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| ✡ |  | *Qoheleth*  (*Ecclesiastes*): |
| *The Strangest*  *Book* |
| *in the*  *Bible* |
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the New Revised Standard Version, unless indicated otherwise.

### introduction

# Questions of Introduction

1. **introduction**
   1. Qoheleth is “the Bible’s strangest book.” (Crenshaw 23)
2. **text**
   1. “The Hebrew text of Qohelet has survived in good condition.” (Crenshaw 53)
   2. c. 150 bc: “Fragments dating from the middle of the second century b.c.e., discovered at Qumran, include part of 5:13-17 [14-18E], substantial portions of 6:3-8, and five words from 7:7-9.” (Crenshaw 53)
   3. c. ad 130: “The Greek version is thought to be the work of disciples of Aquila [Aquila of Sinope, who translated the Hebrew Bible very literally into Greek c. ad 130]” (Crenshaw 53)
   4. ad 100s: “the Syriac translation in the Peshitta [Syriac translation, c. ad 100s] seems to rest on a Hebrew text very similar to the Massoretic.” (Crenshaw 53)
   5. c. ad 405: “The Vulgate strove for faithfulness to the Hebrew, although Jerome completed the translation of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs hastily (“in three days”).” (Crenshaw 53)
3. **language used**
   1. Hebrew original
      1. “For a brief period, scholars argued that the original language was Aramaic (Zimmerman 1945/46; 1949/50; 1973; Ginsberg 1950; 1952).” (Crenshaw 49)
      2. “But fragments of the book in Hebrew from Qumran seem to date to the mid-second century b.c.e. (Muilenburg). Such an early dating of a Hebrew version of Ecclesiastes leaves little time between its composition and the Qumran fragments for its contents to become so popular that translation into Hebrew became imperative.” (Crenshaw 49)
      3. “More importantly, translation need not be posited to explain the peculiar style and syntax of the book.” (Crenshaw 49)
   2. Aramaic influence
      1. “Granted, the book employs an Aramaizing Hebrew, a language with strong Mishnaic characteristics. The high percentage of Aramaisms places Ecclesiastes alongside other late canonical books (Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Song of Songs).” (Crenshaw 49)
   3. Persian influence
      1. “Occasional Persian loanwords also appear, for example *pardēs* (park) and *medînāh* (province).” (Crenshaw 49)
   4. Greek influence
      1. “Some have seen Greek influence in the phrases “under the sun” and “to see the good” (Ranston 1930), but the former expression occurs in ancient Semitic literature and the latter phrase is authentic Hebrew.” (Crenshaw )
4. **place of composition**
   1. Phoenicia
      1. “On the basis of certain commercial terms and usages, as well as orthography, Dahood (1952; 1962; 1965; 1966) proposed a Phoenician setting. This theory of the book’s origin has made little impact on the scholarly community.” (Crenshaw 49)
   2. Egypt
      1. “Even less convincing has been Humbert’s suggestion of Egyptian provenance, based largely on the allusion to natural phenomena in 1:5-7.” (Crenshaw 49)
   3. Israel
      1. “The references to reservoirs (2:6), leaky roofs (10:18), wells (12:6), farmers’ attention to the wind (11:4), the temple (4:17 [5:1E]; 8:10), and bread, wine, and oil as the three primary products of the country suit a Palestinian setting (Hertzberg 1957).” (Crenshaw 49)
   4. “so-called historical references in 4:13-16; 8:2-4; 9:13-15; and 10:16-17” (Crenshaw 49)
      1. Qoh 4:13-16, “Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king, who will no longer take advice. 14One can indeed come out of prison to reign, even though born poor in the kingdom. 15I saw all the living who, moving about under the sun, follow that youth who replaced the king; 16there was no end to all those people whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”
      2. Qoh 8:2-4, “Keep the king’s command because of your sacred oath. 3Do not be terrified; go from his presence, do not delay when the matter is unpleasant, for he does whatever he pleases. 4For the word of the king is powerful, and who can say to him, “What are you doing?””
      3. Qoh 9:13-15, “I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. 14 There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. 15Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.”
      4. Qoh 10:16-17, “Alas for you, O land, when your king is a servant, and your princes feast in the morning! 17Happy are you, O land, when your king is a nobleman, and your princes feast at the proper time—for strength, and not for drunkenness!”
      5. “But the evidence does not exclude other contexts, for ancient authors were open to receiving material from various sources. The so-called historical references in 4:13-16; 8:2-4; 9:13-15; and 10:16-17 invited use because of their typicality. Therefore, they offer no real assistance in dating the book or in locating its cultural setting.” (Crenshaw 49)
5. **sources**
   1. “An intellectual crisis like that in Qohelet struck other cultures also, but not at the same time. One expects, therefore, to find some common themes throughout the ancient Near East (Loretz 1964, 45-134). This phenomenon has led to exaggerated claims of literary dependence.” (Crenshaw 51)
   2. Greek influence?
      1. “Given the probable date of the book, Hellenistic influence has seemed most likely (Braun). The question of the extent of exposure to Greek thought affects every interpretation of the book.” (Crenshaw 51)
      2. “Qohelet’s concept of chance (*miqreh*) has been related to *tychē*, absurdity (*hebel*) to *typhos*; profit (*yitrôn*) to *ophelos*; under the sun (*taḥat haššemeš*) to *hypo ton hēlion*.” (Crenshaw 51)
      3. “Norbert Lohfink (1980) has postulated competing places of learning in Jerusalem: private schools using the Greek language and temple schools using Hebrew. He argues that Qohelet struck a compromise, expanding Hebrew wisdom with input from Greek thinkers, especially Homer, Sophocles, Plato, Aristotle, and contemporary philosophers.” (Crenshaw 51)
      4. “Other interpreters plausibly suggest that Qohelet’s knowledge of Greek literature amounts to no more than what any Jew would have absorbed simply by living in Jerusalem during the late third century.” (Crenshaw 51)
   3. Egyptian influence?
      1. “Qohelet’s *carpe diem* resembles the advice of the Harper’s Songs (Fox 1985) but then, determination to enjoy sensual pleasure seems universal.” (Crenshaw 51)
      2. “Qohelet’s preoccupation with death recalls “The Dialogue of a Man with His Soul”” (Crenshaw 51)
      3. “the royal testament form corresponds with the literary type of such Instructions as Merikare. But Qohelet’s version does not leave a legacy for a successor, and he drops the royal fiction after chapter 2.” (Crenshaw 51)
      4. “thematic similarities with late Egyptian texts” (Crenshaw 51)
         1. Papyrus Insinger
            1. “both Insinger and Qohelet refer to the hiddenness of God” (Crenshaw 51)
            2. Both “refer to divine determination of fate” (Crenshaw 51)
         2. The Instructions of `Onkhsheshonqy
            1. “`Onkhsheshonqy and Qohelet advise releasing bread (or a good deed) on the waters and promise a profitable return, and both use the phrase “house of eternity.” However, the sense of the counsel about releasing bread on water is different, and the euphemism for the grave is widespread.” (Crenshaw 51)
   4. Mesopotamian influence?
      1. Gilgamesh Epic
         1. “Perhaps the most striking verbal similarity is with a Mesopotamian text, the Gilgamesh Epic.” (Crenshaw 51)
         2. “The alewife Siduri’s advice to Gilgamesh that he enjoy his wife, fine clothes, and tasty food closely resembles Qohelet’s positive advice. One thing is missing from Qohelet, the allusion to the pleasure that Gilgamesh would receive from his child.” (Crenshaw 51)
         3. “The Gilgamesh Epic also deals with the themes of death, life’s ephemerality, the importance of one’s name, and memory of a person after death.” (Crenshaw 51)
      2. “Another Mesopotamian work, “I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom,” says divine decrees are hidden from humans, a view that Qohelet advocates in 3:11; 8:12-14; and 8:17.” (Crenshaw 51)
      3. “The fundamentally pessimistic “Babylonian [51] Theodicy,” differs from Qohelet, who shrinks from blaming all evil on God (cf. 7:29).” (Crenshaw 51-52)
      4. ““The Dialogue Between a Master and His Slave” recognizes the threat posed by women and sets up polarities in a way that commends neither alternative. Qohelet also voices a low opinion of women (7:26) and juxtaposes positive and negative activities (3:1-8).” (Crenshaw 52)
6. **date**: **250-225 bc**
   1. It was certainly written before 150 bc: a fragment dating from c. 130-100 bc was among the Dead Sea Scrolls. (Bickerman 141)
   2. It was probably written before 200 bc: Sirach “seems to have been familiar with Ecclesiastes . . .” (Bickerman 141)
   3. It was probably written during the 200s bc: the Israelites bor­rowed the word *pardes* from the Persians, who used it to refer to a royal or satrapal enclosed pre­serve; and it is used in this sense in Neh 2:8 and the Song of Songs. But in Qoh 2:5, Qoheleth pairs *parde­sim* (plural of *pardes*) with *gannot*, “gar­dens”; he says that he planted in the *pardesim* “every kind of fruit tree,” and in the next clause he speaks of the water sup­ply to his “forest sprouting with trees.” Thus *pardes* means orchard. But that is how *paradeisos* was used by the Greeks adminis­tering the Nile and the Persian Gulf in the 200s bc. “There­fore, Ecclesias­tes must have been written in the third century, when Jerusalem and Palestine were under the domination of the Ptolemies . . .” (Bicker­man 141)
   4. “A date for Qohelet between 225 and 250 remains most likely.” (Crenshaw 50)
   5. linguistic data
      1. “The vocabulary itself shows signs of being very late, for example *sôp*, *pēšer*, *māšal* (to rule), *šālat*, *pitgām*, *zemān*, *`inyān*, the high frequency of the relative pronoun *še* attached to the next word, and the exclusive use of the short form of the first-person pronoun ´*anî*.” (Crenshaw 50)
      2. “Moreover, the *waw* consecutive occurs rarely, but of course the literary types in the book do not lend themselves to frequent use of this verbal form.” (Crenshaw 50)
         1. “Barucq (1977, 617-618) cautions against making very much of this phenomenon, for the texts from Qumran witness to competing traditions. The Manual of Discipline uses it freely, in the perfect but rarely in the imperfect, whereas the Damascus Document normally uses the *waw* consecutive even with the imperfect.” (Crenshaw 50 n. 23)
      3. “A Hellenistic coloring may rest behind the vocabulary for rulers, perhaps also behind the observations about individuals whose responsibilities brought them into regular contact with the royal court.” (Crenshaw 50)
      4. “At least one of the rhetorical questions, a literary device that the author uses nearly thirty times, is attested only in postexilic texts, with one possible exception. This rhetorical question [is] *mî yôdēa`* (who knows?)” (Crenshaw 50)
      5. “The use of participles with accompanying personal pronouns also marks this language as late.” (Crenshaw 50)
   6. political background
      1. “The meager political data that scholars have detected in the book point to a period prior to the Maccabean revolt in 164 b.c.e., for the attitude toward foreign rulers fits best the Ptolemaic period.” (Crenshaw 50)
   7. economic background
      1. “Gordis (1968) and Crüsemann (1979) have argued that Qohelet belonged to the privileged class, although the evidence suggests rather that his students were well to do, hence could act on their teacher’s advice about wearing fine clothes and anointing themselves with expensive oils.” (Crenshaw 50)
      2. “The Zenon archives reflect a political situation of economic prosperity for the upper echelons of Jewish society about 250 b.c.e.” (Crenshaw 50)
      3. “freedom to follow one’s inclinations [e.g., fine clothes and expensive oils], whether personal or religious, was severely restricted under Antiochus IV’s reign [175-63 bc] (at least for ordinary citizens).” (Crenshaw 50)
   8. relation to Sirach
      1. “Hertzberg (1963, 47-49) and Gordis (1951, 46-48) examine the relationship between Sirach and Qohelet.” (Crenshaw 50 n. 24)
      2. “Another argument for a date prior to 200 b.c.e. comes from Ben Sira, who knew and used the book about 180 b.c.e.” (Crenshaw 50)
      3. “Whitley (1979) has attempted to show that Qohelet actually used Ecclesiasticus, claiming that the language is later than Daniel, that the Mishnaic tongue was widely used in Judea, and that Qohelet wrote before 140 but after Jonathan’s appointment in 152 b.c.e. and its accompanying political change. The arguments are unconvincing.” (Crenshaw 50)
      4. “Although Sirach may have known the book of Ecclesiastes, the evidence is not conclusive.” (Crenshaw 52)
         1. “A few verbal similarities between the book and Sirach exist: for example, everything is beautiful in its time (3:11; Sir. 39:16); God seeks (3:15; Sir. 5:3); wise of heart and changed of face (8:1; Sir. 13:24 [25E]); and either for good or for evil (12:14; Sir. 13:24 [25 E]).” (Crenshaw 52)
         2. “In addition, verbal echoes also occur in “one in a thousand,” and “the end of the matter,” but these stock expressions belong to wisdom literature in general.” (Crenshaw 52)
   9. relation to the Book of Wisdom
      1. “A similar situation exists with regard to Wisdom of Solomon, often thought to attack Qohelet’s views about enjoying life’s sensual pleasures. If the author of chapter 2 has Qohelet in mind, he mis­reads its teachings, for Qohelet did not advocate robbery (see Skehan).” (Crenshaw 52)
7. **literary form**
   1. “The work is *sui generis* and lies somewhere between a treatise and a collection of sayings and thoughts. Sayings and admonitions alternate with lengthy reflections.” (Murphy, *Tree of Life* 50)
   2. Qoheleth’s aphoristic style caused “his discursive and repeti­tious reasoning.” (Bicker­man 147)
   3. “. . . these are jottings, unified only by the very tenuous thread of ‘vanity’ . . .” (Mur­phy, *Seven Books* 90)
8. “**Qoheleth**”
   1. “The name occurs seven times.” (Crenshaw 32)
      1. 1:1, “The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”
      2. 1:2, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”
      3. 1:12, “I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem”
      4. 7:27, “See, this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum”
      5. 12:8, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.”
      6. 12:9a-b, “Besides being wise, the Teacher also taught the people knowledge”
      7. 12:10, “The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly.”
   2. *Cohelet* derives from *cahal* (“assembly,” “congre­ga­tion”). But its precise meaning is uncertain; perhaps “leader of the assembly.”
   3. “The difficulty of comprehending the meaning is compounded by the fact that it seems to be understood differently within the book itself” (Crenshaw 32)
   4. the epilogue (Qoh 12:9-14)
      1. In 12:9-14, “an editor speaks of Qoheleth in the third person, in contrast to the first-person style throughout the work.” (Murphy, *Tree of Life* 52)
      2. But only Qoh 12:9-10 are relevant to the question of authorship (Qoh 12:11-14 are teaching). Qoh 12:9-10, “Besides being wise, the Teacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs. 10The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly [nab, “and to write down true sayings with precision”].”
      3. “All we know of him is contained in two verses [12:9-10] . . . One of his students, most likely, tells us that he was a sage . . .” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 88)
      4. “It is reasonable to infer that he formed some kind of school, perhaps after the manner of Ben Sira a century later (Sir 51:23), and the present work would have been edited by his disciple or disciples.” (Murphy, *Tree of Life* 49)
      5. “That Qoheleth’s radi­cal questioning of traditional beliefs won a response among schol­ars, as well as among the laity, is evident from the enco­miums appended in 12:9-11 to the edition of his teachings. On the other hand, the cautionary postscript in verses 13-14 is clear­ly from the hand of a more orthodox copyist.” (Scott 18)
      6. *the* Qoheleth
         1. In 12:8 (“Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity”), “Qohelet has the article, although nearly the same sentence occurs in 1:2, where Qohelet lacks the article.” (Crenshaw 32) (1:2, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”)
         2. “In all likelihood, the article also appears in 7:27 [“See, this is what I found, says the Teacher”], where Qohelet takes a feminine verb form, although the word Qohelet is otherwise always construed as masculine. The Septuagint supports a redivision of the consonants in 7:27, yielding ´*mr hqhlt* (says the Qohelet).” (Crenshaw 32)
   5. “Formally the word Qohelet is a Qal feminine participle. Elsewhere the root *qhl* always occurs in Hiphil or Niphal (causative or reflexive/passive). It means “to convoke,” “to assemble” (Hiphil) or “to be gathered” (Niphal).” (Crenshaw 32)
   6. “Qoheleth” has been “explained as a personal name [or] a nom de plume” (Crenshaw 32)
      1. “Precedent exists for a masculine personal name with a feminine ending (Alemeth, I Chron. 7:8).” (Crenshaw 32)
      2. Solomon
         1. “This interpretation clearly underlies the identification of Qohelet as son of David, which occurs in the superscription to the book (1:2), but the idea of royal authorship ultimately derives from the book itself (1:12).” (Crenshaw 32)
         2. “David did not, however, have a son named Qohelet who succeeded him. Is Qohelet a nickname for Solomon, who occupied the throne after his father’s health failed?” (Crenshaw 32)
         3. “The link between “Qohelet” and Solomon could lie in the language of I Kings 8:1-12, where the king assembles (*yāqhēl*) representatives of the people at Jerusalem.” (Crenshaw 32)
         4. “But the initiative to look for such a suitable text must surely have sprung from the author’s self-presentation in 1:12-2:26, for Solomon’s vast wealth supplies the imagined context for the royal experiment comprising these verses.” (Crenshaw 32)
         5. “The Egyptian royal testament offers a prototype for this section of the book, but Qohelet did not restrict his sayings to this literary form. Conceivably, the allusion to one shepherd in 12:11 reverts to the royal fiction earlier abandoned by the author, [32] inasmuch as the image of pharaohs as shepherds regularly appears in Egypt (D. Müller).” (Crenshaw 32-33)
         6. “things [that] weaken the argument for viewing Qohelet as a personal name, a substitute for Solomon” (Crenshaw 33)
            1. “Qohelet usually speaks as a teacher, not a king.” (Crenshaw 33)
            2. “the use of the article” (Crenshaw 33)
            3. “the identification of Qohelet as a wise man (*ḥākām*), presumably a technical term in this instance (12:9)” (Crenshaw 33)
            4. “the point of view from which the author writes. Except for the royal fiction in 1:12-26, the author’s perspective invariably suggests a subject powerless to redress the injustices perpetrated by higher officials.” (Crenshaw 33)
   7. “Qoheleth” has been explained as an acronym. (Crenshaw 32)
      1. “Does the strange form conceal an otherwise unknown identity? Is Qohelet an acronym? Skehan (42-43) has argued that the name for Agur’s father in Prov. 30:1a, Jakeh, actually conceals the first letters of a sentence comprising three words (*yqh* = *yhwh qādôš hû*´). Following this analogy, *qhlt* constitutes the abbreviation of a four-word sentence. But what four words? So far, no satisfactory explanation along these lines has come to light.” (Crenshaw 33)
      2. “Some interpreters have thought that Qohelet personifies wisdom, constituting a walking assembly of wise sayings, but elsewhere Dame Wisdom always goes by the name *ḥokmāh*.” (Crenshaw 33)
   8. an office
      1. assembler of proverbs?
         1. “The verb *qhl* always appears in connection with an assembly of people. If it could also apply to the gathering of objects, then Qohelet might be a “collector of proverbs,” as the epilogist remembers the teacher (12:9-11). Qohelet kept an ear in readiness to hear something worthwhile, he searched [33] high and low for appropriate insights, and he grouped the resulting sayings in an understandable way.” (Crenshaw 33-34)
         2. “This instance would not be Qohelet’s only departure from ordinary usage of the word. He forged a language and syntax peculiar to this book.” (Crenshaw 34)
         3. “Furthermore, he saw no fundamental distinction between humans and animals in death; one could therefore argue that Qohelet assembled sayings rather than people (1:1)” (Crenshaw 34)
         4. One could argue “that 7:27 [“this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum”] contains a veiled allusion to this understanding of the title (“one to one to discover the sum”). Qohelet collected sayings and in doing so concluded that life amounts to nothing.” (Crenshaw 34)
      2. assembler in a school?
         1. “Did Qohelet assemble people in a school? That kind of activity accords with the epilogist’s description in 12:9.” (“Besides being wise, the Teacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs.”) (Crenshaw 33)
         2. “School wisdom may have possessed the capacity to criticize itself as in this book.” (Crenshaw 33)
         3. “Furthermore, if the form *qehillāh* in Neh. 5:7 actually means “harangue,” then the word Qohelet might refer to an office of “arguer” or “haranguer.” However, the way Qohelet presents his observations does not justify this interpretation of his title.” (Crenshaw 33)
      3. probably, assembler of people
         1. “The most compelling answer to the enigma of the name points to two instances where a feminine participle describes an office (Ezra 2:55, 57; Neh. 7:59). Two different occupations lie behind the personal names in these verses (a scribe and a binder of gazelles).” (Crenshaw 33)
         2. “By analogy, Qohelet refers to an office related to assembling people.” (Crenshaw 33)
            1. “The Septuagint renders the word this way, associating the noun for assembly with the word for a public gathering (*ekklēsia*).” (Crenshaw 33)
            2. “Jerome continued that line of reasoning in the Vulgate, but stressed the role of speaking in the presence of an assembly.” (Crenshaw 33)
         3. “Did Qohelet gather people for a cultic assembly? This understanding led to the Reformers’ use of *Prediger* (Preacher) with reference to this book, but no biblical evidence for such a meaning exists. Whatever else Qohelet did, he did not preach, at least in the modern sense of the word.” (Crenshaw 33)
         4. “One could even say that Qohelet democratizes wisdom, turning away from professional students to ordinary citizens. The use of *hā* `*ām* (the people) in 12:9 [“the Teacher also taught *the people* knowledge”] where one would naturally expect a reference to students favors this interpretation of the situation.” (Crenshaw 33)
9. **canonization**
   1. “Qohelet’s radical views render his teachings an alien body within the Hebrew Bible (Gese 1958).” (Crenshaw 52)
   2. “How, then, did the book gain acceptance into the canon?” (Crenshaw 52)
      1. “The usual answer [is] that the attribution to Solomon paved the way for the book’s approval as scripture” (Crenshaw 52)
         1. This “overlooks the fact that a similar device failed to gain acceptance into the canon for Wisdom of Solomon or for the Odes of Solomon. However, their linguistic medium, Greek, may have canceled the effect of the claim to Solomonic authorship.” (Crenshaw 52)
      2. “A better answer [is] the second epilogue [12:12-14], which removed the sting from Qohelet’s skepticism and advocated traditional views concerning observance of Torah (cf. Sheppard 1977).” (Crenshaw 52) (Qoh 12:13-14, “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. 14For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”)
   3. “We do not know how soon after its completion Qohelet acquired canonicity.” (Crenshaw 52)
   4. ad 100s
      1. “The attitude of Hillel prevailed over the usually conservative Shammaite contingency, who objected to the book.” (Crenshaw 52)
      2. “Evidence from the second century c.e. mentions the book of Ecclesiastes, together with Song of Songs, Esther, Ezekiel, and Proverbs, in a discussion about books that “defile the hands” because of their sacred character.” (Crenshaw 52)
      3. “Akiba recognized Qohelet’s canonical authority just before the middle of the second century” (Crenshaw 52)
      4. “the book appears in the list drawn up by the Christian Melito of Sardis about 190 c.e.” (Crenshaw 52)
   5. ad 400s
      1. “Objection to its sacred character surfaced again in the early fifth century in a work by Theodore of Mopsuestia.” (Crenshaw 52)
   6. “Eventually, worshipers read the book of Ecclesiastes in the synagogue on the third day of the Feast of Booths.” (Crenshaw 52)
10. **outline**
    1. an outline by Roland Murphy

