as a double entendre, figuratively describing the loss of one’s teeth at the onset of old age. The figurative usage also draws upon the polysemantic nature of this noun; the related Arabic root *tahinat* means “molar tooth” (HALOT 374 s.v. \*מְרִינָה).

<sup>7</sup> **tn** *Heb* “rises up.” The verb קָם (*qum*, “to arise”) refers to being awakened from sleep in the middle of the night by a sound (e.g., Exod 12:30; 1 Sam 3:6, 8) and waking up early in the morning (e.g., Gen 24:54; Judg 16:3; Ruth 3:14; Neh 2:12; Job 14:12; 24:14); see HALOT 1086 s.v. קָם 1; BDB 877 s.v. קָם 1.a. Here it describes one of the frustrations of old age: the elderly person is unable to get a full night’s sleep because very little sound awakens him in the middle of the night or too early in the morning.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** The term “their” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

<sup>9</sup> **tn** *Heb* “all the daughters of song.” The expression “the daughters of song” (בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר, *b'not hashir*) is an idiom for “songs; musical sounds; melodious notes” (HALOT 166 s.v. בְּנוֹת 2; BDB 123 s.v. בָּת 5; GK 418 §128.v). The genitive construct (“song”) represents the nature, quality, character or condition of the construct (בְּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר “daughters”); see IBHS 149-51 §9.5.3b. The idiom refers to the musical songs sung during one’s youth or to the ability to hear songs that are sung. This line is lamenting the loss of hearing which occurs at the onset of old age.

<sup>10</sup> **tn** *Heb* “are brought low.”

<sup>11</sup> **tn** The Hebrew noun הַתְּרָתִים (*khatkhattim*) literally means “terrors” (HALOT 363 s.v. הַתְּרָתִים; BDB 369 s.v. תְּרָתָה). Here it is used as a metonymy (cause for effect) to refer to dangers that cause the elderly to be fearful of going outside or walking along the streets. The form הַתְּרָתִים is a reduplicated noun

stem from the root תָּרַח (“terror”); HALOT 363 s.v. הַתְּרָתִים; BDB 369 s.v. תְּרָתָה. The reduplication of the noun stem intensifies its meaning; the noun תָּרַח (*khittat*) means “terror,” so the intensified reduplicated form הַתְּרָתִים (*khatkhat*) connotes something like “great terror” (see S. Moscati, *Comparative Grammar*, 78-79, §12.9-13). The plural form הַתְּרָתִים (“great terrors”) denotes plural of number (more than one) or plural of intensity (which would further intensify the experience of fear); see IBHS 122 §7.4.3a.

<sup>12</sup> **tn** The noun שֶׁקֶד (*shaqed*) is used in the OT in reference to the “almond nut” (e.g., Gen 43:11; Num 17:23 HT [17:8 ET]) and metonymically (product for thing producing it) for the “almond tree” (e.g., Jer 1:11); cf. HALOT 1638 s.v. שֶׁקֶד; BDB 1052 s.v. שֶׁקֶד 2.

<sup>13</sup> **tn** The verb נָצַץ (“to blossom”) is a geminate verb (ll = ll) that, in this case, is written with a *matres lectionis* (plene spelling) rather than the normal spelling of נָצַץ (GKC 204 §73.g). The Hiphil verb נִצְצָה (*vane'is*) is from the root נָצַץ “to shine; to sparkle; to blossom” (HALOT 717 s.v. נָצַץ; BDB 665 s.v. נָצַץ). It is used in reference to almond blossoms whose color progresses from pink to white as they ripen (e.g., Song 6:11). This is an appropriate metaphor (comparison of sight) to describe white hair that often accompanies the onset of old age.

<sup>14</sup> **tn** Or “locust.”

<sup>15</sup> **tn** The verb שָׁבַל (*saval*, “to bear a heavy load”) means “to drag oneself along” as a burden (BDB 687 s.v. שָׁבַל) or “to become thick; to move slowly forward; to clear off” (HALOT 741 s.v. שָׁבַל).

