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KOHELET - DID HE STAND ALONE?

by

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of the requirements for Ordination

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אני מרגש שכמה שני חיי עברו בהכנות העבודה הזאת.
במשך השנים האלו למדתי מהרבה אנשים. עלי להודות
להם: אמי ואבי, הרב רונלד סובל, והרב דניאל פוגל
שהם הקימו את יסוד אמונתי. אני גם רוצה להודות
למורי בהיברו אויון קולג' ובמקומות אחרים. ביניהם
היו שנים שהשפיעו עלי ביותר. הראשון היה דר. ג'מס
פרויס באוניברסיטת בוסהון. הוא הציג לי את הלמוד
המדעי של התנ"ך. והשני הוא הרב דוד וויסברג שהוא
החבר אשר קניווי.

החבור הזה מוקדש לרעיוני יוכבד. היא למדה אותי שמקרה
בני האדם ומקרה הבהמה ומקרים שונים להם כי עזה
כמות אהבה קשה כשאל קנאה.

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DIGEST

This thesis is divided into three sections: the introduction, the main body, and the conclusion. The main body is further subdivided into two sections.

The introduction deals with the methodology of the thesis. This consists of my disposition in studying the book and the mode of my study. I will attempt to understand the book within its literary and cultural setting with an eye toward realizing what makes Kohelet different. This work I will carry out both by investigating selected passages from Kohelet and by examining the whole of his message.

The first section of the main body contains three investigations into selected passages. The first chapter deals with 7:15-22. This is a passage which contains a variety of familiar literary and thematic elements. Kohelet uses these elements to highlight a new problem. That is the righteous person who suffers because of his righteousness. Kohelet has contrasted the righteous man against the wicked to indicate the limits of righteousness. This investigation by Kohelet helps the reader to understand the best way to lead the righteous life.

Kohelet's use of language is traditional as is his basic morality, yet the subject of this passage points to his uniqueness.

The next chapter deals with 6:1-6. Again in this passage Kohelet makes use of traditional elements, within a formal structure.

Here Kohelet's imagery when comparing the best and the worst of possible human existences is particularly vivid. As in 7:15-22 the comparison is employed in order to point to a weakness in the life-style we might assume to be superior. Kohelet's sharply worded point is that the "good" life without enjoyment is worse than the worst possible existence.

Kohelet employed traditional elements to make a statement all his own. In addition the suspenseful style, structure and vivid imagery of this passage point to Kohelet's homiletical talents.

The third chapter is concerned with the proverbs found in Kohelet. In the book proverbs are found in a wide variety of situations, which indicate Kohelet's artistry. Of particular interest are 9:13-10:1 wherein a series of proverbs concludes a passage and 7:10 which is a passage centered around a series of similarly constructed proverbs. This type of proverb is used by Kohelet throughout the book in a creative manner.

Kohelet's wide and varied use of proverbs points to his artistry in general and his homiletical talents in particular.

Part two of the main body consists of two chapters. The first of these deals with understanding Kohelet's message. Initially Kohelet's relation to other biblical wisdom writers is investigated. As we move from this study we are able to understand Kohelet's motivation for writing the book as well as the significance of his message. This in turn yields insight to understand Kohelet, the thinker.

The fifth chapter deals with the book's relation to Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. Kohelet shared much with Ancient Near Eastern wisdom writers. His style, the forms in which he framed his message and the type of intellectual activity in which he was engaged, were similar to many of these writers. However Kohelet's understanding of his world and his own purposes in writing his work differed greatly from that of these other writers.

Therefore I conclude that although Kohelet shared much in common with his world and spoke from within that context, his artistry and thinking went beyond that which preceded him and indeed he did stand alone.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this thesis is to determine on one hand the level and nature of dependence of Kohelet upon other authors and traditions. On the other hand I seek to determine the nature and extent of Kohelet's independence from those sources. I have summed up this quest in the title: "Kohelet - Did He Stand Alone?"

In general I directed my studies along the following lines. My approach to the book of Kohelet will take advantage of the one point of agreement among those who have studied the book, that being the book's complexity. Scholarship through the ages has sought to explain this complexity. Several times multiple author (or contributor) theories have been put forth. Various authors would have a variety of experiences, objectives and literary talents. Together they have created the complexity of Kohelet, though perhaps confusion would be the better objective here. Others have heard two voices in the words of Kohelet engage in dialogue. More recently great man theories have been put forth. It is thought that Kohelet is essentially a book written by one man, though the Book is not necessarily a unified essay. This single Kohelet embodies the qualities attributed to multiple Kohelets. He must have been a worldly individual acquainted with much of the thought of his day, skilled in a variety of literary genres, and steeped in the traditions of Israel. (Looking back we can speculate that the tradition claiming Solomonic authorship for the book may be rooted in this kind of thinking.)

The conclusions about the book of Kohelet which these approaches reach stem from a relationship between the words of Kohelet and the Kohelets who wrote them along with their worlds. My approach's understanding will stem from a relationship between the elements found in the book and their appearance in other literature. I will employ the following model in my work. The book of Kohelet can be conceptualized as a geometric plane upon which a number of solid objects intersect. These solids represent the elements present in Kohelet. We find among the elements poetry, discourse, aphoristic wisdom, homily and parable. We also find pessimism, guidance, observations and rebukes. These elements are observed as they pass through the plane of Kohelet. On the plane God is seen taunting man with eternity and making available that which is required for human happiness. The natural order remembers man in life but forgets him in death.

When the various elements pass through the plane they leave their impression. At the same time the plane, as the medium upon which these impressions are made, is not a passive receptacle. Rather the plane determines the form in which an impression will appear. (This is comparable to a cloud chamber, in which sub-atomic particles are observed. The particles themselves are not seen; only the image they create when passing through the chamber is visible.) Turning to the book for an example one could make this tentative conclusion. The book of Kohelet is not a treatise of Greek Philosophy. Yet reflections of Greek thought may make their appearance in Kohelet, and the form they take will be determined by the plane. Returning

to the geometric model, any passage from the book can be represented by a line segment belonging to the plane. Through it pass planes of the elemental solids.

The goal of this thesis is to discover something about the book of Kohelet by reflecting the elements we observe in the book (plane) against the background of two apparent sources of these elements, the Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Traditions. This is a two-part process. First, I will seek out other sources of the elements found in Kohelet. This will help me postulate the ways in which Kohelet is dependent upon these traditions. Second, I will seek to understand the uniqueness in the way the elements appear in Kohelet.

In particular my work divides itself into two parts. First, I carried out these three investigations into the text. These studies concern themselves with one area of Kohelet's work. The first two deal only with single passages, while the third traces the use of proverbs throughout the book. These chapters represent original work by the author and embody his original translations as does the whole of the thesis. Second, I wrote two chapters which utilize the results of the first part and other considerations to determine the nature of Kohelet's message and artistry and its relation to other biblical wisdom works and the wisdom writings of the Ancient Near East.

In this effort an assumption operates. I will assume that the Book of Kohelet can be studied without the necessity of deleting large portions of the book as later additions. Recent scholarship

has been moving in this direction and I will begin my work from this point. One scholar, Michael Fox, whose work will be discussed at length below, has concluded that even those passages which point directly to an editor (1:2, 7:27 and 12:8 ff.) do not point to an editor, but point to a clever author. This author composed the book as a frame-narrative. My assumption, which skirts the problem with which Fox deals, allows me to carry out my research into the plane of Kohelet in the most fruitful manner.

Similarly I have not attempted to make a definitive division of the book into passages or to identify a formal structure in the book. When I quote a passage I do so to understand how it operates in consideration of my method. I believe that these passages can be studied as discrete units yet they may belong to larger passages.

CHAPTER I

THE LIMITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Let us begin our discussion of Kohelet with a look at his view of the common biblical theme of righteousness. 7:15-22 contain an examination of this subject.

This passage has two parts. Verses 15-18 deal with the question of proper human behavior in the context of dangers inherent in both good and evil. Then in verses 19-22 Kohelet illustrates his point.

Examining the first four verses three things strike my eye: the parallel structure contained in these verses, the mention of the success which evil may bring and the balance between evil and righteousness kept throughout the passage.

I

Verses 15b through 18b are composed of three parallel lines:

יש צדיק אבד בצדקו //
ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו

There is a righteous man lost in his righteousness//
and there is a wicked man increased through his evil.

אל-תהי צדיק הרבה ואל-תהחכם יותר למה תשומם //
אל-תרשע הרבה ואל-תהי סכל למה תמות בלא עתך

Don't be too much the righteous one, or act overly wise.
Why destroy yourself?//
Be neither overly wicked nor be a fool. Why die before
your time?

טוב אשר תאחז בזה //
וגם-מזה אל-תנח את-ידך

It is good that you take hold of this one//
but also from that one don't remove your hand.

The elegant style of these couplets is obvious. The repetition of יש in verse 15, which is cast in an exacting rhythmical parallel style, introduces the two subjects of the passage. Verses 16 and 17 are parallel.¹ In addition 16a is parallel to 16b as 17a is parallel to 17b. Kohelet's style is further enhanced by the reversal of the verbal forms in the a and b parts of these verses. Then in both verses a dark admonition is introduced with למה. The use of זה twice in verse 18 with two different antecedents, almost conflating the two, brings resolution.

II

In verse 15c a great theological problem of biblical Judaism is presented.

ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו

There are evil people who become wealthy and powerful through their evil. That this was a problem for Kohelet is evidenced in 8:10.

ובכן ראיתי רשעים קברים ובאו וממקום קדוש יהלכו
וישתכחו בעיר אשר כן-עשו גם-זה הבל

And also I saw evil people buried and gone.
Then from the holy place others walk and praise
(them) in the city where they did (evil). This
too is hevel.²

Again in verse 14 Kohelet outlines the problem

יש-הבל אשר נעשה על-הארץ אשר
יש צדיקים אשר מגיע אלהם כמעשה הרשעים
ויש רשעים שמגיע אלהם כמעשה הצדיקים
אמרתי שגם-זה הבל

There is a hevel which is done on the earth that there are righteous people who are fated according to the way of the wicked and there are wicked people who are fated according to the way of the righteous. I think this also is hevel.