1:1-9 man and regularity

1:12-18 pointlessness of wisdom

2:1-12 pointlessness of pleasure

2:13-17 pointlessness of wisdom

2:15-16 man’s end

2:24-25 conclusion

3:1-11 man and regularity

3:12-13 conclusion

3:14-16 problem of evil

3:19-21 man’s end

3:22 conclusion

4:1-2 problem of evil

5:9-6:6 pointlessness of riches

5:17-19 conclusion

6:7-9 pointlessness of pleasure

7:1-25 pointlessness of wisdom

7:13-18 problem of evil

7:13-14 conclusion

8:5-13 problem of evil

8:15 conclusion

8:16-9:6 problem of evil

8:16-17 pointlessness of wisdom

9:1-3 man’s end

9:7-10 conclusion

9:13-17 pointlessness of wisdom

11:7-10 conclusion

11:7-12:7 youth and old age

12:8 man’s end

12:9-14 added gloss (Murphy, *Seven Books* 87-103)

* 1. an outline by James Crenshaw

1:1 superscription

1:2-3 thematic statement (motto)

1:4-11 nothing new under the sun

1:12-2:26 royal experiment

3:1-15 a time for everything

3:16-4:3 tears of the oppressed

4:4-6 proverbial insights about toil and leisure

4:7-12 advantages of companionship

4:13-16 the fickle crowd

4:17-5:8 [5:1-9e] religious obligations

5:9-6:9 [5:10-6:9e] disappointments of wealth

6:10-12 transitional unit

7:1-14 proverb collection

7:15-22 moderation

7:23-29 seeking and finding

8:1-9 rulers and subjects

8:10-17 mystery of divine activity

9:1-10 shadow of death

9:11-12 time and chance

9:13-18 wasted wisdom

10:1-20 proverb collection on wisdom and folly

11:1-6 risk

11:7-12:7 youth and old age

12:8 thematic statement

12:9-11 epilogue 1

12:12-14 epilogue 2

secondary materials

1:1 superscription

12:9-11 epilogue 1

12:12-14 epilogue 2

glosses 2:26a, 3:17a, 8:12-13, 11:9b

possibly secondary materials

glosses 5:18 [19E], 7:26b

the motto 1:2, 12:8

1. **Crenshaw**’**s translation**
   1. “Although I prefer a dynamic equivalence translation for its literary quality, I have hesitated to surrender the pedagogic value of formal correspondence between the source and target languages. I considered offering two different translations but finally abandoned the idea as unworkable.” (Crenshaw 53)
   2. “The translation that follows vacillates between formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence; like most compromises, this one does not entirely satisfy me.” (Crenshaw 53)
   3. “Believing that no translation adequately renders Qohelet’s words, in the discussion I do not always translate a given verse the same way it appears in the translation at the beginning of each section. This practice calls attention to the translator’s limits and emphasizes the rich nuances of the biblical text.” (Crenshaw 53 n. 25)
2. **scholars**’ **strengths**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *for* | *read* |
| “relentless attention to language and syntax” (Crenshaw 7) | Delitzsch, Barton, and Ginsberg |
| “thoroughness, especially the introductory material” | Podechard |
| “a history of research” | Ginsburg |
| “the study of the ancient Near Eastern parallels” | Loretz |
| “philological observations” | Whitley |
| “comprehensiveness” | Hertzberg and Lauha |
| “the Greek background” | Braun |
| “special syntactical problems” | Ellermeier and Kroeber |
| “literary features” | Lohfink |
| “theological insights” | Zimmerli |
| “philosophical probings” | Lys |
| “cautious examination of the status of research on Qohelet” | Barucq (Crenshaw 7) |

# Themes

1. **vanity and simple pleasures**
   1. There is a two-part thesis. (Murphy, *Seven Books* 90)
      1. *First*: Everything in this life is pointless (1:2-3, 1:14, 2:11, 2:26, etc.).
         1. “Koheleth’s *hebel*, which we render “vanity” . . . properly means ‘vapor.’” (Bick­erman 145)
         2. “All is vain for two reasons.” (Bick­erman 148)
            1. “First, death ends all. Koheleth disproves possible objections. The end is unrelated to man’s deserts . . . There is no survival, neither personal in the abode of the dead, nor through children. [Memo­ries] of all the dead . . . ultimately perish.” (Bick­erman 148)
            2. “Second: un­changeable yet unpredictable fate has no relation to man’s deeds.” (Bick­erman 148)
         3. “Yet Koheleth . . . speaks against sloth, condemns carousing, warns against women, and praises docility and patience.” (Bickerman 152)
      2. *Second*: “Hence one must take things as they come and enjoy the small plea­sures that God allows (2:24; 8:15, etc.).” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 90) From Gilgamesh to Horace, “the intense contempla­tion of pallid Death called forth the same watchword: *carpe diem*.” (Bickerman 151)
2. **contradictions**
   1. Qoheleth has “apparent contradictions . . .” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 88)
      1. “I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive” (4:2); but “a living dog is better than a dead lion” (9:14). (Murphy, *Seven Books* 88)
      2. “Fools fold their hands” (4:5), but “Better is a handful with quiet than two handfuls with toil” (4:6). (Murphy, *Seven Books* 88)
      3. But we do the same: “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” but “out of sight, out of mind.” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 89)
   2. Qoheleth “has not succeeded in presenting a finished philosophy of life. He is groping through the conflicting facts of experience and belief.” [89] “Through . . . his groping in the dark shine his honesty and sincerity . . .” [103] (Murphy, *Seven Books* 89, 103)
3. **Qoheleth’s experimental method**
   1. “. . . Coheleth was bent on assaying traditional values by the experi­mental method.” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 87)
   2. “Koheleth conducts a psychological experi­ment (2:1). He essays the three types of life as classified by the Greek philoso­phers—plea­sure [2:1-11], contemplation [2:12-17], and action [2:18-23]—and he finds all three want­ing.” (Bickerman 154)
   3. The first experiment is wisdom (1:16-18).
   4. The second experiment is “luxury” (2:1-11, see 6:7-9). (Murphy, *Seven Books* 91) “Luxury” includes pleasure (2:1-3, 10), riches (2:7-9), and enjoyed work (2:4-6, 11).
      1. The vanity of pleasures: “He was deep enough to see that no real satisfac­tion lies in these plea­sures, espe­cially [given] man’s insatiable ap­petite [6:7, “All human toil is for the mouth, yet the appetite is not satis­fied”].” (Mur­phy, *Seven Books* 91)
      2. The vanity of riches: “When one considers the precarious grasp that man has on his posses­sions, the vanity of riches is apparent.” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 92)
   5. Thirdly, there is a return to the experiment of wisdom (2:12-16).
      1. The vanity of wisdom: “True, he recognizes a certain theoretical superiority in the wise man. He has eyes in his head, whereas the fool walks in darkness (2:14) . . .” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 93)
         1. “Only in a relative and limited way is the wise man better off than the fool; he is aware of the problem and of his own ignorance.” (Scott 11)
      2. But “wisdom is inaccessible [7:23-24] . . . This is the theme [of Job 28].” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 93) Wisdom is vain because of death [39]: 2:16, “How can the wise die just like fools?” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 39-40)
4. **God**
   1. Qoheleth’s “*Elohim* was an unpredictable, morally neutral being, beyond good and evil. . . . for Koheleth the traditional precept to “fear God” means to be on guard against *Elohim*.” (Bickerman 149)
   2. Proverbs’ authors “cheerfully accepted the divine government of the world because they trusted in the wisdom and kindness of Providence. . . . But Koheleth has lost this child’s faith . . .” (Bickerman 149-50)
   3. Qoh 1:13, “. . . it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with.”
   4. Qoh 3:11, “he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”
   5. Qoh 3:17-18, “I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work. 18I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals.”
   6. Qoh 6:1-2, “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind: 2those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous ill.”
   7. Qoh 7:13-14, “Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked? 14In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.”
   8. Qoh 8:17, “I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun.”
   9. Qoh 9:1, “. . . the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know.”
5. **man and regularity**: “There is a perpetual and monotonous cycle [in nature] which epi­tomizes man’s own activity . . . [Nature] mirrors the monotony and sameness in human life, which is the real burden of his complaint . . .” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 90)
6. **man’s end**: “The dichotomy of soul and body which was at the base of Greek philosophical thought remained alien to the Jew, so alien that he could not conceive of an afterlife except as resurrection.” (Bicker­man 150) “. . . the Hebrew had no concept of “soul” as an indepen­dent spirit in man which is his animating principle. For him, man is not body and soul, he is animated body.” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 94-95)
   1. Sheol: “Coheleth’s only mention of the nether world, or Sheol, is heart-rending” [9:10, “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going”].” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 95)
7. **the problem of evil**
   1. Qoh 7:15, “In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evil-doing.”
   2. “. . . there is no denying . . . that man’s life comes to an end without God ever having intervened . . . to reward him, whether for good or for evil.” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 97)
   3. “Like Job, Coheleth could not accept the traditional Hebrew theory [of double retribu­tion]. The astonishing thing is that he neverthe­less affirms his faith in God [e.g., 3:16-17; 9:1-3].” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 98)
   4. Qoh 8:12b, “I know that it will be well with those who fear God,” “says no more . . . than what he always considers an ultimate truth: fear God. God is above every law, and the only thing to do is to show him reverence (cf. 7:18; 12:13 f.).” (Mur­phy, *Seven Books* 99)
   5. “He begins with the facts: there is no connection between virtue or evil and a man’s lot in life.” (Murphy, *Seven Books* 100)
   6. Qoheleth “looks at the problem [of evil] from a differ­ent angle, that of the observer rather than the victim [as was the case with Job] . . .” (Scott 11)