<sup>16</sup> **tn** The noun אֲבִיּוֹנָה (*aviyyonah*, “caper berry, caper fruit”) is a *hapax legomenon*, occurring only here in the Hebrew Bible. It refers to the *Capparis spinosa* fruit which was eaten as an aphrodisiac in the ancient Near East (HALOT 5 s.v. אֲבִיּוֹנָה; BDB 2-3 s.v. אֲבִיּוֹנָה). There are two options for the interpretation of this figure: (1) At the onset of old age, the sexual virility that marked one’s youth is nothing more than a distant memory, and even aphrodisiacs fail to stimulate sexual desire to allow for sexual intercourse. (2) The onset of old age is like the shriveling up of the caper berry fruit; the once virile youth has passed his prime just like a shriveled caper berry can no longer provide a sexual stimulant.

<sup>17</sup> **tc** The MT vocalizes consonantal וְתַפְרָה (*v'tafer*, conjunction + Hiphil imperfect 3rd person feminine singular form, *parar*, “to burst”). However, an alternate vocalization tradition of וְתַפְרָה (*v'tafer*, conjunction + Hophal imperfect 3rd person feminine singular “to be broken down”) is reflected in the LXX which reads καὶ ἀσκαδασθηῖ ( *kai diaske-dasthe*, “is scattered”) and Symmachus καὶ ἀδολυθηῖ (*kai dialuthe*, “is broken up”) which is followed by the Syriac. On the other hand, Aquila’s καὶ καρπευσεῖ (*kai karpusei*, “are enjoyed,” of fruits) reflects וְתַפְרָה (Qal imperfect 3rd person feminine singular form, *parar*, “to bear fruit”); this does not reflect an alternate reading but a translator’s error in word division between הַתְּרָתִים וְתַפְרָה אֲבִיּוֹנָה (*v'tafer ha'aviyyonah*, “the caper berry bursts”) and וְתַפְרָה אֲבִיּוֹנָה (*v'tafreh 'aviyyonah*, “the caper berry bears fruit”).

**tn** Or “fails”; or “bursts.” The meaning of the verb פָּרַר (*parar*, “to break; to make ineffectual”) is debated: (1) “to be ineffectual,” that is, to fail to provide sexual power as an aphrodisiac, or (2) “to break; to burst,” that is, the caper berry fruit shrivels as it lingers on its branch beyond its period of ripeness (HALOT 975 s.v. פָּרַר 2.f; BDB 830 s.v. I. פָּרַר 2.d).

<sup>18</sup> **tn** In the construct phrase בֵּית עוֹלָם (*bet 'olamo*, “house of his eternity”), the genitive עוֹלָם (“eternity”) functions as an attributive adjective: “his eternal home.” This is an idiom for the grave as the resting place of the body (e.g., Ps 49:12 [11]; Job 7:9; 14:10-12; Ecc 12:5) or Sheol as the residence of the dead (e.g., Job 17:13; Job 20:23); see HALOT 124 s.v. בֵּית 2; 799 (5); BDB 109 s.v. בֵּית 1.d. For example, the term בֵּית (“house”) is used in Job 30:23 in parallelism with “death” (מָוֶת, *ma-vet*). The same idiom appears in postbiblical Hebrew: “the house of eternity” (בֵּית עוֹלָם, *bet 'olam*) is a euphemism for a



and the mourners go about in the streets – 12:6 before the silver cord is removed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the well,<sup>1</sup> or the water wheel<sup>2</sup> is broken at the cistern – 12:7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the life's breath<sup>3</sup> returns to God who gave it.

*Concluding Refrain: Qoheleth Restates His Thesis*

12:8 “Absolutely futile!”<sup>4</sup> laments the Teacher,<sup>5</sup>  
“All of these things<sup>6</sup> are futile!”<sup>7</sup>

burial ground or cemetery (e.g., *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:5); see Jastrow 1084-85 s.v. גַּלְגָּל III. This idiom is also found in a Moabite text in reference to the grave (Deir Alla Inscription 2:6). A similar idiom is found in Phoenician and Palmyrene in reference to the grave (*DISO* 35). The idiom appears to have originated in Egyptian literature (H. A. Hoffner, *TDOT* 2:113). See F. Cumont, *Afterlife in Roman Paganism*, 48-50.

**1 tn** Heb “water-spring.”

**2 tn** The term גַּלְגָּל (*galgal*, “wheel”) refers to the “water wheel” or “paddle wheel” for drawing water from a well (*HALOT* 190 s.v. גַּלְגָּל 2; *BDB* 165 s.v. גַּלְגָּל 1.b). This Hebrew noun is related to the Akkadian term *gulḡullu* (“pot”), as well as Phoenician (?) גַּלְגָּל (“wheel for drawing water”). The Latin term *gingillus* (“lever for the bucket”) is a late derivation from this term. See G. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, 2:225-28.