Job too laments the good fortunes of the wicked in his speech in chapter 21 of his book. Job says in verses 7 and 8,

מדוע רשעים יחיו עתקו גם-גברו חיל
זרעם נכון לפניהם עתם וצאצאיהם לעיניהם

Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? Their children are established in their presence and their offspring before their eyes.

Babylonian wisdom writers were also in touch with this problem.

In the Babylonian Theodicy, a dialogue between a sufferer and a consoling friend reminiscent of Job, the sufferer laments the success of evil as against the troubles of the honest man.

People extol the word of a strong man who is trained in murder, but bring down the powerless who has done no wrong. They confirm the wicked whose crime is [. . .] yet suppress⁴ the honest man who heeds the will of his god.

Not surprisingly the friend is unable to refute this. Anger over the good fortune of the wicked predates in the biblical tradition wisdom inquiry into it. The prophet Micah, who prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah in Jerusalem during the second half of the eighth century and the beginning of the seventh, prophesied in Judea against the wicked who are powerful and use their power to enrich themselves.

הוי חשבי-און ופעלי רע על-משכבותם
באור הבקר יעשוה כי יש-לא אל ידם
וחמדו שדות וגזלו ובתים ונשאו
ועשקו גבר וביתו ואיש ונחלתו

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil upon their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and seize them; and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. (2:1-2)

A few years earlier the prophet Amos prophesied in the Northern Kingdoms in a similar vein.

לכן יען בושטכם על-דל ומשאה-בר תקחו ממנו
בתי גזית בניתם ולא-חשבו בם
כרמי-חמד נטעוכם ולא השתו את-ייןכם
חי ידעתי רבים פשעיכם ועצמים חטאתיכם
צרי צדיק לקחי כפר ואביונים בשער הטו

Therefore because you trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins--you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate. (5:11;12)

Also striking is the b part of verse 15 which presents a new problem generated by good.

יש צדיק אבד בצדקו

There is a righteous person lost in his righteousness.

This problem should not be confused with the problem of the unrewarded righteous person in the face of the wealthy wicked. Kohelet mentions this problem in 8:14. This kind of person is afflicted with a bad fate despite his righteous life. In the passage now under consideration the righteous is done harm because of his righteousness not in spite of it. This is a new problem and set as it is against a more familiar problem it draws our attention. Kohelet is showing

himself as more than simply a reaction to his heritage. The problem of the well off wicked is present yet it functions to highlight a new problem.

III

The third feature of this passage which strikes my eye is the balance of antithetic ideas contained in each of the three pairs of parallel lines. Ernest Horton Jr. in his article "Kohelet's Concept of Opposites" brought attention to these pairs in Kohelet.⁵ He compares Kohelet's concept of opposites to concepts of opposites found in Greek, Far Eastern and Ancient Near Eastern literatures. Of particular interest to us are his conclusions concerning the Greek and Ancient Near Eastern materials. Horton finds little to connect these materials to Kohelet. He finds no development in Kohelet of any sort of "mystical cord" connecting opposites in a "neat complete pattern" as in Greek thought and he finds nothing in the Ancient Near Eastern material worthy of comparison.⁶ Nevertheless Horton does find a relationship between Kohelet and the Greek philosophers in as much as they deal with the same issues. Such a relationship may be causal to some extent or it may be coincidental. The possibility exists that Kohelet was influenced by Greek thought. However our sketchy and incomplete knowledge of Kohelet's fully laid out concept of opposites, if indeed he possessed such a detailed conception, leaves us unable to reach any conclusions in this area.

Another possible source for the balance of opposites in these verses is contained in the biblical traditions. The biblical

merism often contains this kind of balance. Significant for this line of reasoning is Deuteronomy 30:15,

ראה נחתי לפניך היום את-החיים ואת-הטוב
ואת-המוות ואת-הרע

See, I have set before you this day life and
good, death and evil.

It was from this theological basis that the problem of the well off wicked arose.

In short what is indeed striking about these verses is the variety of elements present. Kohelet acknowledges the problem of ill gotten gain with familiar sounding words. He employs some type of concept of opposites which calls to mind other literatures. And he gives voice to these in a classic example of biblical parallelism.

Yet this passage definitely does not dutifully reflect ideas and concepts found originally elsewhere. At the very least Kohelet's problem of righteousness bringing harm adds a new slant to wisdom. Robert Gordis sees in the addition of this new balancing problem Kohelet's own unique version of the Aristotelian principle of ethics, the golden mean. For Kohelet, both wickedness and happiness lead to unhappiness.⁷ The man who reveres God will "do his duty to both!"⁸ Therefore Kohelet gives his own individual view of this Greek thought in language reflective of the biblical and Ancient Near Eastern attempts at dealing with the related issue of the troubling presence of successful sinners cast in the form typical of biblical, and for that matter Ancient Near Eastern poets.

My view of these verses takes Gordis' understanding one step further. Kohelet employs not only a certain kind of language and form to express his ideas but also uses the contrasting opposites of good and

evil, perhaps in its golden mean formulation, to make a wisdom contribution all his own. Kohelet employs these elements to create a setting for his problem of righteousness' potential for harm. An examination of verses 15 through 18 along with an examination of verses 19 through 22 will bear this out.

The passage begins with a self-deprecating and sobering remark which serves as an introduction.

את-הכל ראיתי בימי הנלי

I have seen everything in the days of my hevel.

The words את-הכל "everything" makes the reader aware that Kohelet will make mention of more than one matter. Then come the aforementioned sets of parallel lines.⁹

The first set of parallel lines is an example of antithetical parallelism.

There is the righteous man lost in his righteousness.//
And there is the wicked man increased through his evil.

This is a statement of irony. However the evil man who lives all too well is a well known figure, figuratively and otherwise. He cheats others and prospers and he is tough in business, maybe even unpleasantly tough. He is hated, envied and admired.

His counterpart, the righteous man lost in his righteousness is less well known. It is painfully obvious that someone may wax through evil, but how can someone be lost through righteousness.

Perhaps he is fanatically faithful to the ways of righteousness, immersed in them as the wicked man is immersed in his evil ways. This seems unlikely since in his observation in verse 20 Kohelet explicitly denies the possible existence of such a person.

כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה-טוב ולא יחטא

For there is no man on earth so righteous
that does good and does not sin.

Perhaps he is the victim of the רשע. The righteous man is so committed to good that he becomes an innocent and easy prey for the wicked. This person would not only be a צדיק but a fool, unschooled in the ways of the world. Since in verse 17 the wicked man is identified as the fool I think this identification unlikely.

Another possibility is that just like sometimes a wicked man profits through evil, a righteous man is harmed because of his righteousness, in a similar fashion to the wealthy man whose wealth brings him harm.

יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש
עשר שמור לבעליו לרעתו

There is a terrible evil I have observed
under the sun: Wealth guards its owner for
his detriment. (5:12)

Exactly how this harm is inflicted upon the צדיק is as yet unknown. In as much as we do know how the רשע cheats his way to fame and fortune, our attention is further drawn to the mysterious צדיק.

To the point, the comparison between the רשע and צדיק is strange, if viewed as a comparison of two morally equivalent entities. There is nothing in Kohelet to make one think that he has departed from the biblical view regarding the value of a righteous life. Evil may bring wealth, power and comforts which are important to Kohelet. However he says nothing to lead us to believe that such methods are proper or to be desired. Rather, examining 7:1 in reverse we see that although his point is pessimistic (the day of

death is better than the day of birth) Kohelet introduces it with the axiom, "A good name is better than fine oil."

The next pair of parallel lines is an example of synonymous parallelism. Verse 16 continues the thought of verse 15b.

אל-תהי צדיק הרבה ואל-תתחכם יותר למה תשומם

Don't be too much the righteous person and
don't act overly wise. Why destroy yourself?

From this advice we gain a better understanding of the harmed righteous person. Somehow he overdoes his righteousness, but as pointed out above, verse 20 limits this overdoing to something other than acting righteous continually which is impossible. Then Kohelet advises:

ואל-התחכם יותר

And don't be overly wise.

The use of the verbal form תתחכם instead of אל-תהיחכם is interesting.

The חכם in the התפעל here does not mean to be wise but to act in a way which appears wise. It is a mimicing of wisdom without necessarily touching its substance. The form appears only one other time in the Bible. There in the Egyptian royal court Pharaoh says to his ministers in his concern about the large Hebrew presence in Egypt הבה נתחכמה לו פן ירבה (Exodus 1:10a). In this context the verb clearly does not imply the wisdom of the sage but the craftiness of the state. Pharaoh says let us act wisely or shrewdly toward them. Sforno captures the nuance when he says: הבה נתחכמה לו: לבא עליו בעקיפין "to come upon him with tricks." This kind of wisdom implies only intelligence and not the positive moral element usually applied to

the wisdom of the sage. Ben Sirah uses the התפעל of חכם several times. Some of these refer to becoming wise in a traditional sense (6:32, 38:24). Other times (10:26, 32:4 (35:4)) he uses it in the sense of displaying intellectual prowess. In chapter 32 (35) Ben Sirah talks about proper party manners. He says in verse 4, "where there is entertainment, do not pour out talk; do not display your cleverness (תהחכם) out of season."¹⁰ Kohelet's use of תהחכם implies a display of actions which might appear wise. Later in verse 19 Kohelet will introduce the wise mode of behavior in this matter. (Also it should be noted that when Kohelet seeks a verb to infer the accumulation of wisdom (2:15 and 7:23) or the accumulation of wealth through wisdom (2:19) he uses the Kal form of √חכם.) Employing the vernacular we might translate אל תהחכם as "Don't act so smart" or even "Don't be such a smarty pants or wise guy." Therefore from verse 16ab we observe that the harm done to the righteous person comes from overdoing his righteousness and connected to this is the business of acting wise with the accent on acting.

In verse 17, the second line of the parallelism, the a and b part of the verses are similar in construction to 16a and b but are simpler to understand.

אל-תרשע הרבה ואל-תהי סכל

Don't be too wicked and don't be a fool.

Kohelet is speaking to the person who overdoes wickedness and labels him a fool. By dropping the expected modifier יותר in 17b Kohelet makes his point precisely. As we might say, "Make no bones about it, this kind of person is a fool."

Kohelet ends both lines with a negative judgment. These behaviors will lead to self destruction or an early death.