### commentary

# 1:1, Superscription

1. **text**
   1. Qoh 1:1, “The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”
2. **superscription form**
   1. Prov 1:1, “The proverbs of Solomon, David’s son, king of Israel . . .”
      1. This is “remarkably close to Eccl. 1:1.” (Crenshaw 55)
   2. Prov 22:17, “the words of the wise . . .”
      1. This superscription is “incorporated in the first line of the text . . .” (Crenshaw 55)
   3. Prov 30:1, “The words of Agur, Yakeh’s son, the Massaite . . .”
   4. Prov 31:1, “The words of Lemuel, the Massaite king, that his mother taught him . . .”
   5. Jer. 1:1, “The words of Jeremiah . . .”
   6. Amos 1:1, “The words of Amos . . .”
   7. Isa 1:1, “The vision of Isaiah . . .”
   8. Obad 1:1, “The vision of Obadiah . . .”
   9. international works of wisdom
      1. “The beginning of the Instruction of X” is found in *The Instruction for King Merikare*, *The Instruction of King Amenemhet*, *The Instruction of Prince Hordedef*, and *The Instruction of Amenemopet*.
      2. *The Instruction of Ptahhotep* skips “The beginning of.”
3. “**Qoheleth**”
   1. “Qoheleth” occurs 7 times.
   2. 1:1, “The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”
   3. 1:2, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”
   4. 1:12, “I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem . . .”
   5. 7:27, “See, this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum . . .”
   6. 12:8, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.”
   7. 12:9, “Besides being wise, the Teacher also taught the people knowledge . . .”
   8. 12:10, “The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly.”
   9. Only 7:27 and 12:8 have “the” before “Qoheleth” in the Hebrew.
4. **Is Qoheleth Solomon**?
   1. yes
      1. “Qoheleth” is a proper name (or a title) in 1:12.
         1. Qoh 1:12, “I, Qoheleth, when king over Israel in Jerusalem . . .”
      2. “Qoheleth” is a proper name (or a title) in 12:9-10.
         1. Qoh 12:9-10, “Qoheleth also taught the people . . . 10 Qoheleth sought to find pleasing words . . .”
      3. In 1:1 he’s called *ben-dāwid melek* (“son of David, king”).
      4. In 1 Kgs 8:1-12, Solomon *assembles* representatives of the people.
      5. Both Solomon and Qoheleth had collections of wisdom.
         1. 1 Kgs 11:41, “Now the rest of the acts [*debārîm*, lit. “words”] of Solomon, all that he did as well as his wisdom, are they not written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon?”
         2. Qoh 12:9-10, “the Teacher . . . arrang[ed] many proverbs. 10 The Teacher sought to find pleasing words . . .”
      6. In Qoh 1:12-2:26, Solomon’s “wealth supplies the imagined context for the royal experiment . . .” (Crenshaw 32)
   2. no
      1. on the superscription
         1. Qoh 1:1 is a gloss by a later hand. (Crenshaw 48)
            1. Since it is in third person, “The superscription does not come from the author of the book.” (Crenshaw 57)
         2. *Ben-dāwid* (son of David) can mean “a remote member of the Davidic dynasty.” (Crenshaw 56)
         3. *Ben* can mean “close relationship . . . of mind and spirit without implying actual physical kinship (sons of the prophets = disciples or guild members; sons of God = servants).” (Crenshaw 56)
         4. “The purpose of the superscription may have been to strengthen the case for canonical use of the book by attributing its observations to Solomon. The several collections in Proverbs and the Song of Songs bear witness to an effort to enhance the authority of various writings by linking them with Israel’s great king whose wisdom was legendary.” (Crenshaw 57)
      2. on “Qoheleth” is a proper name or title
         1. The definite article is found in 12:8 (“*the* Qoheleth”) and may be implied in 7:27.
            1. Qoh 12:8, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.”
            2. Qoh 7:27, “See, this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum . . .”
         2. So “Qoheleth” probably just means “assembler” or “teacher” or “preach­er.”
      3. The speaker is a king only in the royal experiment (1:12-2:26). (Crenshaw 33)
         1. Elsewhere Qoheleth “speaks as a teacher, not a king.” (Crenshaw 33)
         2. Except in 1:12-26, “the author [is] a subject powerless to redress the injustices perpetrated by higher officials.” (Crenshaw 33)
      4. That Qoheleth is Solomon is contradicted by Qoh 12:9.
         1. Qoh 12:9, “Besides being wise [‎ חָכָ֑ם, *ḥākām*], the Teacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs.”
         2. Qoh 12:9 says Qoheleth is “a wise man (*ḥākām*), presumably a technical term . . .” (Crenshaw 33)
         3. Qoh 12:9 calls him “a sage, that is, a professional wise man (*ḥākām*).” (Crenshaw 57)
   3. conclusion
      1. Probably “Qoheleth” means “an office related to assembling people . . .” (Crenshaw 33)
      2. Why was the speaker called “Assembler”?
         1. Because he gathered wives? (Crenshaw 35)
            1. 1 Kgs 11:1-3, “King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women . . . 3 Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines . . .”
         2. Because he gathered students in a school? (Crenshaw 33)
         3. Because he gathered proverbs? (Crenshaw 33, 35)
         4. Probably, he was called “Assembler” because he gathered people. (Crenshaw 33, 35)
            1. The LXX translates “Qoheleth” with ἐκκλησία (*ecclēsia*), “assembly,” “congregation.” Hence the older name of the book, “Ecclesiastes.”
            2. Qoh 12:9 says “the Teacher also taught *the people* knowledge,” not (as one might expect) students.

# 1:2-3, Statement of Theme (Motto)

1. **1**:**2**
   1. Qoh 1:2, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”
   2. The book is now first person. (Only in 1:1, 7:27, and 12:8-14 is it third person.)
   3. “Vanity of vanities” is an exclamation (made twice). “All is vanity” is a declaration.
   4. “Vanity” is *hebel*, “from a root that connotes a breath or vapor . . .” (Crenshaw 58)
      1. “Implicit within the word *hebel* is the sense of transience.” (Crenshaw 60)
      2. “Vanity” occurs 31 times in Qoheleth (in the nrsv).
   5. “wind”
      1. Usually רֽוּחַ (*ruaḥ*) means “wind,” and it is a synonym for *hebel*.
      2. Sometimes it means “fleeting appearance . . .” (Crenshaw 58)
         1. Qoh 2:17 speaks of “chasing after or herding the *wind* . . .” (Crenshaw 58)
      3. Usually it means “futility,” “absurdity.”
      4. “Wind” (as futile) occurs 10 times in Qoheleth (in the nrsv).
   6. The grammatical construction, “x of x,” is how one says the superlative in Hebrew.
      1. “Song of songs” means most song-like.
      2. “Holy of holies” means holiest.
      3. “Lord of lords” means most Lord-like.
   7. “*All* is vanity” eliminates exceptions that “vanity of vanities” might have allowed. (Crenshaw 58)
   8. With 1:2, 12:8 (the fourth-from-last verse) creates an inclusio.
      1. Qoh 12:8, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; All is vanity.”
2. **1**:**3**
   1. Qoh 1:3, “What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?”
   2. The answer to this rhetorical question, juxtaposed as it is to “all is vanity,” has to be, “nothing.”
   3. Since “some individuals succeed in amassing a fortune,” the question implies “the finality of death.” (Crenshaw 60)
   4. “gain”
      1. The Hebrew is יִתְרוֹן (*yithron*). The word here means “outcome”; in Qoh 2:13 it means “profit, benefit.” (Holladay 149)
      2. Qoh 2:13, “Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.”
   5. conventional wisdom: double retribution theory
      1. The sages thought “wise conduct brought lasting gain . . . [They thought it] so tenaciously that a dogma resulted, often called the theory of reward and retribution.” (Crenshaw 59)
      2. “The belief that the deity rewarded virtue and punished vice functioned as a powerful motive for ethical action . . .” (Crenshaw 59)
   6. “profit” (*yitrôn*)
      1. In the OT only Qoheleth uses the word.
      2. “The fundamental notion is “advantage.” What advantage accrues . . .?” (Crenshaw 59)
      3. Qoh 1:3 contradicts conventional wisdom.
         1. Prov 14:23, “In all toil there is profit . . .”
         2. Prov 21:5, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance [*môtar*, “the idea of profit or advantage”] . . .” (Crenshaw 104)
   7. “all”
      1. “All” (*bekol*) emphasizes futility’s universality.
   8. “toil” (`*āmāl*)
      1. `*Āmāl* means “burdensome labor and mental anguish,” but also came to mean wealth.
   9. “under the sun”
      1. “Under the sun” emphasizes futility’s universality.
      2. “Under the sun” occurs 29 times (in nrsv) (plus 3 “under the heavens,” 1:13; 2:3; 3:1).
      3. In the OT only Qoheleth uses the phrase.
      4. It’s in the *Gilgamesh Epic*.
   10. relation of 1:2 and 1:3
       1. 1:2 is a statement of theme; 3 is the rationale.
       2. “. . . reality [is] utterly absurd, transitory, and futile. Consequently, all human toil is wasted . . .” (Crenshaw 57)
       3. Some put 3 with the following prologue. (Crenshaw 61)

# 1:4-11, Prologue: Nothing New under the Sun

1. **text**

1:4 “A generation goes, and a generation comes,

but the earth remains forever.

5 The sun rises and the sun goes down,

and hurries to the place where it rises.

6 The wind blows to the south,

and goes around to the north;

round and round goes the wind,

and on its circuits the wind returns.

7 All streams run to the sea,

but the sea is not full;

to the place where the streams flow,

there they continue to flow.

8 All things are wearisome;

more than one can express;

the eye is not satisfied with seeing,

or the ear filled with hearing.

9 What has been is what will be,

and what has been done is what will be done;

there is nothing new under the sun.

10 Is there a thing of which it is said,

“See, this is new”?

It has already been,

in the ages before us.

11 The people of long ago are not remembered,

nor will there be any remembrance

of people yet to come

by those who come after them.”

1. **outline**
   1. 1:4-7, observation
      1. 1:4, pointless activity 1: generation
      2. 1:5, pointless activity 2: sun
      3. 1:6, pointless activity 3: wind
      4. 1:7, pointless activity 4: streams
   2. 1:8, Qoheleth’s response: pointless activity 5: all things
   3. 1:9, conclusion
   4. 1:10-11, conclusion reinforced
2. **content as a whole**
   1. The prologue presents “the pointless movement of nature [1:4-7] and the meaningless activity of people [1:8-11] . . .” (Crenshaw 61)
   2. The prologue justifies 1:2-3’s pessimism.
   3. Qoheleth’s arguments for the conclusion that there is no “profit” are “nature’s ceaseless movement, which achieves no surplus, and . . . human striving, which fails to reach its goal.” (Crenshaw 68)
3. **1**:**4-7**
   1. The four elements are here: earth (“earth”), fire (“sun”), air (“wind”), and water (“streams,” “sea”).
   2. הלך (*hôlēk*) “yields the following senses: die (1:4), blow (1:6, twice), flow (1:7, twice).” (Crenshaw 65)
   3. Nature’s “constant movement . . . has no discernible purpose or result.” (Crenshaw 62)
   4. Compare *The Instruction for Merikare*: “While generation succeeds generation, God who knows characters is hidden; one can not oppose the lord of the land, He reaches all that the eyes can see.” (Qtd. in Lichtheim 105)
   5. 1:4-5
      1. “The participles [in Heb., “going,” “coming,” “rising, “setting”] indicate continuous action . . .” (Crenshaw 62)
      2. antithesis
         1. Contrasting participles modify the same noun: “going” and “coming” modify “generation,” and “rising” and “setting” modify “sun.”
         2. Antithesis is common in Qoheleth.
   6. 1:4a
      1. Qoh 1:4a, “A generation goes, and a generation comes . . .”
      2. The repetition of “generation” (*dôr*) in 1:5-8 adds weight. Repetition of the word hints at nature’s repetition.
         1. “Goes . . . comes” presents death, then birth. One “expects the opposite order.” (Crenshaw 63)
         2. “A generation goes”: “go” (*hōlēk*) refers to death.
            1. Qoh 3:20, “All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.”
            2. Qoh 5:15, “so they shall go again . . .”
            3. See the common phrase, “go to his fathers.”
         3. Cf. *Iliad* 6.146-50 (Lattimore trans.): “As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity. The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning. So one generation of men will grow while another dies.”
   7. 1:4b
      1. Qoh 1:4b, “but the earth remains forever.”
      2. “the earth”
         1. Contrasting human generations’ transience and earth’s permanence is ironic: the stage set remains, the (more important) actors come and go.
      3. “remains forever”
         1. *Le*`*ôlām* did not mean “eternity” but rather “as long as the mind can project into the future.” (Crenshaw 63)
   8. 1:5
      1. Qoh 1:5, “The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises.”
      2. “sun”
         1. Ps 19:5, the sun “comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.”
         2. שׁאף (*šā*´*ap*, “hurries”) means panting (Jer 14:6, see Isa 42:14, Job 7:2). (Crenshaw 64)
         3. Qoheleth’s “exhausted sun must undertake the whole ordeal again.” (Crenshaw 63)
         4. “To the place where it rises” “advances the thought from exhaustion after an arduous journey to monotonous repetition of drudgery.” (Crenshaw 64)
         5. The sun is like Sisyphus: he eternally rolled a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down.
   9. 1:6
      1. In 1:5 the sun is east-west; in 1:6 the wind is north-south: the 4 cardinal directions.
4. **1**:**8-11**
   1. 1:4-7 applied “the themes of relentless movement and ineffectual activity” to nature. 1:8-11 now applies these themes to human actions. (Crenshaw 62)
      1. Now “the author internalizes ceaseless and pointless movement.” (Crenshaw 65)
      2. Now “human actions . . . always fail to reach their goal.” (Crenshaw 62)
   2. 1:8
      1. In 1:4-7, the examples were generations, sun, wind, and streams. In 1:8, the examples are speech (generations’ endless talking), seeing, and hearing.
         1. Compare Qoh 1:8 (nab), “All things are wearisome, too wearisome for words.”
         2. The Hebrew translated “can express” is דּבר; but it is a verb, “to speak, talk.”
      2. 1:8a
         1. Speech “distinguishes human beings from animals,” but is pointless. (Crenshaw 62)
      3. 1:8b
         1. “The eye always increases human desire, and the ear never hears enough.” (Crenshaw 62)
         2. Compare “lust of the eyes” in 1 John 2:16, “for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire [ἐπιθυμία] of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world.”
      4. “Does Qohelet launch an attack on traditional wisdom at this point? The choice of illustrations [speech, seeing, hearing] certainly fits such an interpretation. The quest for the right word for the occasion is futile, the observations that arise from experience are incomplete, and the “hearing” is insufficient.” (Crenshaw 66)
   3. 1:9
      1. “Qohelet’s argument rests on the identity of past and present, a point emphasized by illustrations from nature [4-7] and human history [8-11].” (Crenshaw 67)
   4. 1:10
      1. “See!” “Sages commonly introduced a striking observation by the particle *yēš*. Qohelet uses this protasis often (1:10; 2:21; 4:8, 9; 5:12; 6:1, 11; 7:15; 8:14 [3 times]; 10:5). The Hebrew particle of existence takes on an ironic dimension in his hands, for it calls attention to bogus claims.” (Crenshaw 67)
      2. “Qohelet ascribes claims of newness to a colossal ignorance of the past . . . Previous generations are quickly forgotten . . .” (Crenshaw 68)
      3. Some prophets believed in new things: new covenant, new exodus, new heart.
   5. 1:11
      1. “. . . everything is destined to oblivion.” (Crenshaw 62)
      2. “A traditional response to [Qoheleth’s assertion of meaninglessness is] children, for one’s name survives in them.” (Crenshaw 62)
         1. Qoheleth says no: “Only the earth endures [1:4b] . . .” ( (Crenshaw 62)
5. **1**:**4-11**
   1. To 1:4-11 compare Sir 14:14-19.

“Do not deprive yourself of a day’s enjoyment;

do not let your share of desired good pass by you.

15 Will you not leave the fruit of your labors to another,

and what you acquired by toil to be divided by lot?

16 Give, and take, and indulge yourself,

because in Hades one cannot look for luxury.

17 All living beings become old like a garment,

for the decree from of old is, “You must die!”

18 Like abundant leaves on a spreading tree

that sheds some and puts forth others,

so are the generations of flesh and blood:

one dies and another is born.

19 Every work decays and ceases to exist,

and the one who made it will pass away with it.”

# 1:12-2:26, The Royal Experiment

1. **text**

12 “I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem,

13 applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with.

14 I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

15 What is crooked cannot be made straight,

and what is lacking cannot be counted.

16 I said to myself, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.”

17 And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind.

18 For in much wisdom is much vexation,

and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.

**2**:1 I said to myself, “Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But again, this also was vanity.

2 I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?”

3 I searched with my mind how to cheer my body with wine—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, until I might see what was good for mortals to do under heaven during the few days of their life.

4 I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself;

5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

7 I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house; I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and delights of the flesh, and many concubines.

9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me.

10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

11 Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

12 So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the one do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.

13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

14 The wise have eyes in their head,

but fools walk in darkness.

Yet I perceived that the same fate befalls all of them.

15 Then I said to myself, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also; why then have I been so very wise?” And I said to myself that this also is vanity.

16 For there is no enduring remembrance of the wise or of fools, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How can the wise die just like fools?

17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

18 I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me

19 —and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

20 So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun,

21 because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

22 What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun?

23 For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

24 There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God;

25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

26 For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

1. **introduction**
   1. “. . . Qohelet runs the risk that someone will question his authority to dare such observations. . . . To counter this sort of response, an editor invests Qohelet with the authority of the wisest sage of all, King Solomon . . .” (Crenshaw 28)

# 3:1-15, A Time for Everything

1. **text**
   1. In the following text, an up arrow is something positive; a down arrow is something negative. For example, in 3:2a, to be born is positive and to die is negative.