**3 tn** Or “spirit.” The likely referent is the life's breath that originates with God. See *Ecc* 3:19, as well as *Gen* 2:7; 6:17; 7:22.

**4 tn** Heb “futility of futilities.” The phrase “absolutely futile” (הַבֵּל הַבְּבֵלִים, *havel havalim*) is a superlative genitive construction (*GKC* 431 §133.3). See note on “futile” at 1:2.

**5 tn** Elsewhere in the book, the author is identified with the anarthrous term קֹהֵלֶת (*qohelet*, *Ecc* 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:9, 10); however, in 12:8 it is used with the article, indicating that it is a professional title rather than a personal surname: הַקֹּהֵלֶת (*haqqohelet*, “the Teacher”). Numerous English translations render קֹהֵלֶת as a professional title: “the Speaker” (*NEB*, *Moffatt*); “the Preacher” (*KJV*, *RSV*, *YLT*, *MLB*, *ASV*, *NASB*); “the Teacher” (*NIV*, *NRSV*); “the Leader of the Assembly” (*NIV* margin); “the Assembler” (*NJPS* margin). Others render it as a personal surname: “Koheleth” (*JPS*, *NJPS*) and “Qoheleth” (*NAB*, *NRSV* margin).

**6 tn** Heb “Everything.” The term is rendered “all of these things” for clarity. Although כֹּל (*kol*, “everything; all”) is often used in an absolute or comprehensive sense (*BDB* 481 s.v. כֹּל 1), it is frequently used as a synecdoche of the general for the specific, that is, its sense is limited contextually to the topic at hand (*BDB* 482 s.v. 2). This is particularly true of הֵבֵל (*hakkol*, *BDB* 482 s.v. 2.b) in which the article particularizes or limits the referent to the contextual or previously mentioned topic (e.g., *Gen* 16:12; 24:1; *Exod* 29:24; *Lev* 1:9, 13; 8:27; *Deut* 2:36; *Josh* 11:19 [see 2 *Sam* 19:31; 1 *Kgs* 14:26 = 2 *Chr* 12:9]; 21:43; 1 *Sam* 30:19; 2 *Sam* 17:3; 23:5; 24:23; 1 *Kgs* 6:18; 2 *Kgs* 24:16; *Isa* 29:11; 65:8; *Jer* 13:7, 10; *Ezek* 7:14; *Pss* 14:3; 49:18; 1 *Chr* 7:5; 28:19; 29:19; 2 *Chr* 28:6; 29:28; 31:5; 35:7; 36:17-18; *Ezra* 1:11; 2:42; 8:34-35; 10:17; *Ecc* 5:8). Thus, “all” does not always mean “all” absolutely or universally in comprehension. In several cases the context limits its reference to two classes of objects/issues being discussed, so הֵבֵל means “both” (e.g., 2:14; 3:19; 9:1, 2). Thus, הֵבֵל (“all; everything”) refers only to what Qoheleth characterizes as “futile” (הֵבֵל, *havel*) in the context. This does not mean that everything is futile. For example, fearing God is not “futile” (2:26; 3:14-15; 11:9-10; 12:1, 9, 13-14). Only those objects/issues that are contextually placed under הֵבֵל are designated as “futile” (הֵבֵל).

**7 tn** The term הֵבֵל (*havel*, “futile”) is repeated three times

*Concluding Epilogue: Qoheleth's Advice is Wise*

12:9 Not only was the Teacher wise,<sup>8</sup>  
but he also taught knowledge to the  
people;  
he carefully evaluated<sup>9</sup> and arranged<sup>10</sup>  
many proverbs.

12:10 The Teacher sought to find delight-  
ful<sup>11</sup> words,  
and to write<sup>12</sup> accurately truthful

within the six words of this verse for emphasis. See footnote on “futile” at 1:2.

**8 sn** Absolutely futile!... All of these things are futile! This motto is the theme of the book. Its occurs at the beginning (1:2) and end of the book (12:8), forming an envelope structure (*inclusio*). Everything described in 1:2–12:8 is the supporting proof of the thesis of 1:2. With few exceptions (e.g., 2:24-26; 3:14-15; 11:9–12:1, 9), everything described in 1:2–12:8 is characterized as “futile” (הֵבֵל, *havel*).