Verse 17, though easy to understand, is at first puzzling because it seems to infer the opposite lesson about wickedness than the one given the previous parallel lines. Kohelet's view in verse 15b that צדק may produce harm is carried further in verse 16. However his remark about the reality of the fortunes of the wicked (15c) is negated in verse 17. What in fact Kohelet is doing here is to affirm his own doctrine of retribution.¹¹ The wicked may prosper yet they will receive their just rewards. In 8:11-13 Kohelet explicitly states his view in this matter:

אשר אין-נעשה פתגם מעשה הרעה מהרה
על-כן; מלא לב בני-האדם בהם לעשות רע
אשר חטא עשה רע מאת ומאריך לו
כי גם-יודע אני אשר
יהיה-טוב ליראי האלהים אשר ייראו מלפניו
וטוב לא-יהיה לרשע ולא-יאריך ימים כצל
אשר איננו ירא מלפני אלהים

Because the sentence for an evil deed is not made quickly--that is why men are brave to do evil, because the sinner does evil 100 times and He is patient with him. Yet I also know that it will be well for those who fear God; who stand in fear before Him. And it will not be well for the wicked person and he will not live long--like a shadow--because he does not fear God.

The God-fearing person who is here contrasted with the רשע will be mentioned again below in verse 18. If Kohelet had differed from the biblical doctrine of retribution it is in the way he holds a negative view toward some forms of righteousness and not in his view toward wickedness.

Another factor which disturbs the symmetry between the רשע and צדיק relates to their respective classes. For while it is true that some men are successful in their wickedness, while others are not, all wicked people are immersed in their wickedness. They all תרשעו הרבה. Wicked people by definition are not only occasionally wicked. Their actions are always governed by their evil designs. The sub-class referred to in verse 15c (successful wicked people) is a part of the class referred to in verse 17 (wicked people). On the other hand, the class of people referred to in verse 15b (people harmed by their righteousness) is the same as in verse 16. Sometimes some righteous people are harmed in their righteousness. This happens when one is somehow too much the righteous person and acts too wise. As will be shown below in the discussion of verses 19-22, this happens when one loses cognition of the true nature of human behavior and is overly zealous for the ideals of righteousness in circumstances in which such an attitude is unwarranted. The קדוש is so caught up in righteousness that he becomes oblivious to the obvious.

The third set of parallel lines is an example of synthetic parallelism. The a and b parts of verse 18 are set in a parallel chiasmic style, however the content of the two lines is not synonymous. To hold fast to something (18a) is not the same as not letting go of something else (18b). Kohelet is saying take hold of righteousness but don't remove your hand from evil. Kohelet is not talking solely about actions here, telling people to choose a path between good and evil deeds because as said before that mix is the best which may be expected from someone committed only to righteousness.

Rather Kohelet is talking mainly about an attitude here. He is telling us to lead righteous lives without losing sight of the realities of the human condition. He is not recommending evil as a wise response to life.

Finally Kohelet appends to his advice this observation:

כִּי-יִרָא אֱלֹהִים יֵצֵא אֶת-כָּלם

for he that fears God does them all.

This means that the God-fearing person does evil as well as good. However the evil he does comes not from a desire to be evil but from the nature of his existence as human. This observation, taken from life (verse 20), is a good reason not to become so wrapped up in righteousness that one loses sight of the natural disposition in man to do evil at times and as a result become injured. Assuming Kohelet is consistent in his use of terminology in the book, then the God-fearing person יִרָא אֱלֹהִים is the true opposite of the רָשָׁע as in 8:11-13. In 7:15-18 the lost righteous person is not the opposite of the רָשָׁע. Rather Kohelet employs a form which contrasts the unfortunate צָדִיק with the רָשָׁע to focus our attention on the צָדִיק and explore his problem.

Now we can turn our attention to verses 19-22. These verses comprise an introduction and example of the person who is so caught up in righteousness that he acts too wisely and is harmed through his actions.

Kohelet begins his introduction (verses 19-20) with a proverbial statement,

החכמה תעז לחכם מעשרה שליטים אשר היו בעיר

Wisdom strengthens the wise better than
ten rulers who were in the city.

I see in this verse a traditional element. Kohelet is deferring to wisdom as the source of his example. He is not promoting his own way of living in the full passage but wisdom's way. A similar attitude is reflected in Ben Sirah (chapters 1 and 24) and Proverbs (chapters 8:1-9:19). Kohelet relies heavily upon his own observations but is not divorced from his wisdom background which is reflected in, among other things, his vast use of proverbs and the proverbial form.¹²

Then in a style well known to us from Kohelet, he adds an explanation or reason for the truth of the proverb based upon observable reality and introduced by the word כי.¹³

כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה-טוב ולא יחטא

For there is no man on earth so righteous that
does good and does not sin.

Kohelet's use of observation complements well his use of traditional wisdom materials. We find observations in many places including the observation in 1:4-11 about the cyclical ways of the natural order, which proves to him that there is nothing new under the sun. The poem of cycles in 3:19 seems to be based upon observation and categorizes human existence along similar lines as Kohelet used for nature in 1:4-11 and the poem about old age (12:1-8) is a masterful, if enigmatic collection of images taken from observations. Often Kohelet introduces an observation with וראיתי or ראיתי.¹⁴ His usage of these forms comprises eighteen percent (19 out of 101) of their total usage in the bible. Though this does not prove anything it

does indicate Kohelet's strong inclination to make personal observations. This passage (verses 18-22) is rooted in the conflict between an observation made by Kohelet mentioned in verse 18c and 20 and the assumed standard for the righteous in which the צדיק never does evil. Kohelet is willing to accept this standard for righteous conduct only as modified in light of observable phenomena. The wise man is aware of human imperfection and acts accordingly.

Finally we have our example:

גם לכל-הדברים אשר ידברו אל-תתן לבך
אשר לא-תשמע את-עבדך מקללך
כי גם-פעמים רבות ידע לבך
אשר גם-את קללת אחרים

To all the words that men speak don't give credence so that you listen to your slave reviling you. For also you know that many times you have reviled others.

Kohelet warns us not to take seriously everything said lest you take seriously your slave's disparagement of you. This is an example of the wisdom which strengthens the wise. Coincidentally, Kohelet's other use of the root קלל in the piel is in 10:20

גם במדעך מלך אל-ת-קלל ובחדרי משכנך אל-תקללישיר
כי עוף השמים יוליך את-הקול ובעל הכנפים ינייד דבר

Also do not revile the king in your thoughts or in your bed chamber revile the rich for a bird will carry your voice a winged creature reveal the matter.

The king and the wealthy or those looking out for their welfare are accused here of possibly taking seriously your disparagement. More importantly Kohelet considers this kind of activity as wrong and unwise. Yet to overhear and take seriously this kind of behind the back murmurings is in 7:18-22 also wrong and unwise.

To be so caught up in righteousness, thinking yourself wise in this area of ethics, that you overly react in a negative way to his words is to allow yourself to be harmed by righteousness. The source of your trouble is that you fail to bring to bear, at this moment, your own knowledge that you too are not without sin. Actually from these two passages the problem of disparaging and the associated problem of taking it seriously seems to exist in all strata of society from kings to servants. To disparage is wrong, to become angry because of it is to act in what appears to be a righteous and wise way without real wisdom.

Righteousness, for Kohlet, is a value. However it is not merely a matter of good intentions. One must be aware of human imperfection if he is to truly lead a righteous life.

CHAPTER I

NOTES

¹ The Masoretic accentuation however does not reflect this rhythm:

verse 15b	זקף קטון,	מונח,	פשטא,	מהפך.
	disjunctive,	conjunctive,	disjunctive,	conjunctive.
verse 15b	סליק,	טפחא,	זקף קטון,	מונח.
	disjunctive,	conjunctive,	disjunctive,	conjunctive.

² The Hebrew word hevel unquestionably implies emptiness, meaninglessness and a lack of worthiness. However to attempt to give an exact translation is impossible. Therefore I have left the word untranslated throughout the thesis. My own thought is to translate hevel as "waste" because it implies an existent. However, this existent is of no value.

³ All biblical citations outside of Kohelet are translated in accordance with the Revised Standard Version (1952). The edition used was The Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, edited by J. May and B. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁴ W. G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 89.

⁵ Numen XIX (April 1972), 1-21.

⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷ R. Gordis, Kohelet - The Man and His World (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951), pp. 168-169.

⁸ Ibid. (translation of verse 18c).

⁹ Parallelism was noted by the commentators as early as Levi ben Gershon, David Kimhi, and Ibn Ezra who called it the דרך צחונ. Robert Lowth, particularly in the introductory essay to his translation of Isaiah (Edinburgh: George Caw, 1807), was the first scholar to

detail the operation of parallel lines. He divided them into parallels synonymous, antithetic and synthetic. Though some scholars, as early as G. B. Gray (The Forms of Hebrew Poetry [New York: Ktav, 1972; first published 1915]), discount synthetic parallelism, in which fresh ideas are added in the second parallel member, as a form which only mimics true parallelism, Lowth's terminology has stood the test of time.

¹⁰ Revised Standard Version translation cf. note 3.

¹¹ A belief in proper retribution for an evil life is an essential aspect of many religions. The Shamash Hymn (W. G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960] p. 131), written in a cultural setting which influenced the biblical world, stated this belief in words similar to Kohelet's words.

Lines 88-89: A man covets his neighbor's wife
 Will [.....] before his appointed day.

¹² See below pp. 49 ff. for a discussion of wisdom and pp. 31 ff. for a discussion of proverbs.

¹³ Kohelet's language is reminiscent of Proverbs 20:9; Job 4:17 and 15:14 and especially I Kings 8:46 (II Chronicles 7:36).

¹⁴ For similar uses of הנל see Proverbs 24:30-34; Psalms 37:25, 35-36.

CHAPTER II

THE PURPOSE OF WEALTH AND LABOR

In the first six verses of chapter six Kohelet preaches, concretizing the two fundamental elements in his philosophy, the omnipresent hevel of life and the good gained from enjoyment. The passage contains an introduction and four additional sections, each one set off by a value judgment or opinion or what I will call an I-statement.

Introduction:

יש רעה אשר ראיתי תחת השמש ורבה היא על-האדם

There is an evil which I have observed
under the sun and it weighs heavily
upon man.