1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

2 a time to be born, and a time to die; ↑ ↓ (this pattern, 6 total)

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ↑ ↓

3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; ↓ ↑ (this pattern, 8 total)

a time to break down, and a time to build up; ↓ ↑

4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; ↓ ↑

a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ↓ ↑

5 a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; ↓ ↑

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ↑ ↓

6 a time to seek, and a time to lose; ↑ ↓

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

7 a time to tear, and a time to sew; ↓ ↑

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ↓ ↑

8 a time to love, and a time to hate; ↑ ↓

a time for war, and a time for peace. ↓ ↑

9 What gain have the workers from their toil?

10 I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with.

11 He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live;

13 moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

14 I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him.

15 That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

1. **3**:**1-15**
   1. “The poem focuses entirely on human activity. Nevertheless, Qohelet leaves the impression that the deity controls the right times for all things.” (Crenshaw 96)
   2. outlines
      1. 3:1-9 and 3:10-15
         1. “Ancient sages believed that there was a right time and a wrong time for everything, and they devoted considerable energy to discerning proper times. Qohelet concurs in the view that everything has its own moment (3:1-9) . . .” (Crenshaw 92)
         2. But Qoheleth “insists that humans cannot know those times (3:10-15), for God withholds that information.” (Crenshaw 92)
      2. antitheses
         1. 3:2-8 are 14 antitheses. (Crenshaw 93)
         2. 3:9-15 are “conclusions about these polarities . . .” (Crenshaw 93)
      3. chiasms
         1. “. . . the whole poem (birth/death [3:2a]: war/peace [3:8b])” is a chiasm. (Crenshaw 96)
         2. 3:8 “(love/hate: war/peace)” is a chiasm. (Crenshaw 96)
2. **3**:**2-8**
   1. There are no metaphors in the poem. (Crenshaw 96)
   2. In the 14 antitheses, the 28 “items cover the spectrum of human activity . . .” (Crenshaw 93)
   3. In the Bible opposites often “express completeness or totality” (Crenshaw 93)
   4. 3b
      1. “Break down” and “build up” refer to “construction of walls or houses.” (Crenshaw 93)
   5. “In ancient Palestine construction often required dismantling of existing stone structures.” (Crenshaw 94)
   6. 5a: reasons for moving rocks (Crenshaw 94)
      1. war
         1. “. . . rocks were thrown on cultivable fields” (2 Kgs 3:19, 25).
         2. 2 Kgs 3:19c, 25b, “every good piece of land you shall ruin with stones. . . . 25 and on every good piece of land everyone threw a stone, until it was covered . . .”
      2. farming
         1. “. . . rocks had to be cleared from a field before cultivation . . .”
         2. “. . . on hillsides these stones [became] terraces to prevent erosion [and] catch the rain . . .”
         3. Isa 5:2, “He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.”
      3. animal husbandry
         1. “Shepherds carried pouches and small pebbles, which represented the number of animals . . .”
      4. business
         1. “. . . merchants used stones for recording commercial transactions . . .”
      5. construction
         1. Rocks made “houses in Palestine, both temporary and permanent (a grave heap).”
3. **3**:**9-15**
   1. 3:9
      1. Qoh 3:9, “What gain have the workers from their toil?”
      2. “The prefatory judgment . . . rules out any celebration of the deity’s orderly universe.” (Crenshaw 93)
      3. People “constantly do things. But does their activity produce anything [1:3, 5:16]? . . . One thing cancels another.” (Crenshaw 96)
         1. Qoh 1:3, “What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?”
         2. Qoh 5:16, “This also is a grievous ill: just as they came, so shall they go; and what gain do they have from toiling for the wind?”
   2. 3:10
      1. Qoh 3:10, “I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with.”
      2. “Business” (*hā*`*inyān*, from `*nh*, “afflict”) has “an oppressive connotation” throughout Qoheleth. (Crenshaw 96)
      3. “Busy-ness” is from God—a dubious gift.
      4. “Be busy with” could be translated “afflict themselves with.” (Crenshaw 97)
   3. 3:11
      1. Qoh 3:11, “He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”
      2. This is a “difficult verse . . .” (Crenshaw 97)
      3. “Suitable” is literally “beautiful” (*yāpeh*). An action at the right time is “lovely to behold.” (Crenshaw 97)
      4. “Moreover” “suggests that what the deity has placed in the human heart (mind) is good.” (Crenshaw 97)
      5. What is in human minds is `*lm*.
         1. If `*lm* is `*ôlām*, the meaning is “eternity.”
            1. Rabbis thought `*ôlām*.
            2. The LXX has *aiōn*.
            3. The “contrast between `*ēt* and `*ôlām* is a strong argument [for] reading “eternity” . . .” (Crenshaw 98 n 55)
         2. If `*lm* is `*elām*, the meaning is “darkness.” Crenshaw translates: “the unknown.” (Crenshaw 97)
         3. “. . . human beings cannot discern the times fixed by God [but] divine activity lasts forever.” (Crenshaw 93)
   4. 3:12
      1. Qoh 3:12, “I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves [lit. “succeed”] as long as they live . . .”
      2. “I know” expresses certainty.
      3. Qoheleth’s certainty “assumes the form of a negative “better” saying.” (Crenshaw 98)
   5. 3:13
      1. Qoh 3:13, “moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.”
      2. See 2:24, “There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God . . .”
      3. In 2:24, the opportunity to eat, drink, and enjoy “is within God’s control.” Is it in 3:13? Note that “all” eat and drink. (Crenshaw 99)
   6. 3:14
      1. Qoh 3:14, “I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him.”
      2. “An arbitrary deity shapes human lives, allowing some persons to participate in pleasure and preventing others from doing so. It does no good to fight against this external control, for God’s deeds are permanent, and lest humankind forget that sober fact, the deity acts so that they will possess appropriate fear where God is concerned.” (Crenshaw 92)
      3. “awe”
         1. In Proverbs, “fear of the Lord” is “the correct attitude of a religious person . . .” (Crenshaw 100)
         2. In Qoheleth, “in a few instances the fear of God comes very close to terror before an unpredictable despot (E. Pfeiffer).” (Crenshaw 100)
      4. God “jealously guarding divine prerogatives” can be found also in Gen. 3:22; 11:6. (Crenshaw 100)
         1. Gen 3:22-23, “Then the Lord God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— 23 therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden . . .”
         2. Gen 11:6-8, “And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech.” 8 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.”
   7. 3:12-14
      1. In 3:12-13, a first certitude (which begins “I know”) is that the “ability to [enjoy] is within God’s control.” (Crenshaw 99)
      2. In 3:14, a second certitude (which begins “I know”) is that “there is no way to alter God’s ways.” (Crenshaw 99)
   8. 3:15
      1. Qoh 3:15, “That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.”
      2. See Qoh 1:9, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.”
      3. God seeks the past “so that the past circles into the present.” (Crenshaw 100)

# 3:16-4:3, The Tears of the Oppressed

1. **text**

16 Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well.

17 I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.

18 I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals.

19 For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity.

20 All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.

21 Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth?

22 So I saw that there is nothing better than that all should enjoy their work, for that is their lot; who can bring them to see what will be after them?

4:1 Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them.

2 And I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive;

3 but better than both is the one who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

1. **3**:**16**
   1. Qoh 3:16, “Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well.”
   2. “There” is emphatic, both times.
   3. the dead and the unborn
      1. The dead are better off than the living: they no longer see injustice. (Crenshaw 102)
      2. The unborn are better off than the dead: they never see “undeserved suffering.” (Crenshaw 102)
2. **3**:**17**
   1. Qoh 3:17, “I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.”
   2. Did Qoheleth believe in divine judgment?
      1. Perhaps he thought “divine judgment [exists but] escapes human perception” (Crenshaw 102)
         1. But then “his assessment of injustice would be tempered by hope for its adjustment. Such optimism is missing from Qohelet’s thought.” (Crenshaw 102)
         2. “divine judgment appears contradictory. This verse, then, may be a later gloss.” (Crenshaw 102)
      2. More likely he reasoned from injustice to absence of divine judgment.
   3. possible relation of 16-21
      1. 16 thesis statement
      2. 17 Qoheleth’s early assumption
      3. 18-21 conclusion that injustice forces him to reach
3. **3**:**18**
   1. Qoh 3:18, “I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals.”
   2. “To show”: the LXX has “to show,” but the literal Hebrew is “to see.”
   3. “They are but animals”: or “they are indeed animals.”
   4. “The story of the Fall has a comparable distancing of humans from the divine realm lest men and women seize some of the power belonging to deity.” (Crenshaw 103)
      1. Gen 3:22-23, “Then the Lord God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— 23 therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden . . .”
4. **3**:**19-21**
   1. 3:19-21 explain the “similarity between humans and animals: . . . death.” (Crenshaw 103)
   2. “Humans should not think too highly of themselves, linked as they are with animals in a common death.” (Crenshaw 105)
   3. Qoheleth “extends the horizon of discussion beyond earthly events, but denies any pertinence to the [discussion].” (Crenshaw 105)
      1. “For all humans know death brings everything to an end.” (Crenshaw 105)
      2. “. . . humans can speculate idly, or enjoy the portion God grants them.” (Crenshaw 105)
5. **3**:**19**
   1. Qoh 3:19, “For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity.”
   2. “Vanity” here may imply “fleeting” or “transient” rather than futile.
6. **3**:**20**
   1. Qoh 3:20, “All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.”
      1. Gen 3:19b, “you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
      2. Job 10:9, “Remember that you fashioned me like clay; and will you turn me to dust again?”
      3. Job 34:15, “all mortals return to dust.”
      4. Ps 104:29, “they [all creatures] die and return to their dust.”
      5. Ps 146:4, “When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.”
      6. Sir 40:11, “All that is of earth returns to earth, and what is from above returns above.”
   2. “The dissolution of the body into dust might rule out belief in continued existence in Sheol, but . . . Qohelet affirms the traditional belief . . .” (Crenshaw 104)
      1. Qoh 3:20, “All go to one *place* . . .”
      2. Qoh 9:10, “there is no work or thought . . . in Sheol, to which you are going.”
7. **3**:**21**
   1. Qoh 3:21, “Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth?”
   2. “Who knows” implies “Nobody knows.”
   3. Conventional wisdom thought “that human beings enjoy a favorable status after death. He [Qoh] does not absolutely rule out the possibility, but he dismisses such speculation as a waste of time.” (Crenshaw 104)
   4. 3:21 does not contradict 12:7.
      1. Qoh 12:7, “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.”
      2. “. . . that both elements return to their source” gives Qoheleth no comfort. (Crenshaw 105)
8. **3**:**22**
   1. Qoh 3:22, “So I saw that there is nothing better than that all should enjoy their work, for that is their lot; who can bring them to see what will be after them?
   2. “. . . enjoy what is certain and knowable—human accomplishments.” (Crenshaw 105)
      1. 2:24, “There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil.”
      2. 3:12, “I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live”
   3. “who can bring them”
      1. A rhetorical question that implies “nobody can.”
   4. “after them”
      1. Or “afterward.” But it likely means “after his death.” (Crenshaw 105)
9. **4**:**1**
   1. Qoh 4:1, “Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them.”
   2. “Again I saw”
      1. This phrase also begins 4:7 (where he sees the companionless).
      2. “. . . injustice and oppression are . . . recurring phenomena.” (Crenshaw 106)
   3. “with no one to comfort them”
      1. “Them” is the oppressed in both instances.
      2. The “refrain adds considerable emphasis . . .” (Crenshaw 105)
      3. “Qohelet used the same stylistic device in 3:16” (“wickedness was there” occurs twice), also about injustice. (Crenshaw 105)
         1. Qoh 3:16, “Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well.”
   4. “power”
      1. Literally “a hand of power.” (Crenshaw 106)
   5. Here “Qohelet’s usual detachment eases . . . Such misery pained Qohelet . . .” (Crenshaw 106)
      1. “. . . but he suggests no way to comfort . . .” (Crenshaw 106)
      2. “. . . nor does he urge hearers to correct injustice.” (Crenshaw 106)
10. **4**:**2**
    1. Qoh 4:2, “And I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive . . .”
    2. “And I thought”
       1. Literally “And I praised.” (Crenshaw 106)
    3. Qoh 7:1, “the day of death [is better] than the day of birth.”
    4. Job 3:11-19, “Why did I not die at birth . . .? 18 they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster . . ., 19 and the slaves are free from their masters.”
    5. Sir 11:28a, “Call no one happy before his death . . .”
    6. Qoh 9:4b, “a living dog is better than a dead lion.”
       1. This does not contradict 4:2, because it is ironic.
11. **4**:**3**
    1. Qoh 4:3, “but better than both is the one who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.”
    2. Job 3:16, “Or why was I not buried like a stillborn child . . .?”
    3. preferring nonexistence to life or death
       1. Qoh 2:16-17, “How can the wise die just like fools? 17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me . . .”
       2. “Such loathing . . . arises from a vision of the way things should be in a perfect world.” (Crenshaw 107)
    4. “evil deeds”
       1. The reference is to work, rather than all criminal acts. (Crenshaw 108)
    5. “Qohelet shared the sages’ conviction that a just moral order should accompany belief in the Creator, but sees no [just moral order]. Instead, oppression dominates.” (Crenshaw 107)

# 4:4-6, Proverbs on Toil and Rest

1. **text**

4 Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from one person’s envy of another. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

5 Fools fold their hands

and consume their own flesh.

6 Better is a handful with quiet

than two handfuls with toil,

and a chasing after wind.

1. **4**:**4**
   1. Qoh 4:4, “Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from one person’s envy of another. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”
   2. Why “[1] toil and [2] all skill in work”?
      1. “The implication of the dual objects in 4:4 is that some types of toil produce discernible results, but Qohelet thinks such productive work stems from envy.” (Crenshaw 108)
   3. “envy”
      1. Isa 11:13, “The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, . . . Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah . . .”
      2. Qohelet “personaliz[es] . . . the national problem of jealousy and violence . . .” (Crenshaw 108)
      3. Franz Delitzsch (275): “All the expenditure of strength and art has covetousness and envy . . . as its poisoned sting.” (*Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*. Edinburgh: 1877. [*Koheleth*. Leipzig, 1875.]) (Qtd. in Crenshaw 108)
2. **4**:**5**
   1. Qoh 4:5, “Fools fold their hands and consume their own flesh.”
   2. Prov 6:10-11 (24:33-34 are identical), “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, 11 and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior.”
   3. 4:5 rules out concluding that you should not work at all.
   4. “consume their own flesh”
      1. Perhaps “the sluggard . . . lives off his body fat”? (Crenshaw 107)
      2. Or the proverb says a lazy person with plenty of meat to eat is unjust. (Crenshaw 108)
         1. “But is anyone who beats the system this way really a fool?” (Crenshaw 109)
3. **4**:**6**
   1. Qoh 4:6, “Better is a handful with quiet than two handfuls with toil, and a chasing after wind.”
   2. 4:4 says work is undesirable; 4:5 says sloth is undesirable; 4:6 says work, but don’t overwork.
      1. Prov 15:16, “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.”
      2. Prov 16:8, “Better is a little with righteousness than large income with injustice.”
      3. Prov 17:1, “Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.”
   3. But 4:6 “sympathizes more with the [indolent] fool than with one who toils endlessly . . .” (Crenshaw 109)
      1. It “comes perilously close to stifling individual initiative . . .” (Crenshaw 108)
   4. 4:6 may be a quoted proverb, but Qoheleth adds “and a chasing after wind.”

# 4:7-12, Advantages of Companionship

1. **text**

4:7 Again, I saw vanity under the sun:

8 the case of solitary individuals, without sons or brothers; yet there is no end to all their toil, and their eyes are never satisfied with riches. “For whom am I toiling,” they ask, “and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.

10 For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help.

11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?

12 And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

# 4:13-16, The Fickle Crowd

1. **text**

13 “Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king, who will no longer take advice.

14 One can indeed come out of prison to reign, even though born poor in the kingdom.

15 I saw all the living who, moving about under the sun, follow that youth who replaced the king;

16 there was no end to all those people whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

# 5:1-9, Religious Obligations

1. **text**

1 “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil.

2 Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.

3 For dreams come with many cares, and a fool’s voice with many words.

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow.

5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfill it.

6 Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?

7 With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God.

8 If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and right, do not be amazed at the matter; for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.