**9 sn** *Ecc* 12:9-12 fits the pattern of a concluding colophon that draws from a conventional stock of ancient Near Eastern scribal practices and vocabulary. See M. A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 29–31.

**9 tn** Heb “he weighed and studied.” The verbs וְהִקָּדַח (v<sup>h</sup>: *izzen vekhiqquer*, “he weighed and he explored”) form a hendiadys (a figurative expression in which two separate terms used in combination to convey a single idea): “he studiously weighed” or “carefully evaluated.” The verb וְהִקָּדַח (conjunction + Piel perfect 3rd person masculine singular from II אָזַן (*azan*) “to weigh; to balance”) is related to the noun מִזָּנֵן (*mo'zen*) “balances; scales” used for weighing money or commercial items (e.g., *Jer* 32:10; *Ezek* 5:1). This is the only use of the verb in the OT. In this context, it means “to weigh” = “to test; to prove” (*BDB* 24 s.v. מִזָּנֵן) or “to balance” (*HALOT* 27 II אָזַן). Cohen suggests, “He made an examination of the large number of proverbial sayings which had been composed, testing their truth and worth, to select those which he considered deserving of circulation” (A. Cohen, *The Five Megilloth* [SoBB], 189).

**10 tn** The verb תִּקְוֶה (*taqan*, “to make straight”) connotes “to put straight” or “to arrange in order” (*HALOT* 1784 s.v. תִּקְוֶה; *BDB* 1075 s.v. תִּקְוֶה). This may refer to Qoheleth's activity in compiling a collection of wisdom sayings in an orderly manner, or writing the wisdom sayings in a straightforward, direct manner.

**11 tn** In the construct phrase דִּבְרֵי הַחֵפְזִים (*divre-khefets*, “words of delight”) the noun חֵפְזִים (“delight”) functions as an attributive genitive (“delightful words”) or a genitive of estimation or worth (“words viewed as delightful by Qoheleth” or “words that he took delight in”). For another example of a genitive of estimation of worth, see זְבִיחֵי אֱלֹהִים (*zivkhe' elohim*) “sacrifices of God” = “sacrifices viewed as acceptable to God” (*Ps* 51:19). In other words, Qoheleth wrote his proverbs so effectively that he was able to take moral and aesthetic delight in his words.

**12 tc** The consonantal form וְכָתוּב has been revoiced in three ways: (1) The Masoretes read וְכָתוּב (*v<sup>h</sup>khatuv*, conjunction + Qal passive participle ms from כָּתַב, *katav*, “to write”): “Qoheleth sought to find pleasant words, what was written uprightly, namely, words of truth.” This is supported by the LXX's αὐτὸς γέγραμμένον (*hai gegrammenon*, conjunction + masculine accusative singular perfect passive participle from γράφω, *graphō*, “to write”). (2) The BHS editors suggest the vocalization וְכָתוּב (*v<sup>h</sup>khatov*, conjunction + Qal infinitive absolute). The infinitive וְכָתוּב (“and to write”) in the B-line would parallel the infinitive of purpose לִמְצֹא (*limtso*, “to find”) in the A-line: “Qoheleth sought to find pleasant words, and to write accurately words of truth.” (3) Several medieval Hebrew MSS preserve an alternate textual tradition of וְכָתוּב (*v<sup>h</sup>khatav*, conjunction + Qal perfect 3rd person masculine singular). This is reflected in the Greek versions (Aquila and Symmachus), Syriac Peshitta and Vulgate. The major English versions are divided among these three textual options: (1) וְכָתוּב (Qal passive participle); “and that which was written was upright, even words of truth” (*KJV*); “and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth” (*ASV*); “and, written by the upright, words

sayings.<sup>1</sup>

**12:11** The words of the sages are like prods,<sup>2</sup> and the collected sayings are like firmly fixed nails; they are given by one shepherd.

*Concluding Exhortation: Fear God and Obey His Commands!*

**12:12** Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.<sup>3</sup> There is no end to the making<sup>4</sup> of many books, and much study is exhausting to the body.<sup>5</sup>

**12:13** Having heard everything, I have reached this conclusion:<sup>6</sup> Fear God and keep his commandments, because this is the whole duty<sup>7</sup> of man.