Part I:

איש אשר יתן-לו האלהים עשר ונכסים וכבוד
ואיננו חסר לנפשו מכל אשר-יתאוה
ולא-ישליטנו האלהים לאכל ממנו
כי איש נכרי יאכלנו זה הבל וחלי רע הוא

A man to whom God gives riches, treasures
and splendor so that he lacks nothing for his
appetite from all he might desire yet God does
not give him the ability to enjoy it for a
stranger will consume it, this is hevel
and a terrible ill.

Part II:

אם-יוליד איש מאה ושנים רבות יחיה
ורב שיהיו ימי-שניו ונפשו לא-השבע מם-הטובה
וגם-קבורה לא-היתה לו אמרתי טוב ממנו הנפל

If he were to sire a multitude and live numerous years, though great that the days of his years might be, if his soul is not satisfied from this bounty even if he never had to face a burial, I think an abortion is better than he.

Part III:

כי-בהבל נא ובחשך ילך ובחשך שמו יכסה
גם-שמש לא-ראה ולא ידע נחת לזה מזה

Because in hevel it came and in darkness it went; its name is covered in obscurity. Also the sun he did not see or know. This one had more rest than the other.

Part IV:

ואלו חיה אלף שנים פעמים וטובה לא ראה
הלא אל-מקום אחד הכל נולך

So that even if he were to live one thousand years twice over but never experience the good. . . Do not all go to one place?

Kohelet has drawn a comparison between two extremes, the highly successful and well blessed individual who fails to partake of the fruits of his labor and the נפל or stillborn.¹ This comparison is similar in form to the comparison between the righteous man who is lost in his righteousness and the wicked person.² In both cases it is a flaw in the obviously better person which equates him with the other or even makes the other's situation appear superior. Much of what was said above about Kohelet's conception of opposites could be repeated here.³ As we shall see Kohelet compares two familiar extremes, not for synthesis but to point out a possible flaw in one of the extremes which destroys its advantage. In 7:15-22 the flaw was the misuse and overuse of righteousness while here the flaw is

the non-use of wealth for the purposes of enjoyment. While these passages have in common the use of a comparison as their basis, their purposes are different. In 7:15-22 Kohelet is giving us an insight into real righteousness based upon his observation of reality. Here he speaks of the value of enjoyment in a world marked by hevel. These two themes, enjoyment and hevel come up again and again in the book in other forms and are central to Kohelet's understanding of the world.⁴

Our passage restates these views in a style which seems homiletical. The imagery is rich and the point made is one which challenges the listener. Throughout the passage Kohelet sustains a sense of artistic balance and suspense. He leads his slightly bewildered audience along saving his best arguments for last, yet uses the kind of language and imagery his audience could understand and with which they could identify and feel comfortable. Whether this piece constituted part of a sermon or oral lesson or was prepared to be read is impossible to say at this point and its place in a homiletical tradition lies beyond our understanding.⁵ Nevertheless we can describe the features of this passage. For example one feature which stands out is Kohelet's ability to get across his unique ideas about enjoyment and hevel through traditional imagery. Let us now turn to the text.

The introduction serves to alert us that Kohelet is about to address a widespread or particularly painful problem depending on whether we translate וְרֵבָה הִיא עַל-הָאָדָם as "and it is prevalent among men" or as "it weighs heavily upon man." The serious nature of the

problem laid out below, its centrality to Kohelet's thought and its affect on the rich who are already in the minority, the latter translation is appealing.

Rashi interprets the verse in line with the first translation while Ibn Ezra and the Rashbam side with the second interpretation. C. D. Ginsburg cites the use of על in this verse as reason enough to translate in the latter manner. על "expresses the pressure or weight of a grievance."⁶ In this connection he cites 2:17a ושנאתי את-החיים כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה חחת השמש "I hated my life for I find the deed done under the sun irksome" and 8:6b כי-רעת האדם רבה עליו "for the evil of man is weighty upon him." He also cites Isaiah 24:20 כמלונה כשכור והתנוודה כמלונה "The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavily upon it, and it falls and will not rise again." Brown, Driver and Briggs, in their lexicon, cite several similar uses of על.⁷

Therefore, because of Ginsburg's convincing arguments along with the intent of the passage as outlined above, I believe we are to translate the line, "it weighs heavily upon man." Kohelet has prepared us to hear something which greatly troubles him.

The first section of the body is composed of two parts. Initially we have the description of this terrible evil. Kohelet describes a wealthy man to whom God denies the ability to enjoy his wealth even though he lacks nothing he might possibly desire. Instead another will inherit the wealth and gain its enjoyment. Two features may be noted about this man. First is that this kind

of person was one with whom Kohelet's audience was probably familiar. The phenomenon of the wealthy person denying himself pleasure is a common human one and one which is often preferred to the rich who live a pleasure-seeking lifestyle. In fact unless one was unfamiliar with Kohelet's emphasis upon enjoyment, the labeling of this state as a רעה might seem perplexing. Second, the language Kohelet employs here makes his image even more familiar to his audience. The phrase עשר ונכסים וכבוד and similar phrases are found elsewhere in the Bible. The two times these three words appear together in the Bible they carry the meaning of great kingly wealth. This wealth is pictured as a gift from God as it is in Kohelet. In II Chronicles 1:11, 12 and I Kings 3:13 these words are used to describe the great material wealth God will give to Solomon in addition to wisdom in response to Solomon's request for the latter.⁸ והעשר והכבוד are described as gifts from God by David in his prayer to God. Later in verse 28 עשר וכבוד are ascribed to David himself. This verse interestingly also ascribes to David a long life and mentions his son. Later in the next verse Kohelet's long life and children will be added to Kohelet's description of the wealthy man. עשר וכבוד are seen as a sign of God's pleasure with Jehoshaphat in II Chronicles 17:5 and are mentioned again in connection with this king in II Chronicles 18:1. Another king who found favor in the eyes of God was Hezekiah. He too is said to have enjoyed עשר וכבוד in II Chronicles 32:27.

The examples cited so far use either all three words or just two of them to describe kingly wealth received from the hand of God. In Proverbs 3:17 and 8:18 עשר וכבוד are gifts from wisdom and in

Proverbs 22:4 וְכָבוֹד עֹשֶׂר joined with חַיִּים are the result of humility.

The least used member of this trio of words is נִכְסִים. Besides the citations mentioned above it is found once alone in Joshua 22:8 and one other time connected with עֹשֶׂר in Kohelet just three verses before our verse. Here he says that when God gives wealth (עֹשֶׂר וְנִכְסִים) along with the ability to enjoy it, this is a gift from God.

To sum up the three words כָּבוֹד and נִכְסִים, עֹשֶׂר have a familiar ring to them. They epitomize great wealth, even kingly wealth. Kohelet's usage seems closer to what is found in the historical books (especially what is said about Solomon) than what is found in Proverbs. This is due not only to the form in which these words appear in connection with Solomon but also because like in the historical books Kohelet holds that they are direct gifts from God. The use of this phrase in verse 2 conveys the meaning of great wealth reminiscent of the days of the monarchy.

In the second place Kohelet concludes this first section as he will conclude all four sections with an I-statement. Here he restates his judgment of this person's situation.

זֶה הַבֶּל וְחָלִי רָע הוּא

This is hevel and an evil disease.

Such a judgment may have been perceived as overly harsh by Kohelet's audience. If so the following section would have been downright perplexing. First he describes this person, giving him a different set of attributes. Again these are positive attributes

with which his audience was familiar. Unfortunately we today have some difficulty understanding all of them. The similarity between יחיה ושרים רבות שנים and שרים ימים-שנים is perplexing. Also והוא קבורה לא-היתה לו is difficult to translate. Some commentators see a negative attribute inferred here. The thought is that this man was denied a decent burial while others see rather a reference to great longevity cast in hyperbolic language.⁹ Nevertheless what can be understood from this additional description of this wealthy man comports well with our idea of what constitutes visible signs of God's favor in the biblical world.

He is an exceedingly fruitful man who has lived many rich years. These two plus wealth epitomize a man blessed by God, except this man is unable to gain any satisfaction from his goods. This is the crucial factor for Kohelet; outweighing all other considerations. As to why this is so we are at a loss.

Kohelet's concluding I-statement does not explain his perception of this life. Rather he reinforces his point with a comparison. Kohelet shockingly explains that a נפל, a stillborn is better off than this man. Kohelet's new image fits well as the opposite of the wealthy old patriarch. The stillborn knows no family and its life-span is nonexistent. Its life is as poor and unfortunate as can be. Nothing symbolizes hevel better than the stillborn.

Just as the second section began by giving additional information concerning the first image the third section fills us in on the נפל. Kohelet traces the travel and travail of the נפל. It comes and goes in darkness. Its name, in whatever subtlety of שם

to which Kohelet is referring here, is obscured and lost in darkness.¹⁰ Also, he adds the sun he did not see or know. This last thought may as well have rang familiarly in the minds of his audience. Three times in the Bible is mention made of the נפל: here, Job 3:15 and Psalms 58:9b. All three make a similar point.

. . . נפל אשת בל-חזו שמש

. . . like the untimely birth that never
sees the sun. (Psalms 58:9b)

או-כנפל עמון לא אהיה כעללים לא-ראו אור

Or why was I not as a hidden untimely birth,
as infants that never saw the light? (Job 3:15)

(In the citation from Job, too, mention is made of the hidden nature of the נפל, however the language is dissimilar.)

Kohelet again makes use of the language and content of his imagery to lead his audience along familiar paths to an unfamiliar comparison. He closes this section with an I-statement which is Kohelet's first attempt to explain his comparison with his preference for the נפל.

נחת לזה מזה

This one had more rest than the other.

נחת is a difficult word to translate here. It is not simply rest but a peaceful quiet state of ease which Kohelet contrasts against the hubbub and pain of the other's life.¹¹ To Kohelet both lives are marked by hevel and are therefore equal. However the נפל is preferred because of the calmness of its existence.

But Kohelet is so far less than convincing. The stillborn's rest is questionable and in addition his audience is predisposed to

favor the wealthy man's life if for no other reason than what Kohelet implies when he says in 9:4b:

כי-לכלב חי הוא טוב מן-האריה המת

Better a living dog than a dead lion.