9 But all things considered, this is an advantage for a land: a king for a plowed field.”

1. **outline**
   1. 5:1-7 are “about cultic obligations . . .” (Crenshaw 118)
2. **5**:**1**
   1. Qoh 5:1, “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil.”
   2. 5:1a
      1. “Qohelet advises caution lest one’s actions incur divine wrath.” (Crenshaw 116)
      2. “house of God”: probably the second temple; possibly a synagogue. (Crenshaw 116)
   3. 5:1b
      1. obedience is better than sacrifice
         1. 1 Sam 15:22, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”
         2. Prov 15:8, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight.”
         3. Prov 21:3, “To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.”
         4. Prov 21:27, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when brought with evil intent.”
         5. “to draw near”
            1. Instead of a noun (“obedience”), “to draw near” may be a second imperative (“Guard your steps . . .; draw near”).
            2. But the remainder of 1b, “fools sacrifice a gift,” would be awkward. So probably not. (Crenshaw 115)
   4. 5:1c
      1. The text may be corrupt. It may have said, “fools know nothing else but doing evil.” (Crenshaw 115)
3. **5**:**2**
   1. Qoh 5:2, “Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.”
   2. Is this verse about speech, prayer, or vows? Speech is in 5:1; 5:2 has “before God”; vows are in 5:4-5.
      1. Qoh 5:4-5, “When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow. 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfill it.”
      2. prayer
         1. Sir 7:14, “Do not babble in the assembly of the elders, and do not repeat yourself when you pray.”
      3. vows
         1. Sir 18:23, “Before making a vow, prepare yourself; do not be like one who puts the Lord to the test.”
      4. But “The Aramaic . . . suggests that Qohelet simply refers to speech . . .” (Crenshaw 116)
   3. 5:2a
      1. “Traditional wisdom advocated thought before speech . . .” So does Qohelet. (Crenshaw 116)
      2. “He implies that thoughtful consideration of what to say before God will result in fewer words . . .” (Crenshaw 116)
   4. 5:2b
      1. “. . . the distance between speaker and addressee” motivates cautious speech. (Crenshaw 116)
      2. Ps 115:3, “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.”
      3. “Qohelet may be similarly emphasizing God’s power . . .” (Crenshaw 116)
      4. Or “perhaps he focuses on God’s distance and indifference.” (Crenshaw 116)
4. **5**:**3**
   1. Qoh 5:3, “For dreams come with many cares, and a fool’s voice with many words.”
   2. 5:3a
      1. Is this referring to “the practice of incubation” (“lying down at a holy place in anticipation of a vision”)? (Crenshaw 116)
         1. If so, then “the point is that the activity associated with [incubation] will be successful.” (116)
         2. “But such an interpretation does not accord with the rest of the verse.” (116)
      2. The more likely interpretation is that “frenetic business has lingering effects that disturb sleep, causing dreams . . .” (Crenshaw 116)
         1. Sir 31:1-2, “Wakefulness over wealth wastes away one’s flesh, and anxiety about it drives away sleep. 2 Wakeful anxiety prevents slumber . . .”
   3. 5:3b
      1. “. . . loquacity marks a fool.” (Crenshaw 116)
      2. But “the mark of folly is surely the substance of the speech rather than its quantity.” (Crenshaw 116)
      3. Perhaps many words make foolish words more likely.
         1. Qoh 10:12b-14a, “the lips of fools consume them. 13 The words of their mouths begin in foolishness, and their talk ends in wicked madness; 14 yet fools talk on and on.”
5. **5**:**4**
   1. Qoh 5:4, When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow.”
   2. 5:4a
      1. Quotes Deut 23:22a (but drops “Yahweh”—reluctance to mention God is also in the NT). (Crenshaw 117)
      2. Deut 23:22, “If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not postpone fulfilling it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you would incur guilt.”
      3. “But while Deuteronomy encourages the making of vows, Qohelet discourages them.” (Crenshaw 117)
   3. fulfilling vows promptly
      1. See Deut 23:22.
      2. Prov 20:25, “It is a snare for one to say rashly, “It is holy,” and begin to reflect only after making a vow.”
      3. Sir 18:22, “Let nothing hinder you from paying a vow promptly, and do not wait until death to be released from it.”
         1. Sir 18:22 is also in a context about considering before speaking.
6. **5**:**5**
   1. Qoh 5:5, “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfill it.”
   2. “. . . religious authorities invented the means of getting around such commitments.” (Crenshaw 117)
   3. “Qohelet suggests that one does better to avoid vows in the first place.” (Crenshaw 117)
   4. “He does not absolutely rule them out, but advises against vows that one cannot . . . fulfill.” (Crenshaw 117)
7. **5**:**6**
   1. Qoh 5:6, “Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?”
   2. “Presumably, the subject is still vows.” (Crenshaw 117)
   3. “messenger”
      1. LXX and Peshitta: God (“do not say before God”)
      2. MT has “messenger,” “angel”
         1. Is this “a priestly messenger who has come to collect a defaulted pledge”? (Crenshaw 115)
         2. Is this “a priest or an emissary from the temple who came to inquire about the failure to pay”? (Crenshaw 117)
         3. “If the messenger [is] the angel of death, such protests fall on deaf ears.” (Crenshaw 115)
            1. *Instruction of Ani* (trans. Lichtheim 2: 138): “When your envoy comes to fetch you . . . do not say, ‘I am young to be taken.’ For you do not know death. When death comes he steals the infant who is in his mother’s arms, just like him who reached old age.” (Crenshaw 117 n 81)
         4. “The reading “angel” may have arisen as a distancing of God from the human arena.” (Crenshaw 117)
   4. “mistake”
      1. *Šegāgāh* in priestly legislation (Num 15:22-31; Lev 4:2-35) is “an offense committed without knowledge or [117] intention, hence inadvertent sin . . .” (Crenshaw 117-18)
      2. Before the messenger or angel, the speaker uses “the excuse of unintentional sin . . .” (Crenshaw 115)
      3. Probably the offense is “failure to pay one’s vows into the temple treasury . . .” (Crenshaw 117)
      4. “The lame excuse, “It was a mistake,” would simply call attention to the offense and prompt the deity to deal destructively.” (Crenshaw 117)
   5. “work”
      1. “There is strong support for the plural “works,” but the meaning is not affected.” (Crenshaw 118)
8. **5**:**7**
   1. Qoh 5:7, “With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God.”
   2. 5:7a
      1. “The conjunction *waw* (and) joins three words—“dreams,” “futility,” “words”—and which have no direct relationship with the final imperative to fear God. No solution seems entirely satisfactory.” (Crenshaw 118)
      2. possible train of thought
         1. 6-7a: “talkativeness increases the chances for affront [6], just as dreams generate anxiety [3, 7a].” (Crenshaw 115)
         2. 7b: fearing God includes recognizing that God “has no . . . fondness for fools.” (Crenshaw 115)
   3. 5:7b
      1. “Fear God” “concludes Qohelet’s remarks about cultic obligations” (5:1-7). (Crenshaw 118)
      2. “Fear of God results in few words, faithfulness in paying vows if one ever resorts to them, and generally in conduct that does not invite punishment.” (Crenshaw 118)
9. **5**:**8**
   1. Qoh 5:8, “If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and right, do not be amazed at the matter; for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.”
   2. “Qohelet sees evil as immutable. Therefore there is no point in getting upset . . .” (Crenshaw 119)
   3. “high . . . higher . . . yet higher”
      1. “. . . levels of authority insulate officials from discovery and punishment.” (Crenshaw 118)
      2. For “Officials caught between superiors and underlings . . . Heavy taxation of the people provides revenues for bribing higher authorities.” (Crenshaw 118)
   4. attack on prophets’ reform attempts?
      1. “. . . a hierarchy of responsibility rises to the supreme earthly ruler, perhaps ascending a step higher to God.” (Crenshaw 115)
      2. “Israel’s prophets held the king responsible for ensuring justice.” (Crenshaw 119)
      3. 5:8 is “an attack against the prophetic voice of protest over oppression . . .” (Crenshaw 115)
10. **5**:**9**
    1. Qoh 5:9, “But all things considered, this is an advantage for a land: a king for a plowed field.”
    2. “. . . this verse is totally obscure.” (Crenshaw 119)
    3. “all things considered”
       1. Or “in every respect.” (Crenshaw 119)
    4. “Does a king who guarantees agriculture bring profit to everybody, since a cultivated field yields produce that can be converted into cash for the payment of taxes?” (Crenshaw 119)

# 5:10-6:9, The Disappointments of Wealth

1. **text**

10 The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.

11 When goods increase, those who eat them increase; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?

12 Sweet is the sleep of laborers, whether they eat little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let them sleep.

13 There is a grievous ill that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owners to their hurt,

14 and those riches were lost in a bad venture; though they are parents of children, they have nothing in their hands.

15 As they came from their mother’s womb, so they shall go again, naked as they came; they shall take nothing for their toil, which they may carry away with their hands.

16 This also is a grievous ill: just as they came, so shall they go; and what gain do they have from toiling for the wind?

17 Besides, all their days they eat in darkness, in much vexation and sickness and resentment.

18 This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot.

19 Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God.

20 For they will scarcely brood over the days of their lives, because God keeps them occupied with the joy of their hearts.

6:1 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind:

2 those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous ill.

3 A man may beget a hundred children, and live many years; but however many are the days of his years, if he does not enjoy life’s good things, or has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.

4 For it comes into vanity and goes into darkness, and in darkness its name is covered;

5 moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he.

6 Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to one place?

7 All human toil is for the mouth, yet the appetite is not satisfied.

8 For what advantage have the wise over fools? And what do the poor have who know how to conduct themselves before the living?

9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire; this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

1. **6**:**8**
   1. Qoh 6:8, “For what advantage have the wise over fools? And what do the poor have who know how to conduct themselves before the living?”
   2. 6:8a
      1. “. . . earlier sages . . . took for granted the absolute superiority of wisdom over folly.” (Crenshaw 128)
      2. “The rhetorical question [is] a strong denial . . .” (Crenshaw 128)
   3. 6:8b
      1. “the poor”
         1. Do “the poor” parallel 8a’s “wise”?
            1. In conventional wisdom ““the poor” were rarely considered wise . . .” (Crenshaw 129)
            2. But Qoheleth allowed for the possibility.

9:13-18 tells of “a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city.” So Qoheleth allowed that “poor” and “wise” might cohere. (Crenshaw 129)

“4:13 (“a poor but wise youth”) is less apt, for the youth later became a king.” (Crenshaw 129 n 91)

* + - 1. “Kroeber (118) understands the word `*ānî* [“the poor”] on the basis of `*nh*, “to be humble,” hence a reserved person.” (Crenshaw 129)
         1. So 8b would mean, “What do the humble [= the wise, who know how to act] have over fools?”
    1. “conduct themselves”
       1. “The expression, “to walk before the living,” is an idiom for conducting one’s affairs successfully . . .” (Crenshaw 129)
       2. “Possessing insight into the way one ought to act does not assure success, for imponderables offset the positive effect of knowledge.” (Crenshaw 129)

1. **6**:**9**
   1. Qoh 6:9, “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire; this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”
   2. “the sight of the eyes”
      1. *Rā´āh* means both “to see and to enjoy . . .” (Crenshaw 129)
      2. Whitley (*Koheleth* 59) distinguishes several meanings in Qoheleth. (Crenshaw 129 n 93)
         1. 2:1 “to enjoy”
         2. 2:3 “to perceive, to discern”
         3. 2:12 “to experience”
         4. 5:18 “to perceive, to discern”
         5. 6:6 “to enjoy”
         6. 6:9 “to attain pleasure” (“both senses of “experience and enjoy””)
         7. 11:9 “experience and enjoy” (11:9, “the sight of your eyes”)
   3. “the wandering of desire”
      1. Does this refer to seeking long-term wealth (as opposed to “the sight of the eyes,” i.e., the “immediately attainable”)? (Crenshaw 129)
      2. Perhaps it means that “a roving appetite seeks what one desires but has no realistic means of obtaining.” (Crenshaw 129)
         1. “Qohelet has referred to restless striving for wealth and endless appetite for food . . .” (Crenshaw 129)
            1. Qoh 5:10-12, “The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity. 11 When goods increase, those who eat them increase; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes? 12 Sweet is the sleep of laborers, whether they eat little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let them sleep.”
            2. Qoh 6:7, “All human toil is for the mouth, yet the appetite is not satisfied.”
   4. “vanity and a chasing after wind”
      1. “The full futility formula occurs here for the last time.” (Crenshaw 130)
      2. “. . . chasing the wind applies [especially well] to a roving desire.” (Crenshaw 130)
   5. overall meaning
      1. In form, this is a “better saying” (“Better x than y”). (Crenshaw 129)
      2. “The meaning . . . is elusive . . .” (Crenshaw 129)
      3. Maybe 6:9 contrasts “momentary pleasures and insatiable desires.” (Crenshaw 130)
         1. Maybe enjoying “things that are immediately attainable” (“the sight of the eyes”) is better than seeking long-term wealth (“the wandering of desire”). (Crenshaw 129)
         2. 5:11 disapproves of seeking wealth. (Crenshaw 129)
            1. Qoh 5:11, “When goods increase, . . . what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?”
         3. 11:9 approves of seeking wealth. (Crenshaw 129)
            1. Qoh 11:9, “Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes . . .”
      4. Or “a roving appetite seeks what one desires but has no realistic means of obtaining.” (Crenshaw 129)
      5. “Better what one can look on and enjoy than fantasizing about eminently desirable things outside one’s grasp.” (Crenshaw 129)
      6. Since “go” (here “wandering”) is used for death (3:20; 5:15; 6:4; 9:10), “Whitley (60) translates [129] . . .: “Better the pleasure of the moment than the departing of life.”” (Whitley, C.F. *Koheleth*: *His Language and Thought*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 148. New York: de Gruyter, 1979.) (Crenshaw 129-30)
   6. “The Massoretes locate the midpoint of the book between verses 9 and 10 of this chapter.” (Crenshaw 130 n 94)

# 6:10-12, Transitional Unit

1. **text**

10 “Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what human beings are, and that they are not able to dispute with those who are stronger.

11 The more words, the more vanity, so how is one the better?

12 For who knows what is good for mortals while they live the few days of their vain life, which they pass like a shadow? For who can tell them what will be after them under the sun?”

1. **6**:**10**
   1. Qoh 6:10, “Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what human beings are, and that they are not able to dispute with those who are stronger.”
   2. 6:10a
      1. “Whatever has come to be”: Crenshaw translates, “that which is.” (Crenshaw 130)
      2. “named”
         1. Gen 2:19c, “whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.”
         2. Babylonian creation epic (*ANET* 61): “When on high the heaven had not been named, firm ground below had not been called by name . . . uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined—Then it was that the gods were formed within them.” (Crenshaw 130 n 95)
      3. Again, “nothing new ever occurs . . .” (Crenshaw 130)
   3. 6:10b
      1. Massoretes: “and it is known that he is a man.” (Crenshaw 130)
      2. “human beings”: *hā*´*ādām*
         1. This is “A pun on the name Adam . . .” (Crenshaw 130)
         2. ´*Ādām* “ironically alludes to the name of the first human creature, who cannot compete with God.” (Crenshaw translates “with *one* who is stronger.”) (Crenshaw 130)
         3. Adam’s “association with the ground would reinforce [10c, which says] that a mere human cannot contend with the creator.” (Crenshaw 130)
      3. That Qoheleth “has Job in mind” is reinforced by 6:11, “The more words, the more vanity . . .” (Crenshaw 130)
   4. 6:10c
      1. “they are not able”
         1. Crenshaw translates, “man cannot . . .” (Crenshaw 130)
      2. “dispute”
         1. “The essential meaning of *dîn* is to adjudicate; Eccl. 6:10 has a wider connotation that approximates the development in the meaning of the related verb *rîb* (from “contend at law” to “strive”).” (Crenshaw 131 n 98)
      3. “*human beings* [cannot] dispute with *those* who are stronger”
         1. Crenshaw translates “*man* cannot . . . argue with *one* who is stronger . . .” (Crenshaw 130)
         2. “Perhaps Qohelet has Job in mind, observing that attacks on God are useless.” (Crenshaw 131)
         3. Isa 45:9-11 (9 quoted), “Woe to you who strive with your Maker, earthen vessels with the potter [*ḥarśê* ´*adāmāh*]!”
2. **6**:**11**
   1. Qoh 6:11, “The more words, the more vanity, so how is one the better?”
   2. “more words”
      1. If continuing 10’s thought: words “widen the gulf between weak and strong” (Crenshaw 131)
      2. “The fundamental orientation of ancient wisdom—the discovery of what benefits human beings—becomes an impossible goal.” (Crenshaw 130)
   3. “. . . eloquence fails for two reasons: . . .
      1. the predetermination and recurrence of all events, and
      2. in the last resort power rests in God, not in the human tongue.” (Crenshaw 131)
   4. “Human beings regularly confront their limits, both among other humans and in the face of death and the one who determines when to send forth the death angel.” (Crenshaw 131)
3. **6**:**12**
   1. Qoh 6:12, “For who knows what is good for mortals while they live the few days of their vain life, which they pass like a shadow? For who can tell them what will be after them under the sun?”
   2. “. . . “What is good for human beings?” expresses the fundamental concern of Israelite wisdom.” (Crenshaw 131)
   3. “. . . Qohelet dismisses the essence of the tradition [and] asserts that no person really knows the good.” (Crenshaw 131)
   4. “But he does not . . . substitute a religious pursuit for an anthropological one.” (Crenshaw 131)
   5. “Individuals move toward darkness, like a shadow that lengthens until lost in evening.” (Crenshaw 132)
   6. “few . . . vain”
      1. “In Qohelet’s description of life two qualifying adjectives stand out: brief and empty.” (Crenshaw 131)
   7. “pass like a shadow”
      1. “Individuals move toward darkness, like a shadow that lengthens until lost in evening.” (Crenshaw 132)
      2. Many interpreters discern Greek influence in *weya*`*aśēm*, that is, *poieō* in the sense of spending time.” (As opposed to *poieō* as “working.”) (Crenshaw 132)
      3. nab has, “God has made [life] like a shadow.”

# 7:1-14, Proverb Collection

1. **text**

1 A good name is better than precious ointment,

and the day of death, than the day of birth.

2 It is better to go to the house of mourning

than to go to the house of feasting;

for this is the end of everyone,

and the living will lay it to heart.

3 Sorrow is better than laughter,

for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad.

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning;

but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise

than to hear the song of fools.

6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,

so is the laughter of fools;

this also is vanity.

7 Surely oppression makes the wise foolish,

and a bribe corrupts the heart.

8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning;

the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit.

9 Do not be quick to anger,

for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

10 Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?”

For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance,

an advantage to those who see the sun.

12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,

and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to the one who possesses it.

13 Consider the work of God;

who can make straight what he has made crooked?

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider;

God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.

1. **7**:**1-3**
   1. 7:1-3 are “better sayings.” (Crenshaw 133)
2. **7**:**2**
   1. Qoh 7:2, “It is better to go to the house of mourning

than to go to the house of feasting;

for this is the end of everyone,

and the living will lay it to heart.”

* 1. Cf. Qoh 4:2, “I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive . . .”

1. **7**:**13**
   1. Qoh 7:13, “Consider the work of God;

who can make straight what he has made crooked?”

* 1. “Neither money nor insight can make any difference in the things God has made.” (Crenshaw 139)
  2. “Some things were twisted in the act of creation itself, and nothing can effectively transform them now.” (Crenshaw 139)
  3. “This attitude to the order of nature and human society . . . [shows that] Qohelet has no . . . optimism about changing society.” (Crenshaw 139)
  4. 7:13 is said “Lest those who possess wealth and wisdom become complacent” (Crenshaw 139)

1. **7**:**14**
   1. Qoh 7:14, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider;

God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.”

* 1. “One cannot change things. One can only enjoy the good things that come along and use misfortunes as occasions for reflecting on divine mystery. Both the good and the evil that God sends conceal any pattern or any trend useful for predicting the future.” (Crenshaw 139)
  2. 7:14c
     1. Vulgate and Symmachus read, “that man may not find just complaint against him.” (Crenshaw 139)
     2. But “the bewildering array of good and evil hardly prevents human beings from finding fault with the creator.” (Crenshaw 139)

1. **7**:**13-14**
   1. “Verses 13-14 have been called “an admirable epitome of Koheleth’s thought” [Gordis 274-75]. Before an all-powerful God, human beings must resign themselves to ignorance about the ebb and flow of events. They can enjoy the good and consider the nature of reality when misfortune strikes. Nothing can challenge God’s sovereign power or secure human existence.” (Crenshaw 139)

# 7:15-22, On Moderation

1. **text**

15 In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evil-doing.

16 Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself?

17 Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time?

18 It is good that you should take hold of the one, without letting go of the other; for the one who fears God shall succeed with both.