**12:14** For God will evaluate every deed,<sup>8</sup> including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

of truth" (YLT); "but *what he wrote* was the honest truth" (NEB); "*and what he wrote* was upright and true" (NIV). (2) וְכָתוּב (Qal infinitive absolute): "*and to write* words of truth correctly" (NASB); "*and to write* correctly the reliable words of truth" (MLB); "*and to write down* true sayings with precision" (NAB). (3) וְכָתַב (Qal perfect 3rd person masculine singular): "*and uprightly he wrote* words of truth" (RSV); "*and he wrote* words of truth plainly" (NRSV); "*even as he put down* plainly what was true" (Moffatt); "*and he wrote* words most right, and full of truth" (Douay); and "*and he recorded* genuinely truthful sayings" (NJPS). The editors of the Jerusalem Hebrew Bible project favor וְכָתוּב "and to write" (option 2); see D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:596–97.

<sup>1</sup> **tn** The construct phrase דְּבַרֵי אֱמֶת (*divre 'emet*, "words of truth") is a genitive of content ("words containing truth") or an attributive genitive ("truthful words"). Depending upon the vocalization of וְכָתוּב, the phrase functions in one of two ways: (1) as direct object of יִשָּׂר וְכָתוּב יִשָּׂר (*khatov yosher*) "and he accurately wrote *truthful words*"; or (2) in apposition to יִשָּׂר וְכָתוּב יִשָּׂר (*khatov yosher*) "and what is written uprightly, namely, *truthful words*."

<sup>2</sup> **tn** Or "goads"; NCV "sharp sticks used to guide animals." For further information see M. A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 29–32.

<sup>3</sup> **sn** The exhortation may be understood in two ways: (1) to avoid any so-called wisdom sayings beyond those mentioned in vv. 10–11: "The words of the wise...are given from one shepherd. And of anything beyond these, my son, be warned!" (see RSV, NRSV, NAB, Douay, NIV). This is paraphrased well by Moffatt: "My son, avoid anything beyond the scriptures of wisdom" (Moffatt). (2) The exhortation refers to the concerns of v. 12b, namely, diligent study is wearisome, i.e., "Furthermore, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of books, and much study is wearisome to the body" (see NEB, ASV, NASB, MLB).

<sup>4</sup> **tn** The verb עָשָׂה (*asah*, "to do") may mean "to make" (HALOT 890 s.v. עָשָׂה 3) or "to acquire" (HALOT 891 s.v. עָשָׂה 6). The LXX rendered it as ποιῆσαι (*poiēsai*, "making"), as do most English versions: "making" (KJV, YLT, RSV, NRSV, NAB, ASV, MLB, NIV, NJPS). However, several English versions reflect a different nuance: "there is no end to the buying of books" (Moffatt); "the use of books is endless" (NEB); and "the writing of many books is endless" (NASB).

<sup>5</sup> **tn** *Heb* "the flesh." The term בָּשָׂר (*basar*, "flesh") refers to the body, functioning as a synecdoche or part (i.e., flesh, skin) for the whole (i.e., body), e.g., Gen 17:13; Ps 16:9; Prov 14:30 (see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 642).

<sup>6</sup> **tn** *Heb* "The end of the matter, everything having been heard."

<sup>7</sup> **tn** *Heb* "This is all men"; or "This is the whole of man." The phrase זֶה כֹּל-הָאָדָם (*zeh kol-ha'adam*, "this is all men") features rhetorical elision of a key word. The ambiguity over the elided word has led to no less than five basic approaches: (1) "this is the whole duty of man" (KJV, ASV, RSV, NAB, NIV); (2) "this is the duty of all men" (MLB, ASV margin, RSV margin); (3) "this applies to all men" (NASB, NJPS); (4) "this is the whole duty of all men" (NRSV, Moffatt); and (5) "there is no more to man than this" (NEB). The four-fold repetition of כֹּל (*kol*, "all") in 12:13–14 suggests that Qoheleth is emphasizing the "bottom line," that is, the basic duty of man is simply to fear and obey God: After "all" (כֹּל) has been heard in the book, his conclusion is that the "whole" (כֹּל) duty of man is to obey God because God will bring "all" (כֹּל) acts into judgment, including "all" (כֹּל) that is hidden, whether good or bad. See D. Barthélemy, ed., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, 3:596.

<sup>8</sup> **tn** *Heb* "will bring every deed into judgment."