Therefore in the last section Kohelet restates his argument in a few elegant words and seals his case with his last I-statement. "And even if he live one thousand years twice over, but fail to experience the good . . ." Now as we hang on his words Kohelet delivers his final point. "Do not all go to one place?" That is to say "is not death the great leveler, bringing the greatest of men and נפל to the same status." If so then the נפל Kohelet reasons, has experienced the better life. After all it experienced neither joy nor pain while most men receive a measure of both. Since the wealthy old patriarch failed to partake of his share of joy his life still marked by the world's pain and hevel is worse off than the life of the stillborn.

Kohelet's sobering conclusion concerns the fate of the dead. In 3:18-21 Kohelet rejects a belief in an afterlife.

אמרתי אני בלבי על-דברת בני האדם לברם האלהים
ולראות שהם-בהמה המה להם
כי מקרה בני-האדם ומקרה הבהמה ומקרה אחד להם
כמות זה כן מות זה ורוח אחד לכל
ומותר האדם מן-הבהמה אין כי הכל הבל
הכל הולך אל-מקום אחד
הכל היה מן-העפר והכל שב אל-העפר
מי יודע רוח בני האדם העלה היא למעלה
ורוח הבהמה הירדת היא למטה לארץ

I thought regarding the matter of God's testing of man and demonstrating to them that they are beasts. . . . They have one fate. For the fate of man and the fate of beasts are one fate. The death of one is like the death of the other, and

all have the same spirit of life. Therefore the advantage of man over the beast is non-existent for everything is hevel. All go to one place, all were from the dust and to the dust all return. Who knows that the life spirit of man rises upwards and that the life spirit of the beast goes down below to the earth?! And I observed that there is nothing better than that man should rejoice in his deeds for this is his lot, for who could bring him to realize what will happen after him?

Against this background the "place" in "Do not all go to one place," is anything but a heaven. In addition, Kohelet's remarks show that this was an area of controversy in his day. His own contribution in this area is that he drew out the implications of his rejection of an afterlife. The leveling of death robs life of meaning and purpose. Out of his world view Kohelet affirms enjoyment as a central component of a life well spent.

Kohelet communicates his ideas, distressful as they may have been perceived in a style characterized by suspense, structure and vivid imagery. This style I have called homiletical.

Unfortunately our knowledge of the origins of Jewish homiletics is scant. We know that when Ezra read from the scroll in Nehemiah 8:1-8 he did more than simply read, though his actions are unclear to us:

ויקראו בספר במורת האלהים מפרש
ושום שכל ויבינו במקרא

In addition Kohelet's use of biblical imagery is relevant here. Though he does not cite a proof text or employ his images in that role, he does concretize his ideas in images drawn in form and substance from his religious heritage. This also points to Kohelet's place within the biblical tradition while the ideas he communicates through his imagery demonstrate his unique place in that tradition.

CHAPTER II

NOTES

¹ Kohelet makes use often of the comparison. In Chapter One the natural elements are compared to show the universal weariness of existence. In his experiments in Chapters One and Two Kohelet compares the benefits of wealth to the pleasures of folly. Wisdom and folly are often compared as in 2:12 ff., 6:8 and 9:13-18. The righteous and wicked are compared in 3:16-17, 7:18-22 and 8:10-14. One of Kohelet's strongest comparisons is 3:18-21 where man by way of comparison is equated to a beast.

² See above pp. 1-15.

³ See above pp. 5-6.

⁴ H. L. Ginsburg's division of Kohelet ("The Structure and Contents of the Book of Kohelet," Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 3 [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955], pp. 138-150) understands half of it to be concerned with the emptiness of life (hevel) and utilization of goods (pleasure), which is life's only plus.

⁵ See below pp. 62-63.

⁶ C. D. Ginsburg, Cohleth (New York: Ktav, 1970 [first published 1861]), p. 358.

⁷ Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), p. 753 (IIb).

⁸ Again as was the case in 7:20 the closest biblical parallel to this phrase is in connection to Solomon.

⁹ Robert Gordis (Kohelet The Man and His World [New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951], pp. 248-249.) adds a new interpretation by emending N to N translating "even if he have an elaborate funeral (on which men lay such great stress)."

¹⁰ The word נש here might simply refer to the stillborn itself or to his now non-existent future family line. See Brown, Driver and Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 1027-1028.

¹¹ Cf. Job 17:16 for a similar use of ננ.

CHAPTER III

KOHELET'S MASTERY OF THE PROVERB

As described in the introduction the book of Kohelet may be compared to a geometric plane. On this plane elements appear which, not restricted to Kohelet, appear in the book in a unique manner. On the plane of Kohelet proverbs often appear. This chapter's goal is to examine the function of proverbs in Kohelet. I will deal with both passages which contain proverbs as well as passages which are collections of proverbs. As a voice of חכמה the proverb was basic to Kohelet's style. Kohelet uses this tool as a means to make his unique contributions. My work will categorize his use of proverbs. These categories are not presented as a definite answer to questions concerning Kohelet's use of proverbs. Instead these representative categories will point out some aspects of his style in this area yielding insight into Kohelet's artistry. Furthermore this will yield insight into wisdom's relationship to Kohelet.¹

When Kohelet employs a proverb as part of a larger passage the proverb can be located at the beginning, middle or end of the passage. In 5:9a a passage begins:

אהב כסף לא-ישבע כסף ומי-אהב בהמון לא תבואה

He who loves money cannot be sated with money
and he who loves wealth, not with gain.

This proverb is concerned with the inability of wealth to bring satisfaction to the person who seeks to be wealthy. It serves a dual introductory role. First it serves as the backdrop upon which Kohelet justifies his idea of wealth's advantage in verse 10.²

ברבות הטובה רבו אוכליה
ומה-כשרון לבעליה כי אם-ראית עיניו

In the increase of wealth its consumers
increase, so what is the advantage for its
owner save the sight of his eyes.

This proverb also opens up a large passage which deals with the problems of wealth, the joys of poverty and the value of enjoyment ending in 6:9. It is interesting that this section ends with a proverb which carries a similar thought to the one expressed in 5:9-10:³

טוב מראה עינים מהלך-נפש

Better is the eyes' vision than the wandering
of desire.

These two proverbs frame Kohelet's discussion of wealth.

Another introductory proverb is 4:13a:

טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל
אשר לא-ידע להזהר עוד

Better a boy, poor but wise than an old
foolish king, who does not know to take
advice anymore.

Of the three values mentioned, wealth, maturity and wisdom, wisdom is the most important even outweighing wealth and age together. Kohelet uses the proverb to introduce a parable about the King and the youth which continues through verse 16.

כי-מבית הסורים יצא למלך
כי גם במלכותו נולד רש
ראיתי את-כל-החיים המהלכים תחת השמש
עם הילד השני אשר יעמד תחתיו

אין-קץ לכל-העם לכל-היה לפניהם
גם האחרונים לא ישמחו-בו
כי-גם-זה הבל ורעיון רוח

From prison he came to rule, even in his own century he was born poor. I have seen all the world passing under the sun with the second lad who will succeed him. There is no end for the nation, for all who were there before them. Also the later ones will not rejoice in him for also this is hevel and wind chasing.

This parable is difficult to interpret yet its basic meaning is clear. Only the nation ultimately survives, neither the king nor the youth. In the future the nation which supported the lad against the King will not remember him. This sobering thought stands in contrast to the theme of the opening proverb and is labeled by Kohelet as hevel and wind chasing.

The second usage by Kohelet of proverbs is within a passage. In 4:7-12 Kohelet uses two proverbs as integral parts of this passage's development. Verses seven and eight recite the complaint of the man without family and the uselessness of his wealth.

ושבתי אני ואראה הבל תחת השמש
יש אחד ואין שני גם בן ואח אין-לו
ואין קץ לכל-עמלו גם-עיניו לא-תשבע עשר
ולמי אני עמל ומחסר את-נפשי מטובה
גם-זה הבל וענין רע הוא

And I came to see hevel under the sun. This is one and not a second neither a son or brother does he have. Yet there is no limit to his labors and wealth cannot satisfy his eyes (vision). "For whom have I labored and kept my appetites from pleasure." This too is hevel and an evil matter.

Kohelet declares proverbially in verse 9a that

טובים השנים מן-האחד

Two are better than one.⁴

He explains his proverb in verses 9b and 10.

אשר יש-להם שכר טוב בעמלם
כי אם-יפלו האחד יקים את-חברו
ואילו האחד שיפול ואין שני להקימו

. . . in that they have a good reward in
their labors for if one should fall his
friend will lift him, but if a single
falls there will not be another to lift him.

He says that two people together can bring value to their labors
and help each other in times of trouble. 'Help each other' then
becomes the subject of the second proverb, in verse 11.

גם אם-ישכנו שנים וחם להם ולאחד איך יחם

Also if two lie together they are warm but
how can one be warm.

Here the two together are able to fend off cold. Kohelet extrapolates
a general principle from this proverb in verse 12.

ואם-יתקפו האחד השנים יעמדו נגדו
והחוט המשלש לא במהרה ינהק

Whereas he could prevail over one, two will
withstand him. A three ply cord is not quickly
broken.

Verse 12b poetically restates this in a proverb. His mention of a
three ply cord when we expect a two ply one is a fitting third in
a numerical progression.⁵ In this passage the two proverbs found
in verses 9 and 11 serve as transitions to new thoughts moving
Kohelet from a complaint (verses 7 and 8) through an examination
of the benefits of companionship.

The proverb of 9:4b holds an interesting position. It
facilitates a transition made by Kohelet just previously and
serves as the topic of verses 5 and 6.

כי-לכלב חי הוא טוב מן-האריה המת

Better a living dog than a dead lion.

Several times previous to this Kohelet has given us this bitter pill to swallow. For Kohelet death has rendered life meaningless except possibly for the value which pleasure brings. In the verses which precede the proverb Kohelet has spoken of hevel surrounding the good fate of evil people (8:10), how this encourages evil (8:11), yet he reaffirms a doctrine of retribution (8:12-13). Kohelet continues to speak the troubling fates given to the righteous and the wicked (8:14) and so he affirms pleasure as the only good available to man (8:15). Then Kohelet points out the glaring limits of wisdom in searching out the works of God (8:16-17). Kohelet turns specifically to the fate of man which is also unknown (9:1), except that the ultimate fate of all is the same (9:2). Just preceding the proverb Kohelet laments all this:

זה רע בכל אשר-נעשה תחת השמש כי-מקרה אחד לכל
וגם לב בני-האדם מלא-רע והוללות בלבבם בחייהם
ואחריו אל-המתים

This is an evil in all that is done under
the sun that there is one fate for all.
Also men's hearts are full of evil and
madness is in their hearts while they live,
and afterwards off to the dead.