19 Wisdom gives strength to the wise more than ten rulers that are in a city.

20 Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning.

21 Do not give heed to everything that people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you;

22 your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others.

# 7:23-29, Seeking and Finding

1. **text**

23 All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me.

24 That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

25 I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness.

26 I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

27 See, this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum,

28 which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

29 See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.

# 8:1-9, rulers and subjects

1. **text**

1 Who is like the wise man?

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

Wisdom makes one’s face shine,

and the hardness of one’s countenance is changed.

2 Keep the king’s command because of your sacred oath.

3 Do not be terrified; go from his presence, do not delay when the matter is unpleasant, for he does whatever he pleases.

4 For the word of the king is powerful, and who can say to him, “What are you doing?”

5 Whoever obeys a command will meet no harm, and the wise mind will know the time and way.

6 For every matter has its time and way, although the troubles of mortals lie heavy upon them.

7 Indeed, they do not know what is to be, for who can tell them how it will be?

8 No one has power over the wind to restrain the wind, or power over the day of death; there is no discharge from the battle, nor does wickedness deliver those who practice it.

9 All this I observed, applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while one person exercises authority over another to the other’s hurt.

# 8:10-17, The Mystery of Divine Activity

1. **text**

10 Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.

11 Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil.

12 Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him,

13 but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.

14 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

15 So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.

16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how one’s eyes see sleep neither day nor night,

17 then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun. However much they may toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out.

1. **8**:**11**
   1. Qoh 8:11, “Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil.”
   2. The negligent executor of sentence “may be civil authorities, or God . . .” (Crenshaw 154)
   3. 8:11 “shifts responsibility away from sinners . . . People are guilty of evil, but God must take some blame, since a breakdown has occurred in the scheme of reward and punishment.” (Crenshaw 155)
2. **8**:**12**
   1. Qoh 8:12, “Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him . . .”
   2. 8:12a says the wicked prosper.
   3. Yet 8:12b-13 present “a view that Qohelet does not otherwise endorse, in language normally used for his own insights [“yet I know”].” (Crenshaw 155)
   4. “No satisfactory solution to the problem exists.” (Crenshaw 155)
      1. “Gordis understands Qohelet to be introducing a quotation in order to challenge it.” (Crenshaw 155)
      2. “. . . others achieve the same thing by labeling this an example of “yes . . . but” reasoning.” (Crenshaw 155)
      3. “. . . the verdict “gloss” seems justified.” (Crenshaw 155)
         1. Note that 14 contradicts 12b-13. (Crenshaw 155)
3. **8**:**13**
   1. Qoh 8:13, “but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.”
   2. “like a shadow”: as the sun (of their lives) goes down.
   3. “fear of God”
      1. 3:14, 5: 7, 7:18: “close to awe in the presence of dreadful power, the numinous.”
      2. 8:13, 12:13: “religious devotion” (Crenshaw 156)
4. **8**:**14**
   1. Qoh 8:14, “There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.”
   2. 8:14 contradicts 8:12b-13.
   3. The verse begins and ends with “vanity.”
   4. “Righteous,” “wicked,” and “retribution” occur twice.
      1. “Retribution” is here “treated according to the conduct . . .”
   5. “on earth”
      1. Perversion of justice is universal. (“On earth” is like “under the sun,” without the connotation of transience.)
   6. “. . . the correlation between one’s good deeds and divine favor no longer exists.” (Crenshaw 159 n 128)
5. **8**:**15**
   1. Qoh 8:15, “So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.”
   2. In Qoh 2:1-2, joy “accomplished nothing . . ., hence was futile.” (Crenshaw 156)
      1. Qoh 2:1-2, “I said to myself, “Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But again, this also was vanity. 2 I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?””
   3. “. . . the best response to [the inequity in 14 is] grabbing all the pleasure one can afford.” (Crenshaw 154)
   4. But he has not “abandoned the view that the house of mourning outranks the place of festivity.” (Crenshaw 156)
      1. Qoh 4:2, “I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive . . .”
      2. Qoh 7:2-4, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for this is the end of everyone, and the living will lay it to heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.”
      3. The double “under the sun” reinforces the transience of pleasure.
6. **8**:**16**
   1. Qoh 8:16, “When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how one’s eyes see sleep neither day nor night . . .”
   2. “how one’s eyes see sleep neither day nor night”
      1. He studies diligently, denying himself sleep?
      2. Clause is object of “see” (toil and anxiety prevent sleep)? More probable.
   3. “On earth” rather than “under the sun.”
7. **8**:**17**
   1. Qoh 8:17, “then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun. However much they may toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out.”
   2. “. . . humans cannot fathom divine activity . . .” (Crenshaw 157)
      1. Qoh 3:11c, “they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”
      2. Qoh 11:5, “Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother’s womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything.”
   3. This verse “equates God’s work with activity on earth—elsewhere Qohelet only implies that whatever occurs is God’s doing.” (Crenshaw 157)
   4. “they may toil”
      1. “They” may be humanity (“no one” precedes “they may toil”) or may be wise men (“those who are wise” follows “they may toil”).

# 9:1-10, The Shadow of Death

1. **text**

1 All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts them

2 is vanity, since the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath.

3 This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

4 But whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

5 The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost.

6 Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun.

7 Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do.

8 Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head.

9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

1. **9**:**1**
   1. Qoh 9:1, “All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts them . . .”
   2. 9:1a
      1. *Kol-zeh* occurs twice: “examining it *all*” and “*Everthing*.” (Crenshaw 159)
      2. “the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God”
         1. Sages thought they controlled their destiny, but their destiny “is entirely at God’s disposal” (Crenshaw 159)
      3. How are “their deeds . . . in the hand of God”?
         1. The wise only think they do their deeds; but God does them.
         2. Or they do their deeds, but God predetermines what they are able do. (Crenshaw 159)
   3. 9:1b
      1. And “no one really knows what God’s disposition is” (love or hate). (Crenshaw 159)
      2. “human beings cannot fathom God’s actions [8:17, “I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening”], hence they have no assurance that a virtuous life will call forth divine favor.” (Crenshaw 159 n 128)
      3. “everything is before them”: spatially or temporally (Crenshaw 160)
   4. “. . . that human beings have no control over their lives elevates chance to a supreme position. Unfortunately, this arbitrary power does not take worth into consideration, thus effectively destroying the foundation on which the sages built so confidently.” (Crenshaw 159)
2. **9**:**2**
   1. Qoh 9:2, “is vanity, since the same fate comes to all,

to the righteous and the wicked, ↑ ↓

to the good and the evil, ↑ ↓

to the clean and the unclean, ↑ ↓

to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. ↑ ↓

As are the good, so are the sinners; ↑ ↓

those who swear are like those who shun an oath.” ↓ ↑

* 1. Why reverse the order in the last pair (↓ ↑)?
     1. To conclude “on a favorable note”? (Crenshaw 160)
     2. Or “concern for rhythmic evenness”? (Crenshaw 160 n 129)
  2. “A person’s behavior does not affect the way God treats that person. All are treated the same . . .” (Crenshaw 160)
  3. According to conventional wisdom, “a correlation existed between one’s deeds and one’s time and manner of death. Yet [Qoheleth] asserts . . . his unique view as if none could disprove it.” (Crenshaw 160)

1. **9**:**3**
   1. Qoh 9:3, “This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”
   2. “the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts”
      1. “even human passions remain a dark secret until death stills them.” (Crenshaw 159)
      2. More likely: “our common fate, regardless of moral worth, issues in human madness” (Crenshaw 160)
         1. See Qoh 8:11, “Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil.”
   3. 3c Crenshaw’s translation: “madness is in their heart during their lives—and afterward off to the dead.”
      1. “In an exquisite phrase the syntax breaks off like life itself.” (Crenshaw 159)
      2. 3c-5 contrast living and dead.
2. **9**:**4**
   1. Qoh 9:4, “But whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.”
   2. Qoheleth “earlier praised the dead over the living.” (Crenshaw 161)
   3. “has hope”: ironic, since in 5 the only difference is that the living know they will die.
   4. 9:4b
      1. This is “an aphorism that Qohelet composed, or more likely, quotes.” (Crenshaw 161)
      2. “. . . the *lamed* on *keleb* [dog]” is an emphatic: “indeed,” “for sure.” (Crenshaw 161)
      3. “In the ancient Near East “dog” (a scavenger) was a metaphor for a contemptible or worthless person, whereas “lion” designated a prince or person of great worth.” (Crenshaw 161)
      4. The aphorism is ironic, since in 9:5 the only difference is that the living know they will die.
      5. Qoh 4:2 (“I thought the dead . . . more fortunate than the living”) does not contradict, since 9:4b is ironic. (Crenshaw 106)
3. **9**:**5**
   1. Qoh 9:5, “The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost.”
   2. “The only advantage of the living is knowledge that they, too, will die. Although many commentators view this theoretical knowledge as positive, Qohelet’s words appear ironic.” (Crenshaw 161)
   3. The living “forget the persons who preceded them, an idea that seems to have troubled Qohelet deeply.” (Crenshaw 161)
4. **9**:**6**
   1. Qoh 9:6, “Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun.”
   2. “love and hate”
      1. 9:1 referred to “divine love and hate” (Crenshaw 161)
      2. “Death stills even the most violent emotions” (Crenshaw 161)
   3. envy
      1. A moderate passion is “envy” (*qin*´*ātām*, ““their zeal” = passions of rivalry”). (Crenshaw 161)
      2. 4:4, “all toil and all skill in work come from one person’s envy of another. This also is vanity . . .”
      3. “Perishing feelings squander one’s portion among the living.” (Crenshaw 161)
   4. “the real tragedy of death [is, it] separates an individual from any portion of joy and pleasure” (Crenshaw 161)
5. **9**:**7**
   1. Qoh 9:7, “Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do.”
   2. Up to now, Qoheleth advises enjoying life (2:24-26; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; but 7:14 has “be happy”). “Now he switches to imperatives . . .” (Crenshaw 162)
      1. “. . . a greater sense of urgency [issues] from Qohelet’s reflection on the power of death . . .” (Crenshaw 162)
   3. “Although the sentiments of this verse and the three that follow are universal, the similarity with Siduri’s advice to Gilgamesh is so great that Qohelet’s familiarity with the Epic of Gilgamesh has often been proposed.” (Crenshaw 162)

“Gilgamesh, whither rovest thou?

The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find.

When the gods created mankind,

Death for mankind they set aside,

Life in their own hands retaining.

Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly,

Make thou merry by day and by night.

Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing,

Day and night dance thou and play!

Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,

Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.

Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,

Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!

For this is the task of [mankind]! (Pritchard *ANET* 90)

* 1. “approved”
     1. “In recommending these little pleasures to soothe the troubled spirit, Qohelet makes the emancipating claim that God has already approved such drinking and eating. Little room exists here for a scrupulous conscience or for anxiety concerning religious duty.” (Crenshaw 27)
  2. predestination in this life
     1. “Since one’s capacity to enjoy life depends on a divine gift, anyone who can eat and drink must enjoy divine favor. . . . persons who lack the means or the disposition to enjoy life lack that favor.” (Crenshaw 162)

1. **9**:**8**
   1. Qoh 9:8, “Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head.”
   2. White clothes are valuable in a hot climate. (Crenshaw 162)
   3. “the righteous will wear white garments” (Rev 3:4, 5; 7:9; *Šabb*. 114a). (Crenshaw 162 n 131)
   4. Oil combats “dry heat on skin” (Pss 23:5; 45:7; 104:15; Prov 27:9). (Crenshaw 162)
2. **9**:**9**
   1. Qoh 9:9, “Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.”
   2. “Enjoy life with the wife”: imperative. Qoheleth’s audience is all male.
      1. (The first epilogist [author of 12:9-11] imagined “people” [Qoh 12:9, “the Teacher also taught the people knowledge”].)
   3. Whether God loves or hates a person is indiscernable (9:1b). Human love will cease (9:6).
      1. But to love a wife “seems a defiant attempt to beat death itself, at least for a fleeting moment . . .” (Crenshaw 163)
      2. “. . . cf. Adam’s response to the divine curse . . .” (Crenshaw 163)
         1. Gen 3:19-20, 4:1, ““to dust you shall return.” 20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. . . . 4:1 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived . . .”
      3. That life is fleeting is reinforced: “your vain life”; “under the sun” (twice).
3. **9**:**10**
   1. Qoh 9:10, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”
   2. Literally “everything you are able to do in your strength, do” (Crenshaw 163)
   3. Fleeting life “motivates intense living,” in both family and work. (Crenshaw 163)
   4. to which *you* [´*attāh*] are going”: explicit “you” emphasizes going toward death. (Crenshaw 163)
   5. Sheol
      1. “Qohelet affirms the traditional belief that people go to the shadowy abode after death. [But it is only] “unrelieved darkness.” [104] It is “a place of nonbeing.” [163] (Crenshaw 104, 163)
      2. For Qoheleth,
         1. there is no resurrection of the body (a Hebrew belief);
         2. there is no immortality of the soul (a Greek belief).
4. **9**:**1-10 and the Book of Wisdom**
   1. Maybe Wis 2:1-9 (esp. 2:4) had Qoheleth 9:1-10 in mind.

1 For they [“the ungodly,” 1:16] reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves,

“Short and sorrowful is our life,

and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end,

and no one has been known to return from Hades.

2 For we were born by mere chance,

and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been,

for the breath in our nostrils is smoke,

and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts;

3 when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes,

and the spirit will dissolve like empty air.

4 Our name will be forgotten in time,

and no one will remember our works;

our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud,

and be scattered like mist

that is chased by the rays of the sun

and overcome by its heat.

5 For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow,

and there is no return from our death,

because it is sealed up and no one turns back.

6 “Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist,

and make use of the creation to the full as in youth.

7 Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes,

and let no flower of spring pass us by.

8 Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither.

9 Let none of us fail to share in our revelry;

everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment,

because this is our portion, and this our lot.

* 1. “But Skehan attempts to refute the claim that Qohelet’s views lie behind this passage . . .” (Crenshaw 161 n 130)
  2. “. . . the author probably does not have Qoheleth in mind, as some have asserted.” (Murphy *Tree* 87)
  3. Wis 1:15, 3:4, 3:7-8 asserts judgment after death.

Wis 1:15, “righteousness is immortal.”

Wis 3:4, “their [the righteous’] hope is full of immortality.”

Wis 3:7-8, “In the time of their visitation they will shine forth,

and will run like sparks through the stubble.

8 They will govern nations and rule over peoples,

and the Lord will reign over them forever.”

* + 1. But the Book of Wisdom seems not to believe in afterlife for the wicked: “the wicked are considered not to live on . . .” (Murphy *Tree* 86)

# 9:11-12, Time and Chance

1. **text**

11 “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.

12 For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.”

1. **9**:**11**
   1. Qoh 9:11, “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.”
   2. “In the end, an unwelcome intrusion will suddenly terminate life” (Crenshaw 164)
2. **9**:**12**
   1. Qoh 9:12, “For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.”
   2. It is a “time of calamity” because death is always a calamity.
   3. “This observation about inability to ascertain times is the most poignant yet, for Qohelet’s earlier comments lacked the finality and pathos of this one. . . . The effort to find the right time for an action fails, and the trap closes unexpectedly and swiftly.” (Crenshaw 165)

# 9:13-18, Wasted Wisdom

1. **text**

13 I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.

14 There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.

15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.

16 So I said, “Wisdom is better than might; yet the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded.”

17 The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded

than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war,

but one bungler destroys much good.

# 10:1-20, Proverb Collection on Wisdom and Folly

1. **text**

1 Dead flies make the perfumer’s ointment give off a foul odor;

so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right,

but the heart of a fool to the left.

3 Even when fools walk on the road, they lack sense,

and show to everyone that they are fools.

4 If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post,

for calmness will undo great offenses.

5 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as great an error as if it proceeded from the ruler:

6 folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place.

7 I have seen slaves on horseback, and princes walking on foot like slaves.

8 Whoever digs a pit will fall into it;

and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a snake.

9 Whoever quarries stones will be hurt by them;

and whoever splits logs will be endangered by them.

10 If the iron is blunt, and one does not whet the edge,

then more strength must be exerted;

but wisdom helps one to succeed.

11 If the snake bites before it is charmed,

there is no advantage in a charmer.

12 Words spoken by the wise bring them favor,

but the lips of fools consume them.

13 The words of their mouths begin in foolishness,

and their talk ends in wicked madness;

14 yet fools talk on and on.

No one knows what is to happen,

and who can tell anyone what the future holds?

15 The toil of fools wears them out,

for they do not even know the way to town.

16 Alas for you, O land, when your king is a servant,

and your princes feast in the morning!

17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is a nobleman,

and your princes feast at the proper time—

for strength, and not for drunkenness!

18 Through sloth the roof sinks in,

and through indolence the house leaks.

19 Feasts are made for laughter;

wine gladdens life,

and money meets every need.

20 Do not curse the king, even in your thoughts,

or curse the rich, even in your bedroom;

for a bird of the air may carry your voice,

or some winged creature tell the matter.

# 11:1-6, The Element of Risk

1. **text**

1 Send out your bread upon the waters,

for after many days you will get it back.

2 Divide your means seven ways, or even eight,

for you do not know what disaster may happen on earth.

3 When clouds are full,

they empty rain on the earth;

whether a tree falls to the south or to the north,

in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

4 Whoever observes the wind will not sow;

and whoever regards the clouds will not reap.

5 Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother’s womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything.