Now completely reversing direction Kohelet says

כי-מי אשר יבחר אל כל-החיים יש בטחון

He who is attached to all the living has hope.

At last Kohelet has given us some hope. Not enjoyable but basically meaningless pleasure but real hope that life has value. Kohelet feels a need to support this last statement and he naturally falls

back upon a proverb. "Better a living dog than a dead lion." Life itself elevates a sorrow filled existence, making it superior to an esteemed life when it is over. The proverb serves as proof for Kohelet's assertion of hope. From this point Kohelet goes on to explain the value of life by explaining the proverb in verses 5 and 6.

כי החיים יודעים שימתו והמתים אינם יודעים מאומה
ואין-עוד להם שכר כי השכח זכרם
גם אהבתם גם-שנאתם גם-קנאתם כבר אבדה
וחלק אין-להם עוד לעולם בכל אשר-נעשה תחת השמש

For the living know that they will die but
the dead know nothing. They no longer have a
reward for their memory is forgotten. In
addition their love, their hate, their jealousy
are lost and they have no share anymore in all
that is done under the sun.

Only the living live, experience their emotions and have a share in reality. From here Kohelet reasserts his pleasure principle.

In this passage the proverb has served as the anchor carrying the weight of Kohelet's wisdom tradition. Upon it Kohelet moors his hopeful message. It serves as a proof text and a text worthy of further development.⁶

Kohelet's third use of proverbs is at the end of a section to conclude it. 1:15 concludes a passage which begins in verse 12.

אני קהלת הייתי מלך על-ישראל בירושלם
ונחתי את-לבי לדרוש ולחזר בחכמה
על כל-אשר נעשה תחת השמים
הוא ענין רע נתן אלהים לבני האדם לענות בו
ראיתי את-כל-המעשי שבעשו תחת השמש
מעות לא-יוכל לחקן וחטיון לא-יוכל להמנון

I Kohelet was king over Israel in Jerusalem.
And I applied my heart to seek and search out
Through wisdom all that is done under the
heavens. It is an evil matter God has given
to man to afflict him. I observed all the

deeds done under the sun and behold all is hevel and wind chasing. The crooked cannot be straightened and the lacking cannot be counted.

Kohelet tells us of his experience in puzzling out the questions of existence, giving us his Solomonic credentials. He says he has seen all the deeds done in our world and behold they are hevel and wind chasing. Although Kohelet has previously declared the world to be hevel (verse 7) and has relegated this world to endless replication (verses 9-11) here he has thrown the full weight of his reputation and wisdom behind his sad analysis of the world in verse 14. Kohelet now uses a proverb which speaks to the hopelessness of the world. "The crooked cannot be straightened nor the lacking counted." The world is fixed as it is in its imperfect state. The static nature of the world is in the first chapter the source of the meaninglessness of the human condition. After declaring the world to be hevel in verse 2 Kohelet asks what is the advantage of man in his labors in this world. Rather than respond Kohelet speaks of the frustration of a changeless natural order. After his definitive declaration of the sad state in which we live (verses 12-15) Kohelet recaps his frustrating observations with this proverb. This adds power to his declaration. From here Kohelet proceeds with his various experiments.

Another example of the use of a proverb to conclude a passage is 7:29. The passage begins in verse 26 with an attack on women.

ומוצא אני מר ממוה את-האשה אשר-היא מצודים
 וחרמים לבה אסורים ידיה
 טוב לפני האלהים ימלט ממנה וחוטא ילכד בה

And I found woman more bitter than death for
she is a snare and her heart is a net; her
feet are fetters. The one who pleases God will
escape from her but the sinner will be taken
as prey by her.

In verses 27 and 28 Kohelet examines men finding them little better.

ראה זה מצאתי אמרה קהלת אחת לאחת למצא חשבון
אשר עוד-בקשב נפשי ולא מצאתי
אדם אחד מאלף מצאתי ואשה בכל-אלה לא מצאתי

See what I have found says Kohelet little by
little to find the score, that I desired to
seek out but did not find one man in a
thousand I found but a woman in all of them
I did not find.

Finding little in this search Kohelet states his only real 'finding'
in a proverb.

לבד ראה-זה מצאתי אשר עשה האלהים
את-האדם ישר והמה בקשו חשבונות רבים

Only see what I found: that God made man straight
but he has sought out many devices.

God did not desire this state of affairs but man has brought it
upon himself with his devious ways. Kohelet has examined men and
women and found them to be a basically wicked lot. He concludes
that this is their own fault and casts his conclusion in the form
of a proverb. This again gives a traditional coloring to his view.

We have seen the use of proverbs in the context of non-
proverbial passages. Proverbs for Kohelet serve several functions.
They can introduce and set the tone for a passage. They can serve
as a pivot of transition and they can give the weight of tradition
or give a traditional feeling to Kohelet's views. Yet these are not
simply proverbs thrown in for a "wisdom" effect but serve as an integral
part of Kohelet's discussion.

Now let us turn to those proverbs which are found together in groups. What function do they fulfill? Sometimes they conclude a passage in a manner similar to what was said above about isolated proverbs. However the interaction between them also gives us further insight into Kohelet's thinking. 9:13-10:1 is an example of this type of usage.

גם-זה ראיתי חכמה תחת השמש וגדולה היא אלי
עיר קטנה ואנשים בה מעט ובא-אליה מלך גדול וסבב אותה
ובנה עליה מצודים גדלים
ומצא בה איש מסכן חכם ומלט-הוא את-העיר בחכמהו
ואדם לא זכר את-האיש המסכן ההוא
ואמרתי אני טובה חכמה מגבורה
וחכמה המסכן בזויה ודבריו אינם נשמעים
דברי חכמים בנחה נשמעים מזעקה מושל בכסילים
טובה חכמה מכלי קרב וחוטא אחד יאבד טובה הרבה
זבובי מוה יבאיש יביע שמן רוקח
יקר מחכמה מכבוד סכלות מעט

Also this piece of wisdom I observed under the sun and I think it great. There was a small city with few men. Then came upon her a great king and he surrounded her and built upon her a great siegeworks. Inside was found a poor sage and he saved the city by his wisdom, but no one remembered this poor man. I think wisdom is better than strength but a poor man's wisdom is despised and no one heeds his words.

The words of the wise are heard in quiet better than the screams of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons but one sinner can spoil much good. Dead flies putrify and ferment perfumer's oil. Weightier than wisdom, than splendor is a little foolishness.

In verses 13-15 Kohelet has told us a parable about a (poor wise) man who in spite of his lowly estate saves his city from attack and certain defeat through his wisdom.⁷ Yet he is forgotten. Kohelet makes his point proverbially lauding wisdom over might even though a poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heeded. The passage now concludes with three proverbs which further discuss the

limits of wisdom. They conclude the passage and carry a message of their own. The first proverb picks up the praise of wisdom found in verse 16a. Wise words spoken softly are potentially more powerful than royal foolishness. The second proverb in verse 18 repeats the message of wisdom's power then limits that power. Wisdom is mighty yet it takes only a small amount of wrong doing to gum up the works. Then 10:1 picks up on this last thought with an image of one puny insignificant fly ruining a significant amount of precious oil. Carrying the thought to its logical conclusion Kohelet tells us that foolishness outweighs both wisdom and wealth. In these four proverbs (9:16a, 17, 18 and 10:1) Kohelet has concluded his parable and has moved us to a new idea. Wisdom is mighty, stronger than weapons of war but it is foolishness which is potentially the strongest for with only a little bit much can be ruined.⁸ And in all this the poor sage remains forgotten.

Kohelet has detailed for us through proverbs a triple comparison: Wisdom is mightier than brute force and foolishness is mightier than wisdom. Similarly after the introductory proverb of 4:13 mentioned above which also praises of poor man's wisdom this time over kingly foolishness. Later in the passage the longevity of the nation champions both by default. Likewise 4:2-3 compares the dead as favorable to the living and the unborn as better still.

ושבח אני את-המתים שכבר מתו
מן-החיים אשר המה חיים עדנה
וטוב משניהם את אשר-עדן לא היה
אשר לא-ראה את-המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש

And I praised the dead, who have already died,
over the living for they still live. But
better than both of them is he who has not yet
been who has not seen this evil deed done under
the sun.

All these passages center around "better than" proverbs which compare two items. Kohelet's skill in using these proverbs is demonstrated by his ability to yield triple comparisons out of these.⁹ The three ideas, the might of fools, the everlasting nature of only the nation qua nation and the benefits of not being born show us the unconventional side of Kohelet. He has used the traditional form to reach his particular conclusions.

Another example of a series of proverbs used together to conclude a passage is in 4:4-6.

וראיתי אני את-כל-עמל ואת כל-כשרון המעשה כי היא
קנאת-איש מרעהו גם-זה הבל ורעות רוח
הכסיל חבק את-ידיה ואכל את-בשרו
טוב מלא כף נחת ממלא חפנים עמל ורעות רוח

And I have seen that all labor and laboring
skill is the envy between men. This too is
hevel and wind chasing. The fool folds his
hands and eats his flesh. Better is a hand-
ful with quiet than two handfuls with labor
and wind chasing.

In verse 4 Kohelet laments the use or misuses of hard work and skill as a source of envy among men. This Kohelet rejects as hevel and wind chasing. In verses 5 and 6 Kohelet gives his own view by contrasting two proverbs. First he gives the opposite of the case cited above. The fool, unlike the man of verse 4, refuses to take part in this envy nonsense. His way is to sit quietly and vegetate. This is the retort with which those whom Kohelet is criticizing above might answer him. "You say we are caught up in envy but it is

the fool whose attitude about work needs criticism." From this Kohelet is able to extract his position. Both are wrong for what is right is a moderate amount of wealth accumulated peacefully. This is better than the fool's idleness and envy's exasperating gains. Kohelet has once again set up a triple comparison. However here two elements are equally bad while only one has value. More importantly here he has balanced two negative attitudes so that the passage flows to his own idea.¹⁰

Several proverbs also appear in Kohelet which are not intimately related to that which has preceded them. These proverbial collections are found in 7:1-10, 7:11-14, 10:2-4, and 10:8-11:6. The last two collections appear to be collections of Kohelet's own proverbs and traditional ones. They speak to his theme of careful wise living and while one can imagine their didactic use by Kohelet though their underlying structure escapes me.¹¹ The same may be said for 7:11-14 though its themes relating to the value of money and wisdom and the way to behave in good times and bad times along with their meaning are typically Kohelet. More may be discovered about the structure and artistry of Kohelet's use of proverbs in 7:1-10. Here is a catalogue of proverbs with occasional explanations by Kohelet.

Kohelet makes use of a special kind of proverb to serve as the structural basis of this passage. Each proverb uses the Hebrew כֵּן...כֵּן to set up a comparison contrasting two items. Because of their function I call these proverbs "better than" proverbs. However I hesitate to label this structure "poetic" since there is an absence of a balance in the length of lines. This balance is an important part of Kohelet's

poetry as shown by 3:1-9 and 7:15-18. Two times here "better proverbs" follow one on another while others are spaced apart by explanations of varying lengths. Still other features can be noted which shed light on Kohelet's talents.

First is the contrast Kohelet develops in verse 1:

טוב שם משמן טוב ויום המוה מיום הולדו

"A good name is better than fine oil" speaks positively about the value of the righteous life. He then adds "but the day of death is better than the day of birth." A good life may be valuable but death is even better. This triple comparison values life over property and then death over life. The comparison is made by contrasting a proverb representing a traditional value (cf. Proverb 22:11) with one representing Kohelet's unique point of view.

Next he uses a proverb which again represents a traditional value, one which is tied up in custom.

טוב ללכת אל-בית-אבל מלכת אל-בית-משונה

It is better to go to a mourning house than
to go to a house of feasting,

Kohelet gives a reason for his proverb, but not a traditional one. Instead it reflects his own sobering value system.

באשר הוא סוף כל-האדם והחי יתן אל-לבו

in that this is the end of all men and the
living should take it to heart.

In verses 3 and 4 Kohelet continues to speak of the value of going to the house of mourning.

טוב כעס משחק כי-ברע פנים ייטב לב
לב חכמתם בבית אבל ולב כסילים בבית שמחה

Sorrow is better than laughter for in sadness the heart is improved. The hearts of the wise are in the mourning house but the hearts of the fools are in a house of feasting.

In verse 1-4 Kohelet has used proverbs to contrast and affirm his own ideas. He again is contrasting his own words in order to reach resolution in his own unique ideas.

In verse 5 he again affirms the less pleasant of two options as preferable.

טוב לשמע גערה חכם מאיש שמע שיר כסילים

It is better to listen to the rebuke of the wise than to be the man who listens to the song of fools.

Unfortunately the difficulty in interpreting verse 7 makes it impossible to determine exactly why Kohelet affirms the wise rebuke:

כי העשק יהולל חכם ויאבד את-לב מתנה

For oppression makes the sage foolish and the gift destroys the heart.

Still the reason for avoiding the fool's song is somewhat clear.

כי כקול הסירס תחת הסיר כן שחק הכסיל וגם-זה הבל

For like the sound of thorns under a pot so is the laughter of the fool and this too is hevel.

Verse 8 uses two better than proverbs to contrast two values as he did in verse 1.

טוב אחרית דבר מראשיתו טוב ארך-רוח מגבה-רוח

Better is the end of a matter than its beginning. "Patience is better than pride.

The end is preferable to the beginning; however, while in the process patience is better than pride. These two proverbs don't actually

represent opposite values but values in conflict. The sage is examining the same situation from two angles noting that while the end is preferable one's action should not overly betray one's preferences. Verse 9 explains Kohelet's preference for patience by characterizing impatience as foolish.

אל-חבהל ברוחך לבעוס כי בעס בחיק כסילים ינוח

Don't be quick in your disposition to become
angry for anger lodges in the breast of fools.

Finally Kohelet looks back over the sad world he has depicted. One in which the difficult and unpleasant are to be valued. He now employs one more time the "better than" formula to urge upon his audience acceptance of the world's ways.

אל-תאמר מה היה שהימים הראשנים היו טובים מאלה
כי לא מחכמה שאלת על-זה

Don't say it was that the former days were
better than these for you don't ask this
from wisdom.

The wise person accepts the world as it is. Verse 10 is not a "better than" proverb like the others. Rather it is cast in the form of an admonition not to make such a proverb. This manipulation of the form concludes this passage.

Two features of Kohelet's use of proverbs in this passage can be noted. He employs them to contrast and affirm his own value system. For example it is the need of man to realize the inevitability of his own death (Kohelet's value) which brings one to a mourning house. In verse 1 and perhaps in verse 8 Kohelet uses a triple comparison to make his point. Second Kohelet uses a proverb to counsel his listeners to accept his ideas and not rebel against the

world's order. This last use of a "better than" proverb in verse 10 is actually a request not to make such a proverb. Kohelet has picked up on the "better than" rhythm of the whole passage in his final line.

Kohelet's use of proverbs may be summarized as follows. He works with his proverbs, inserting them at key moments when a traditional sounding phrase will give structure and importance to his message. He also employs proverbs as a device to create tension between two views. Kohelet often sets up a dialogue between proverbs which lends power to his own views.¹²

These uses of proverbs by Kohelet point again to something mentioned before in regard to 6:1-6. Kohelet's use of proverbs, particularly when they back up his thoughts as in 9:4, has a homiletical force to it. He is addressing his own views to his audience delivering them in and around proverbs. Proverbs form an integral part of Kohelet's message. Through them he is able to display his ties to tradition as well as showcase his own ideas. Kohelet's proverbial usage points to his unique place within tradition.

CHAPTER III

NOTES

¹ Robert Gordis in his article "Quotations in Wisdom Literature," (Jewish Quarterly Review, 30 [1939-1940], pp. 123-147, and in Kohelet - The Man and His World (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951), pp. 95-108, describes a process wherein Kohelet may have quoted current proverbs or his own proverbs in order to contrast them with the main thought of the passage in which they are found.

My work deals with proverbs and their use by Kohelet. Many of these proverbs would qualify as quotations under Gordis' criteria, though Gordis' quotations include non-proverbial material. Nevertheless the very idea that Kohelet employs a proverb assumes Gordis' definition of quotation and this work was influenced by Gordis' work. Of particular influence was the idea that a proverb could be contrasted to another proverb, could be used to buttress an argument or used to begin a discussion. Also see W. J. Whedbee's Isaiah and Wisdom (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), pp. 68-75 for another attempt to deal with the use of proverbial language.

² Gordis notes that this proverb is used as a quoted text on which Kohelet elaborates in verse ten in "Quotations in Wisdom Literature" (Jewish Quarterly Review 30 [1939-1940]), p. 133.

³ Kohelet makes broad use of proverbs of comparison which are structured 1E...11V and which I call "better than" proverbs. See below my discussion of these proverbs in Chapter IV, pp. 63-64. Also see G. E. Bryce, "'Better' Proverbs: An Historical and Structural Study," (Society of Biblical Literature 1972 Proceedings, Volume 2), pp. 343-354 and G. S. Ogden, "The 'Better' Proverbs (Tob-Spruch), Rhetorical Criticism and Qoheleth," (Journal of Biblical Literature 96 [1977], pp. 489-505.

⁴ Gordis sees this proverb as a quoted text upon which Kohelet elaborates in verses 9b-12. Op. cit., p. 133.

⁵ This final proverb has a parallel in Mesopotamian literature discussed below, pp. 71-73.

⁶ Gordis (Op. cit., p. 136) views this proverb as a quoted text refuted in verses 5-6.

⁷ For a discussion of the understanding of the poor in wisdom literature see F. Ch. Fensham, "Widow, Orphan and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 21 (1962), pp. 129-139 (=J. L. Crenshaw, Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom [New York: Ktav, 1976,], pp. 161-171).

⁸ The might of wisdom is a common wisdom image. I Edras 4:33-42 (41) contains an extreme version of this image. "So he ended his speech and all the people shouted and said, 'Great is the truth: truth is the strongest!'" (Translation - New English Bible, verse 41). The commentary in The New English Bible with the Apocrypha (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), (D. B. Weisberg) points out that the phrase through Latin became the popular saying "Great is truth and it prevails."

⁹ Ogden (Op. cit., pp. 497-498) understands 4:2-3 as the use of "better than" proverbs (see note three) in a tripartite structure. Similar to Gordis, he understands verse two as reflecting the wisdom tradition (quote) followed by Kohelet's own view in verse three.

¹⁰ Gordis (Op. cit., pp. 234-235) notes the relationship between verses five and six, but makes no reference to verse four.

¹¹ Gordis in Kohelet - The Man and His World (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951) pp. 182-185, 305-323, groups 10:2-11:6 together as a teaching to his upper class students, but finds little organic connection among them. He cites the work of Fr. Delitzsch, L. Levy, and H. W. Hertzberg who in their commentaries on Kohelet try to interconnect several of these verses. Their attempts according to Gordis reflect their own need to find a connection rather than an organic structure. Gordis then cites the Book of Proverbs as a similar unorganized collection of proverbs. However the difficulty to identify a structure or the inability of scholars to agree does not rule out the possibility of a structure. H. L. Ginsberg, for example in "The Structure and Contents of the Book of Kohelet," (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 3 [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955]), pp. 138-150, places these verses within a section which begins in 7:10 and continues to 12:8. However even in this structuring Ginsberg has difficulty with 9:17-10, 14a, 15-19 which he calls a "block of associative digressions with some internal dislocation" (p. 142, note three).

¹² See above pp. 39-42.

CHAPTER IV

KOHELET'S MOTIVATION AND MESSAGE

The twelve short chapters of the book of Kohelet are all that remain of the work of a critical insightful thinker. Up to this point I have examined certain passages with an eye toward understanding the appearance of certain features. These features often strike the reader as evidence of influence upon Kohelet. I have not expended my energies labeling these features and identifying their original sources for the purpose of revealing that which has influenced Kohelet. Rather I concentrated on how these features provide the substance out of which Kohelet speaks. Now I seek Kohelet's motivations and goals in his message as communicated through these features and the content of his message.