6 In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hands be idle; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

# 11:7-12:7, Youth and Old Age

1. **text**

7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

8 Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

10 Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

1 Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”;

2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened

and the clouds return with the rain;

3 in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent,

and the women who grind cease working because they are few,

and those who look through the windows see dimly;

4 when the doors on the street are shut,

and the sound of the grinding is low,

and one rises up at the sound of a bird,

and all the daughters of song are brought low;

5 when one is afraid of heights,

and terrors are in the road;

the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails;

because all must go to their eternal home,

and the mourners will go about the streets;

6 before the silver cord is snapped,

and the golden bowl is broken,

and the pitcher is broken at the fountain,

and the wheel broken at the cistern,

7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was,

and the breath returns to God who gave it.

1. **11**:**7-12**:**7**
   1. This is “the concluding poem of the book . . .” (Crenshaw 26)
   2. light and darkness
      1. “. . . light characterizes youth . . .” (Crenshaw 182)
      2. Darkness characterizes “the waning years . . .” (Crenshaw 182)
   3. repetition
      1. There are two special verbs. Young men are to:
         1. “rejoice” in youth occurs twice (11:8, 9)
         2. “remember” old age occurs twice (11:8, 12:1)
      2. “before” occurs thrice (12:1, 2, 6) (Crenshaw 182)
      3. “vanity” occurs thrice (11:8, 10; 12:8) (Crenshaw 182)
2. **11**:**7**
   1. Qoh 11:7, “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.”
   2. related quotations
      1. Qoh 6:3, 5, “a stillborn child is better off . . . 5 it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he.” (“He” is a prosperous man who did not enjoy things.)
      2. Qoh 7:11, “Wisdom is as good as an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.”
      3. Isa 22:13b, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”
      4. Euripides (*Iphigenia in Aulis* 1.1219): “it is sweet to see the light.” (Qtd. in Crenshaw 183)
      5. Gilgamesh Epic (*ANET* 89): “Let mine eyes behold the sun that I may have my fill of the light! Darkness withdraws when there is enough light. May one who indeed is dead behold yet the radiance of the sun!” (Qtd. in Crenshaw 183)
      6. Homer (*Iliad* 17.645-47, Lattimore trans.): Telamonian Aias says, “Father Zeus, draw free from the mist the sons of the Achaians, / make bright the air, and give sight back to our eyes; in shining / daylight destroy us, if to destroy us be now your pleasure.”
3. **11**:**8**
   1. Qoh 11:8, “Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.
   2. “many years,” “days of darkness . . . many”
      1. “There is no intended contrast . . . [Both mean] an indefinite period, a long time.” (Crenshaw 183)
   3. “the days of darkness will be many”
      1. The many days are not old age [as in 12:1], since “there is no assurance that these days will be many . . .” (Crenshaw 183)
         1. Qoh 12:1, “Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them” . . .”
      2. The many days are Sheol: “the essential feature of Sheol [is] an absence of the warmth of the sun.” (Crenshaw 183)
      3. “. . . the days of darkness may include old age while focusing on one’s stay in Sheol.” (Crenshaw 183)
   4. “All that comes is vanity”
      1. This is “unrelieved pessimism: everything that the future holds in Sheol is utterly absurd.” (Crenshaw 183)
4. **11**:**9-10**
   1. 11:9-10 contain 6 imperatives.
      1. rejoice
      2. let your heart cheer you
      3. follow
      4. know
      5. banish
      6. put away
5. **11**:**9**
   1. Qoh 11:9, “Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”
   2. “judgment”
      1. “The reminder that God holds people responsible for their actions seems remarkably out of place . . .” (Crenshaw 27)
      2. “Gordis understands this verse as emphasizing the divine imperative to enjoy life . . . God will call you to account if you do not enjoy life to the height of your capacity.” (Crenshaw 184)
      3. More likely, 9 was “inserted to counteract Qohelet’s shocking advice. The entire tradition was on the side of the glossator.” (Crenshaw 184)
         1. E.g., Num 15:39, do “not follow the lust of your own heart and your own eyes.”
6. **11**:**10**
   1. Qoh 11:10, “Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.”
   2. 11:10 continues 11:9a; 11:9b is inserted between.
   3. “banish” and “put away”
      1. These are negative imperatives (vs. 11:9a’s positive imperatives, “rejoice” and “let your heart cheer you”).
   4. “anxiety” and “pain”
      1. Crenshaw translates “sorrow” and “suffering.”
      2. The first is mental; the second is physical.
   5. Eliminating anxiety and pain, “an individual stands a chance of blotting out the terrible specter of death.” (Crenshaw 184)
   6. “dawn”
      1. *Haššaḥarût* is essentially “blackness.”
         1. The Targum translates it, “the time of black hair.”
         2. But it may mean “dawn,” as in 1 Sam 9:26.
            1. 1 Sam 9:26, “Then at the break of dawn [‎שַּׁ֙חַר֙] Samuel called to Saul . . .”
            2. Holladay (366) says, “שַׁחַר: שָֽׁחַר (reddish) (light before) dawn.”
   7. “youth and the dawn of life are vanity”
      1. “But one can never quite achieve this goal.” (Of eliminating anxiety and pain and forgetting death.) (Crenshaw 184)
      2. And “The period when you can do these things is brief, . . . a puff of smoke.” (Crenshaw 184)
7. **12**:**1-7**

1 “Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”;

2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened

and the clouds return with the rain;

3 in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent,

and the women who grind cease working because they are few,

and those who look through the windows see dimly;

4 when the doors on the street are shut,

and the sound of the grinding is low,

and one rises up at the sound of a bird,

and all the daughters of song are brought low;

5 when one is afraid of heights,

and terrors are in the road;

the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails;

because all must go to their eternal home,

and the mourners will go about the streets;

6 before the silver cord is snapped,

and the golden bowl is broken,

and the pitcher is broken at the fountain,

and the wheel broken at the cistern,

7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was,

and the breath returns to God who gave it.”

* 1. “Several analyses of the poem in 11:7-12:7 have recently appeared, each with a distinctive perspective: Sawyer (1976), Gilbert, Witzenrath, Ogden (1984), and Crenshaw (1987).” (Crenshaw 26 n 7)
  2. structure
     1. 12:1-7 consists of 1 imperative clause, then 7 temporal clauses.
     2. 1a Remember your creator in the days of your youth,
     3. 1b before old age (+ 1 and)
     4. 1c when old age
     5. 2 before old age (+ 1 and)
     6. 3 when old age (+ 2 ands)
     7. 4 when old age (+ 3 ands)
     8. 5 when old age (+ 2 ands)
     9. 6-7 before death (+ 5 ands).
  3. The poem is all one sentence.
  4. tense
     1. The tense is present (with 2 futures).
  5. meter
     1. The meter is mostly 3 or (less often) 4 beats per line (occasionally 5, twice 2).
  6. imagery
     1. natural sun, light, moon, stars
     2. natural clouds, rain
     3. manmade village: guards, house, strong men, women who grind, those who look through windows, shut doors on the street, sound of grinding
     4. natural near village: bird sound, absence of birdsong, heights, road, almond trees, blossoms, grasshopper
     5. manmade village: mourners in streets, silver cord snapped, golden bowl broken, pitcher broken at fountain, wheel broken at cistern
     6. other eternal home, dust to earth, breath
     7. “The interplay of human and nonhuman images throughout this unit emphasizes the intimate association of humankind with nature. This link persists after . . . dust returns to the earth” and breath returns to God. (182)
  7. literal and figurative
     1. In 12:3-6, Qoheleth “compares old age and death to the collapse of an estate . . .” (Crenshaw 26)
        1. “Literal and symbolic language combine to depict the silencing of the inhabitants of a stately house.” (Crenshaw 26)
     2. He “contrasts the stormy, wintry darkness with nature’s rejuvenation in the springtime [2, 5b].” (Crenshaw 26)
  8. 12:1-7 (+ 8) is “a fitting conclusion to Qohelet . . .” (Crenshaw 183)
     1. Qoh 12:8, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.”

1. **12**:**1**
   1. Qoh 12:1, “Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them” . . .”
   2. 11:8, “Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.”
   3. “Qohelet addresses young persons” (Crenshaw 183)
      1. “Remember [in] your youth” can only be done by the young.
      2. “will say” is future tense (183)
   4. “creator”
      1. Is 12:1a a gloss?
         1. no
            1. 5:6 (“Do not let your mouth lead you into sin . . .; why should God be angry at your words”) gives “a religious motive for caution . . .” (Crenshaw 185)
         2. yes
            1. 5:6’s caution “is far removed from the piety of 12:1a.” (Crenshaw 185)
            2. “. . . allusion to God the Creator ill fits this context . . .” (Crenshaw 184)
            3. 5:6 interrupts the “natural sequence of thought from 11:10a to 12:lb (“banish vexation . . . remove pain . . . before the unwelcome days arrive”)” (Crenshaw 185)
      2. wife?
         1. emend Creator (*bôre*´*eykā*, MT) to “your well” (*be*´*ērekā*) = wife?
         2. Prov 5:15, 18, “Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well . . . rejoice in the wife of your youth . . .”
      3. grave?
         1. emend to “your pit” (*bôrekā*) = the grave?
      4. both?
         1. “A thinker of Qohelet’s complexity might well have chosen a word that suggests one’s greatest pleasure (the wife) and one’s ultimate destiny (the grave).” (Crenshaw 185)
      5. “More probably, he urges young people to reflect on the joys of female companionship before old age and death render one incapable of sensual pleasure.” (Crenshaw 185)
   5. “days . . . years”
      1. This reverses 11:8.
         1. Qoh 11:8, “Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.”
      2. “Both verses use the verb *zākar* (remember) and end on a gloomy note.” (Crenshaw 185)
2. **12**:**2**
   1. Qoh 12:2, “before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain . . .”
   2. sun, light, moon, stars
      1. Perhaps light is mentioned with sun, moon, and stars because “the sun and the light” is a hendiadys.
         1. Hendiadys is a figure of speech where one (Greek *hen*) is created through (*dia*) two (*duos*). Hendiadys is “one by means of two.” (*Random House Unabridged Dictionary* 2018)
         2. Instead of an adjective and a noun (“nicely warm”), one writes a noun “and” a noun (“nice and warm”).
      2. Perhaps light is mentioned with sun, moon, and stars because in Gen 1 light is separate from sun, moon, and stars.
         1. light: Gen 1:3-5
            1. Gen 1:3-5, “Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”
         2. sun, moon, stars: Gen 1:14-18
            1. Gen 1:14-16, “And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky . . .” 16 God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars.”
   3. “darkened”
      1. “Every source of light becomes dark . . .” (Crenshaw 185)
      2. Perhaps, on th figurative level, darkening is caused by the approaching storm. But on the literal level, darkening is caused by old age.
      3. “The darkness of death affects both slaves and owners, women and men.” (Crenshaw 26)
   4. clouds
      1. Darkening clouds may refer to glaucoma. (Crenshaw 185)
3. **12**:**3**
   1. Qoh 12:3, “in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly . . .”
   2. figurative level
      1. “If Qohelet has in mind the ruin of a house, the verse alludes to
         1. the discomfiture of its guardians,
         2. the bending of old backs,
         3. the inactivity of the grinding maids,
         4. and the darkening of the women whose status granted them [185] free time to watch from openings in the house.” (Crenshaw 185-86)
      2. “. . . four categories of people” alternate: “slaves—free men—slave women—women of substance . . .” (186)
      3. problem 1
         1. “Why do the slaves cease grinding because they are few in number? One would expect them to work all the more diligently . . .” (Crenshaw 186)
         2. Maybe the “residents in the house are few and need little food.” (Crenshaw 186)
      4. problem 2
         1. Why are the “women who look out the windows . . . darkened?” (Crenshaw 186)
         2. Are they in mourning garments?
         3. Are they old and going blind (young people have deserted the town)?
         4. Is the outside dim because of the approaching storm?
   3. literal level
      1. “If Qohelet has in mind the . . . body described as a house,” then
         1. “its keepers may be the hands,
         2. its valiant men the back,
         3. its grinding women the teeth,
         4. and the women who peer through the windows . . . the eyes.” (Crenshaw 186)
      2. problem 1
         1. “scholars cannot agree about the exact things represented by the several images.” (Crenshaw 186)
4. **12**:**4**
   1. Qoh 12:4, “when the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low . . .”
   2. 12:4a
      1. “doors”
         1. figurative: Plural “doors” is a problem: most houses had one door. (Crenshaw 186)
         2. literal: Plural “doors” is not a problem: it means ears or lips. (Crenshaw 186)
   3. 12:4b
      1. “rises up . . . sound”
         1. figurative: Old people are light sleepers and “awake at the chirping of birds.” (187)
         2. literal: This is the “rising pitch of elderly persons’ voices . . .” (Crenshaw 187)
      2. “daughters of song”
         1. figurative: “songbirds” or “dancing women who brought pleasure” (Crenshaw 187)
         2. literal: “feeble quality of the voice” (Crenshaw 187)
5. **12**:**5**
   1. Qoh 12:5, “when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because all must go to their eternal home, and the mourners will go about the streets . . .”
   2. 12:5b (almond tree, grasshopper)
      1. figurative: “the rapid growth of spring” (Crenshaw 187)
         1. In spring, “almonds blossom . . .” (Crenshaw 187)
         2. “. . . locusts eat so much that they can barely drag themselves along . . .” (Crenshaw 187)
         3. “. . . caperberries burst from growth . . .” (Crenshaw 187)
            1. The LXX, Peshitta, Vulgate have “caperberries” rather than “sexual desire.”
            2. Caperberries are “a stimulant [187] of the appetite . . .” (Crenshaw 187-88)
         4. The figurative level has “stark contrast between the deterioration of a house [12:4] and the fresh birth of nature [12:5b] . . .” (Crenshaw 187)
         5. The literal level means “Human beings die and nature is unconcerned . . .” (Crenshaw 187)
            1. “Nature’s callous face turns to the living birds and plants, wholly unmoved by the human plight.” (Crenshaw 26)
      2. literal: “the deterioration of the human body” (Crenshaw 187)
         1. “The almond tree blossoms” means “the hair turns white . . .” (Crenshaw 187)
         2. “The grasshopper drags itself along means “the limbs are stiff and creak . . .” (Crenshaw 187)
         3. And “sexual desire fades.” (187)
            1. The Targum and Mishnah have “sexual desire” (not “caperberries”).
            2. A lack of reference elsewhere “to dwindling sexual desire in the description of old age makes this an attractive reading . . .” (Crenshaw 188)
            3. There are 2 abrupt beats (not the usual 3 or 4).
            4. There is an abrupt abstraction after many concretions.
            5. The figurative level drops away: only a literal statement remains.
            6. “Desire fails” is the tipping point between old age that precedes (12:1-5c) and death that follows (12:5c-7).
            7. That death follows desire failing fits Qoheleth’s emphasis on simple pleasures making life worthwhile.
   3. 12:5c (eternal home, mourners)
      1. “Because” breaks the temporal-clause pattern.
      2. “eternal home”: Literally “house of eternity” (*bêt* `*ôlām*) (Crenshaw 188)
      3. “As professional mourners begin their march, readers perceive that the procession takes place outside their doors too.” (Crenshaw 26)
6. **12**:**6**
   1. Qoh 12:6, “before the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern . . .”
   2. These are “exquisite images . . .” (Crenshaw 182)
   3. “Two images seem to occur here:
      1. the breaking of a bowl after the cord that held it on the wall has snapped,
      2. and the smashing of a vessel after the pulley that assisted in raising and lowering the jar has shattered.
      3. The relation between these metaphors is not clear.” (Crenshaw 187)
      4. “Exquisite images portray the actual silencing of humankind:
         1. “an expensive lamp falling from the wall, spilling its vital liquid,
         2. “and a pulley breaking at a well, shattering the container into pieces and spilling its contents.
         3. Priceless commodities come to ruin: silver, gold, light, water.” (Crenshaw 26)
   4. “silver cord”
      1. The Greek muses severed a cord that was the thread of life. (Crenshaw 188)
   5. “fountain”
      1. “. . . a fountain in disrepair suggests that the water of life can no longer be drawn . . .” (Crenshaw 188)
7. **12**:**7**
   1. Qoh 12:7, “and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.”
   2. “dust returns to the earth”
      1. Gen 3:19, “you shall . . . return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
   3. “breath returns to God”
      1. Gen 2:7, “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”
   4. “The allusion to Gen. 2:7 and 3:19 does not contradict Qohelet’s earlier denial that the human spirit ascends to God and the animal life [188] principle descends to the earth.” (Crenshaw 188-89)
      1. Qoh 3:19-21, “For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21 Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth?”
   5. God “now sucks the breath back out.” (Crenshaw 189)

# 12:8, Statement of Theme (*Inclusio*)

1. **text**
   1. Qoh 12:8, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.”
2. **1**:**2 and 12**:**8**
   1. 12:8 is a variant of 1:2.
      1. Qoh 1:2, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”
   2. With 1:2 it forms an inclusio. (Crenshaw 183)
      1. “This unforgettable refrain unifies the entire book: from first to last nothing profits those who walk under the sun.” (Crenshaw 35)
   3. “says the Qoheleth”
      1. In both 1:2 and 12:8, ““says the Qohelet” underlines the fact that the third person occurs here instead of the teacher’s customary first-person address.” (Crenshaw 35)
      2. “This allusion to “the Qohelet” also emphasizes that a title rather than a name occurs here.” (Crenshaw 35)

# 12:9-14, Epilogues

1. **The epilogues are not by Qoheleth**.
   1. The book of Qoheleth concludes with two epilogues, 12:9-11 and 12:12-14.
   2. Someone other than Qoheleth wrote the epilogues. (Also in the superscription, 1:1.)
      1. True, “The style is generally consistent with Qohelet’s . . .” (Crenshaw 189)
      2. But Qoh 1:1 and 12:9 are in third person.
         1. Qoh 1:1, “The words of the Teacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”
         2. Qoh 12:9, “the Teacher also taught the people knowledge . . .”
      3. Qoh 12:13, “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.”
      4. And 12:12-14 contradict what Qoheleth mostly says elsewhere.
   3. The date (of both epilogues?) is soon after 200 bc. (Crenshaw 34)
2. **why divide the epilogues**
   1. Each epilogue begins (12:9, 12:12) with *weyōtēr*.
      1. This can means “besides, in addition to.” (Crenshaw 189)
      2. This can mean “furthermore.” (Crenshaw 190)
   2. differences in style
      1. 12:9-11: no imperatives (Crenshaw 190)
      2. 12:12-14: “Imperatives return” (Crenshaw 190)
   3. differences in content
      1. 12:9-11: devoted to Qoheleth
      2. 12:12-14: suspicious of Qoheleth
      3. 12:9-11: “focuses on the professional activity of Qohelet and the nature of his teaching.” (189)
      4. 12:12-14: “the intellectual process [is] endless and exhausting . . . and [it] warns [of] judgment day” (189)
   4. how divide epilogues
      1. 12:9-11 and 12:12-14 (Crenshaw 189, 190)
      2. 12:9-12 and 12:13-14 (Crenshaw 24)
         1. “. . . the second epilogue [is] 12:13-14 . . .” (Crenshaw 24)
         2. This is probably a mistake.
            1. 12:12 contains the phrase, “my child, beware.”
            2. Crenshaw later states that the second epilogist “claims the authority of a teacher over students (“my son, be warned”) . . .” (Crenshaw 190)

## 12:9-11, First Epilogue

1. **text**
   1. Qoh 12:9-11, “Besides being wise, the Teacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs. 10 The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly. 11 The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings that are given by one shepherd.”
2. **12**:**9-11**
   1. The first epilogist is “a devoted student who reflects on Qohelet’s activity.” (Crenshaw 190)
      1. He praises Qoheleth for “compositional integrity and elegance.” (Crenshaw 190)
      2. He judges Qoheleth’s “pessimistic tone and realistic truth . . . positively.” (Crenshaw 190)
3. **12**:**9**
   1. Qoh 12:9, “Besides being wise, the Teacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs.”
   2. “wise”
      1. Literally “sage.” Crenshaw translates, “In addition to being a wise man”
      2. A sage educated youth. (Crenshaw 190)
      3. *ḥākām* (sage)
         1. “I agree with Whybray (1974) that the majority of references to *ḥakāmîm* in the Hebrew Bible do not refer to professional wise men, but I think the term *ḥākām* (and its plural) eventually came to mean a sage. This meaning is probably present in the superscriptions within the book of Proverbs, the epilogue to Qohelet, and in Sirach. Beyond these instances, one needs to consider each case on its own merits. For example, I believe Qohelet uses the technical term in 8:17.” (Crenshaw 34 n 16)
         2. “This term had become a technical one by the time of the epilogue’s composition early in the second century b.c.e.” (Crenshaw 34)
   3. “the people”: *hā*`*ām*, “ordinary people” (Crenshaw 190)
   4. “weighing and studying and arranging”
      1. “Three verbs describe his research” (Crenshaw 190)
      2. “studying”: *ḥiqqēr* is carefully considering complexity (Crenshaw 190)
      3. “arranging”: in 1:15, 7:13, and Sir 47:9, “setting something straight” (Crenshaw 190)
   5. “proverbs”
      1. “Proverbs” (*mešālîm*) “applies poorly to [Ecclesiastes], but the word can have much broader range.” (191)
4. **12**:**10**
   1. Qoh 12:10, “The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly.”
   2. “pleasing words”: “bring delight to those who hear them” (Crenshaw 191)
   3. “pleasing words [and] words of truth”: emphasis on “elegance” and “truth,” “aesthetics” and “reliability” (191)
   4. “plainly”: “faithfully” (Crenshaw 191)
   5. “Many readers [disagree] that Qohelet’s observations are both pleasing and truthworthy.” (Crenshaw 191)
5. **12**:**11**
   1. Qoh 12:11, “The sayings of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings that are given by one shepherd.”
   2. “sayings of the wise”: see superscriptions in Prov 24:23, 30:1, 31:1, and (probably) 22:17 (Crenshaw 191)
   3. “wise” = *ḥakāmîm*, so all sages’ sayings are goads, are collected. But Qoheleth’s are also uniquely:
      1. *goads*: Qoheleth’s “pessimistic tone and realistic truth . . . prod one to think more profoundly” (Crenshaw 190)
      2. *fixed*: “they act as fixed points of reference, for they derive from a single source (one shepherd).” (Crenshaw 190)
   4. “one shepherd”
      1. Solomon or God, since “shepherd was used for royalty and for God, both in Israel and in Egypt” (Crenshaw 191)
      2. If God, “The claim of divine origin for wisdom literature goes beyond anything else in canonical wisdom [though] Ben Sira comes close to it.” (Crenshaw 191)

## 12:12-14, Second Epilogue

1. **text**
   1. Qoh 12:12-14, “Of anything beyond these, my child, beware. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. 13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”
2. **12**:**12-14**
   1. “. . . the second epilogue differs sharply from his [Qoheleth’s] thought.” (Crenshaw 190)
   2. “The second epilogue seems to be the work of a detractor who thinks of Qohelet’s teachings as inadequate and perhaps perverse.” (Crenshaw 190)
   3. “A sense of urgency fills the air (“be warned, fear, keep,” and possibly “let us all hear”).” (Crenshaw 190)
   4. The second epilogist “claims the authority of a teacher over students (“my son, be warned”)” (Crenshaw 190)
3. **12**:**12**
   1. Qoh 12:12, “Of anything beyond these, my child, beware. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”
   2. “these”
      1. “Qohelet’s sayings or the entire wisdom tradition? The author probably intended the latter, warning against an open attitude toward the canon.” (Crenshaw 191)
   3. “my child”
      1. “the only occurrence of *benî* (my son) in the book” (Crenshaw 190)
      2. the word for disciple in wisdom schools
   4. “Because of [our] limited knowledge of schools in ancient Israel,” we refer to “conventional wisdom” “rather than . . . the wisdom of the schools.” (Crenshaw 29)
4. **12**:**13**
   1. Qoh 12:13, “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.”
   2. “end of the matter”
      1. *sôp dābār*, Literally “end of the word”
      2. “a colophon marking the end of the discourse, to which a pious glossator added the rest of the verse and the last verse of the book[?] Such markers . . . are common in ancient Near Eastern literature.” (Crenshaw 192)
   3. “all has been heard”
      1. Greek and Coptic: “hear everything”
      2. Vulgate “let us all hear”
      3. “pausal pointing suggests . . . “Everything has been heard.”” (Crenshaw 192)
   4. “whole duty”
      1. “one must supply something like “duty.”” (Crenshaw 192)
      2. Whitley “thinks the original was probably *kelāl* (general rule, principle)” (Crenshaw 192)
5. **12**:**14**
   1. Qoh 12:14, “For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”
   2. “judgment”
      1. 11:9, follow “the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.”
   3. “secret thing”
      1. “God will uncover the hidden villainies and the secret deeds of charity. This comforting word for good people and frightening word for sinners is, again, totally alien to Qohelet’s thinking.” (Crenshaw 192)
6. **12**:**13 repeated**
   1. “The Massoretes repeated v. 13 after 14 in order to make the book end on a positive note. . . . Few people can endure . . . the conclusion that life is utterly futile!” (Crenshaw 192)
   2. “They did the same thing at the end of Isaiah, the Minor Prophets, and Lamentations. Few people can endure words of relentless wrath.” (Crenshaw 192)

### Qoheleth Verses grouped by themes

# References to God

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1:13 | “. . . it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with.” | *negative* |
| 2:24-26 | “There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; 25for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? 26For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.” | *conventional* |
| 3:10-15 | “I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with.  11He has made everything suitable for its time;  moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.  12I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; 13moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.  14I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. 15That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.” | *neutral*  *conventional*  *negative*  *conventional*  *neutral* |
| 3:17-18 | “I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.  18I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals.” | *conventional*  *negative* |
| 5:1-7 | “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil.  2Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few. 3For dreams come with many cares, and a fool’s voice with many words.  4When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow. 5It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfill it.  6Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?  7With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God.” | *conventional*  *conventional*  *conventional*  *conventional*  *conventional* |
| 5:18-6:2 | “This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot. 19Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God. 20For they will scarcely brood over the days of their lives, because God keeps them occupied with the joy of their hearts.  6:1There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind: 2those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous ill.” | *conventional*  *negative* |
| 7:13-14 | “Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?  14In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other,  so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.” | *negative*  *conventional*  *negative* |
| 7:15-18 | “In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evil-doing. 16Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself? 17Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time? 18It is good that you should take hold of the one, without letting go of the other; for the one who fears God shall succeed with both.” | *negative* |
| 7:26 | “I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.” | *conventional* |
| 7:29 | “See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.” | *conventional* |
| 8:12-13 | “Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him, 13but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.” | *conventional* |
| 8:15 | “So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.” | *neutral* |
| 8:17 | “I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun.” | *negative* |
| 9:1 | “. . . the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know.” | *negative* |
| 9:7 | “Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do.” | *negative* |
| 11:5 | “Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother’s womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything.” | *negative* |
| 11:9 | “Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” | *conventional* |
| 12:7 | “. . . the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.” | *conventional* |
| 12:13-14 | “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. 14For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.” | *conventional* |

# Instances of “Vanity”

1:2, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

1:14, “I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

2:1, ““I will make a test of pleasure . . .” But again, this also was vanity.”

2:11, “I considered all that my hands had done and the toil . . ., and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”

2:15, ““What happens to the fool will happen to me also; why then have I been so very wise?” And I said to myself that this also is vanity.”

2:17, “I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

2:19, “they [who come after] will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.”

2:21, “sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.”

2:23, “all their [mortals’] days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.”

2:26, “to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

3:19, “the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same . . ., and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity.”

4:4, “all toil and all skill in work come from one person’s envy of another. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

4:7-8, “Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 8the case of solitary individuals, without sons or brothers; yet there is no end to all their toil, and their eyes are never satisfied with riches. “For whom am I toiling,” they ask, “and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.”

4:16, “there was no end to all those people whom he [a youth who replaced the king] led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

5:10, “The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.”

6:1-2, “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind: 2those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous ill.”

6:4, “[a stillborn child] comes into vanity and goes into darkness, and in darkness its name is covered;”

6:9, “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire; this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

6:11, “The more words, the more vanity, so how is one the better?”

7:6, “like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools; this also is vanity.”

8:10, “I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity.”

8:14, “There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.”

9:1-2, “Everything that confronts them [the righteous and wise] 2is vanity, since the same fate comes to all . . .”

11:8, “Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.”

11:10, “Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.”

12:8, “Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.”

# Instances of “Chasing the Wind”

10 instances

1:14, “I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

1:17, “And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind.”

2:11, “Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”

2:17, “So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

2:26, “to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

4:4, “all toil and all skill in work come from one person’s envy of another. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

4:6, “Better is a handful with quiet than two handfuls with toil, and a chasing after wind.”

4:16, “there was no end to all those people whom he [a youth who replaced the king] led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

5:16, “This also is a grievous ill: just as they came, so shall they go; and what gain do they have from toiling for the wind?”

6:9, “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire; this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

# Instances of “Under the Sun”

29 instances

1:3, “What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?”

1:9, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun.”

1:14, “I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

2:11, “Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.”

2:17-20, “So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind. 18 I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me 19 --and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. 20 So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil of my labors under the sun,”

2:22, “What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun?”

3:16, “Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well.”

4:1, “Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed--with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power--with no one to comfort them.”

4:3, “but better than both is the one who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.”

4:7, “Again, I saw vanity under the sun:”

4:15, “I saw all the living who, moving about under the sun, follow that youth who replaced the king;”

5:13, “There is a grievous ill that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owners to their hurt,”

5:18, “This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot.”

6:1, “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind:”

6:12, “For who knows what is good for mortals while they live the few days of their vain life, which they pass like a shadow? For who can tell them what will be after them under the sun?”

8:9, “All this I observed, applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while one person exercises authority over another to the other's hurt.”

8:15, “So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.”

8:17, “then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun. However much they may toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out.”

9:3, “This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”

9:6, “Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished; never again will they have any share in all that happens under the sun.”

9:9, “Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.”

9:11, “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.”

9:13, “I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me.”

10:5, “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as great an error as if it proceeded from the ruler . . .”

# The Problem of Evil

3:16-18, “Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well. 17 I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work. 18 I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals.”

4:1-3, “Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them. 2 And I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive; 3 but better than both is the one who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.”

4:13-16, “Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king, who will no longer take advice. 14 One can indeed come out of prison to reign, even though born poor in the kingdom. 15 I saw all the living who, moving about under the sun, follow that youth who replaced the king; 16 there was no end to all those people whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

5:8, “If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and right, do not be amazed at the matter; for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.”

5:17, “all their days they eat in darkness, in much vexation and sickness and resentment.”

7:7, “Surely oppression makes the wise foolish, and a bribe corrupts the heart.”

7:13-18, “Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked? 14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them. 15 In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evil-doing. 16 Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself? 17 Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you should take hold of the one, without letting go of the other; for the one who fears God shall succeed with both.”

7:29, “See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.”

8:9-14, “All this I observed, applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while one person exercises authority over another to the other’s hurt. 10 Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things. This also is vanity. 11 Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human heart is fully set to do evil. 12 Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him, 13 but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God. 14 There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.”

9:2-3, “the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath. 3 This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”

9:11-12, “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all. 12 For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.”

10:16-17, “Alas for you, O land, when your king is a servant, and your princes feast in the morning! 17 Happy are you, O land, when your king is a nobleman, and your princes feast at the proper time—for strength, and not for drunkenness!”

# Qoheleth’s Conclusion: Enjoy Simple Pleasures

Qoh 2:24-25, “There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?”

Qoh 3:12-13, “I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; 13 moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.”

Qoh 3:22, “So I saw that there is nothing better than that all should enjoy their work, for that is their lot; who can bring them to see what will be after them?”

Qoh 5:18-19, “This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot. 19 Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God.”

Qoh 7:13-14, “Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked? 14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.”

Qoh 7:26, “I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.”

Qoh 8:15, “So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.”

Qoh 9:7-10, “Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. 8 Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. 9 Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”

Qoh 11:7-10, “Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. 8 Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity. 9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. 10 Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.”

# Appendices

# Three *Carpe Diem* Poems

## Even Such Is Time

Raleigh, Walter. “Even Such Is Time.” *Prerogative of Parliaments*, 1628. Lumenarium. 3 Jan. 2006. <http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/evensuch.htm>.

Even such is time, that takes on trust

Our youth, our joys, our all we have,

And pays us but with earth and dust;

Who, in the dark and silent grave,

When we have wandered all our ways,

Shuts up the story of our days;

But from this earth, this grave, this dust

My God shall raise me up, I trust!

## To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Herrick, Robert. “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time.” C. 1650. *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250–1900*. Ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch. Oxford: OUP, 1919.

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,

  Old Time is still a-flying:

And this same flower that smiles to-day

  To-morrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun, 5

  The higher he ‘s a-getting,

The sooner will his race be run,

  And nearer he ‘s to setting.

That age is best which is the first,

  When youth and blood are warmer; 10

But being spent, the worse, and worst

  Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,

  And while ye may, go marry:

For having lost but once your prime, 15

  You may for ever tarry.

## On a Fly Drinking Out of His Cup

Oldys, William. “On a Fly Drinking out of His Cup.” Book of Days. 3 Jan. 2006. <http://www.­thebookofdays.com/months/april/15.htm>.

Busy, curious, thirsty fly!

Drink with me, and drink as I!

Freely welcome to my cup,

Couldst thou sip and sip it up;

Make the most of life you may: 5

Life is short and wears away.

Both alike are mine and thine,

Hastening quick to their decline!

Thine's a summer, mine no more,

Though repeated to threescore! 10

Threescore summers, when they're gone,

Will appear as short as one!

William Oldys “rummaged old book-stalls undisturbed, made his honest notes, collected materials for mighty works contemplated, jotted down gentle indignation at unworthy treatment in endless diaries, and left all these invaluable treasures at his death to be scattered and lost and destroyed. . . . he grows melancholy about his work, and sets down a pious misgiving,—‘he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them.’[[1]](#footnote-1) In sadder mood still, he includes the contents in a quaint couplet:

‘Fond treasurer of these stores, behold thy fate

In Psalm the thirty-ninth, 6, 7, and 8.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

## Is Qoheleth in Heaven?

Quotations from Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*

(*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*) § 16

On adherents of non-Christian religions: “Nor is God Himself far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and every other gift [Acts 17:25-28], and who as Savior wills that all men be saved [1 Tim 2:4].”

On non-religious persons who seek God: “Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.”

On non-religious persons unaware of God: “Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good and truth is found among them . . . is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.”

On non-religious persons opposed to God: “But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings . . . [or] are exposed to final despair. . . . [To] procure the salvation of all of these, . . . the Church fosters the missions with care and attention.”

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Murphy, Roland E., O. Carm. *Seven Books of Wisdom*. Impact Books. Milwaukee: Bruce, 1960.

1. Qoh 2:18, 22, 26; 6:1-2, “I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me . . . 21sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. . . . 26to the sinner he [God] gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. . . . 6:1There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy upon humankind: 2those to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that they lack nothing of all that they desire, yet God does not enable them to enjoy these things, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous ill.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ps 39:5-7 mt (= 6-8 Vg), “You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight. Surely everyone stands as a mere breath. Selah 6 Surely everyone goes about like a shadow. Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; they heap up, and do not know who will gather. 7 “And now, O Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)