The place to begin such an inquiry is with Kohelet himself. Was he a professional sage for whom teaching was a primary responsibility? Was he one of many engaged in similar activities whom we can identify as a professional class? Gerhard Von Rad in his book Wisdom in Israel speaks of such a class.¹ He deduces its existence from circumstances in neighboring cultures and from Israel's own high level of literary achievement. "This demands the assumption that a class of scribes existed."² And a scribal class demands the existence of schools wherein they could learn their arts. In some of these schools wisdom texts were used as teaching tools and wisdom texts were

composed. These men who ran these schools were known as the חכמים. Their main function was to teach and much of the book of Proverbs reflects a teaching setting. Another function of these schools which developed over time was to grapple with the dilemma of human suffering from a theological standpoint. These efforts resulted in, among other works, the book of Kohelet.

Robert Gordis also speaks of schools (academies) conducted for the upper classes and therefore reflecting a conservative mentality.³ This is reflected for example in Kohelet's views on life after death. Some of the literary output of wisdom schools of thought were designed to inculcate practical commonsense. This lower wisdom is similar to Von Rad's wisdom texts used in the schools. Speculative wisdom works like Kohelet are at variance with this other wisdom but are products of the same schools of thought.

However did these schools really exist and if so what form did they take? Recently such conceptualizations of wisdom have been viewed as unwarranted on the basis of our present knowledge. In The Intellectual Tradition of the Old Testament, R. N. Whybray cites many of the proof texts, which serve as direct evidence for such a professional class to demonstrate that they prove little.⁴ Therefore he disassociates Proverbs, Job, and Kohelet, which are obviously works of intellectual contemplation, from what was previously thought to be their sociological setting. He shows that there is no case for assuming a professional class of wise men engaged as counselors at court, teachers in schools or as authors. Then Whybray seeks to link the wise men not in a class but in a tradition. He achieves this

by an analysis of their shared vocabulary of wisdom terms. First he links Proverbs, Job and Kohelet on the basis of their extensive use of the root חכ. Then he presents words which he also identifies as central to these books. Inadvertently Kohelet's setting actually becomes more difficult to identify in light of this work. This is because the words basic to the thought of Job and Proverbs are often absent in Kohelet while words basic to Kohelet are often absent from Job and Proverbs. Whybray divides the words of central significance for wisdom into four categories. They are words occurring only in Proverbs, Job and/or Kohelet, words occurring frequently both in Proverbs, Job and/or Kohelet and also in other Old Testament traditions, words characteristic of Proverbs, Job and Kohelet, but also occurring occasionally in other Old Testament traditions and finally words apparently exclusive to the Intellectual Tradition (which appear throughout the Bible). Of particular interest are those words which Whybray believes to be exclusively part of Israel's wisdom tradition (category four). Of these nine words only three appear in Kohelet (כסיל, סכל, נלל) and one of them (נלל) appears only once. In category three which is of less value in identifying wisdom traditions similarly excludes Kohelet. Out of ten words none are found in Kohelet. In the second category the link of Kohelet to the wisdom tradition is only slightly better. Here seven of the twenty-three words are shared by Kohelet and at least one other of the two biblical wisdom books. Finally of words used exclusively in these books only צל is shared between books. This word appears fourteen times in Proverbs and once in Kohelet.

To my mind what this infers is that not only can we not assume a class of professional wisdom teachers or the like out of which Kohelet came, we are unable to assume literary tradition of the nature Whybray seeks. Only the root נחן, it seems, connects the three on this level. It appears 51 times in Kohelet, 82 times in Proverbs, and 28 times in Job. Still the 141 uses of this root in the rest of the Bible prevent us from drawing out too much from its use in the three.

Whybray has pointed to a lack of hard evidence for the existence of wisdom schools in Israel with its class of wisdom teachers. Then he further isolates Kohelet (accidentally) on the basis of his vocabulary. So we are left with a Kohelet who shares little in respect to an identifiable tradition with the other wisdom books. Of course Kohelet shares with the other wisdom authors the use of proverbs and parables but this might reflect a common folk wisdom background greater than Israel itself just as easily pointing to a more developed relationship between more sophisticated authors. So Kohelet stands very much alone.

Perhaps it is impossible to assign Kohelet a formal wisdom role or status in the established order of his day yet we may be able to assign him a different kind of place in relation to the thought development of the Bible. Such a task was assumed by James L. Crenshaw in his article "The Popular Questioning of the Justice of God in Ancient Israel."⁵ Crenshaw postulates that Kohelet's inability to find meaning anywhere comes as a violent reaction to a religious outlook which affirmed a doctrine of just retribution in a world which did measure up to it. Kohelet is a book of theodicy particularly

in regard to the world's natural evil. He despairs denying divine justice in the world as defined by the doctrine of retribution. This theory though interesting fails to account for the whole of Kohelet emphasizing only the negative. More will be said about this below.⁶ However, more important than the conclusions Crenshaw reaches is one of his basic assumptions. That is that Kohelet, writing sometime before 150-125 B.C.E., did not live in isolation but was a son of his people and his work was a product of their national life.⁷ For Crenshaw Kohelet's awareness of centuries of disillusionment concerning the doctrine of retribution in Israelite thought leads directly to Kohelet. From my perspective this assumption is the starting point for a discussion of how the various elements in Kohelet operate. Kohelet was part of the Jewish national life of his age. With reasonable assurance we can label Kohelet one of the last composed books of the Bible. The Hebrew in which it is composed, as Robert Gordis has emphasized, appears to be late.⁸ It shares features with both biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew and falls somewhere between the two. Also the use of two Persian loan words, דָּגָל (2:5) and דָּאגָל (8:11) point to a post exile date. From the perspective of content, Kohelet's awareness of a belief in an afterlife in which the soul rises up (3:18-22) is not reflected in other biblical books, except the later book of Daniel (12:1-3), but is found in later Jewish thought.⁹

The superscription and more importantly 1:12 indicate that Kohelet lived in Jerusalem or at the very least was aware of the importance of the city as a center of wealth and activity and places

himself in the midst of it. Kohelet would have had to live in complete isolation not to have been aware of the historical and literary traditions which preceded him. Kohelet's broad use of stylistic features such as proverbs, parables, parallel structures and biblical imagery point to Kohelet's roots in the biblical world. By accepting the assumption we gain a perspective from which to examine the plane of Kohelet and better understand the interaction of the elements. The elements as discussed before are the various features of the text which belong to the world in which Kohelet lived and which are present in the book (plane) in forms unquestionably dependent upon Kohelet. From an understanding of the interaction of the elements we will gain insight into Kohelet the person.

Let me turn to some passages discussed previously. In 7:15-22 Kohelet outlines a definition of righteous action. His definition is one which considers man's disposition to do evil. According to Kohelet only when one is cognizant of one's own wrong-doings can true righteousness be achieved. In order to reach this conclusion Kohelet brings several elements into interaction. The content elements are the observation that evil people often succeed in life (verse 15c), the doctrine which says that these people are punished by God (verse 17), and the observation that all people have an evil side (verse 20 and verses 21-22). These elements are present throughout the bible. Kohelet's awareness that evil is often successful in spite of a belief that it is punished while good is rewarded is very much part of the biblical world. As Crenshaw points out in his previously mentioned article the doctrine of retribution was central to Israel's theology.

That this doctrine was not borne out in reality was troubling to say the least. Micah 2:1 reflects this anguish.

הוי חשבי-און ופעלי רע על-משכבותם
באור הבקר יעשוה כי יש-לא לאל ידם

Woe to those who devise wickedness and work
evil upon their beds. When the morning
dawns they perform it because it is in the
power of their hands.

Kohelet combines this with the awareness of evil's universal character.

With these elements present, one might expect Kohelet to develop them such that Kohelet's views on divine retribution might be aired since this is so central to biblical thought. However, Kohelet employs them to communicate in another related area. He speaks on how to be righteous. Kohelet does this, as noted above, by playing off the righteous against the wicked with parallelism which is of course basic to biblical expression and by introducing the element of evil's universality with another old form, the proverb.

Three things may be noted from the interaction of the elements. First considering the centrality of a doctrine of retribution and the problem of evil for biblical thought the use of these elements to arrive at a definition of righteous action without mention of these central ideas is surprising. This is an indication that Kohelet's primary concern is not with the meaninglessness of the universe reflected in the lack of just retribution in the world. According to Crenshaw this would have represented a reaction to dissatisfaction with the incompatibility of the doctrine of retribution and reality. What I believe to be in fact his prime concern will be developed

below. Second the direction in which Kohelet does move is itself traditional.

Gordis speaks of Kohelet as an unconventional thinker when he notes Kohelet's relationship to the wisdom movement in general.¹⁰ He also notes Kohelet's basic conservatism and traditional use of proverbial ethical teachings and again points to the wisdom movement as their source. I wish to take Kohelet's conservatism one step further. Many of Kohelet's developed teachings, that is teachings not simply given in proverbs but which are developed in a passage within the context of several verses are "Conventional" in a basically fundamental sense. That is they share with other wisdom writings, particularly Proverb and Ben Sirah, the quest to map out a guide for proper behavior and proper living. Kohelet is not unconventional. Rather he develops in his own innovative way "conventional" concepts. This is not to say that nothing in Kohelet is in variance with what came before him. Indeed Kohelet's bitter appraisal of life as hevel would be striking in any religious tradition which affirms life's value and the goodness of God. Yet Kohelet's concern here and elsewhere is with a plan for living in such a world. His unconventionality is confined to how he understands the problem of trying to live in a world of hevel and his solution concerning what constitutes proper behavior. This is better labeled innovative than unconventional.

That Kohelet was the son of his nation is reflected in his conservatism and is basic to his world view. This view included the age old affirmation of righteous acts and the propriety of each receiving his just rewards in life. This passage, if anything,

harmonizes the necessity of righteousness with Kohelet's observation that the world is basically marked by injustice by both the רשע and the צדיק. More will be said about Kohelet's basic tie to other wisdom works later.

The third insight gained from an awareness of how the elements of 7:15-22 interact relates to the literary elements. As noted above, this passage contains three parallel lines (one synonymous, one antithetical, and one synthetic) and a proverb tied together within a framework of observation. Proverbs and parallelisms tie Kohelet to artistic biblical and Ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions.¹¹ However Kohelet takes these literary forms to a new level of development. Kohelet here through his observational framework displays his rare gift for communicating. This is easily shown by contrasting the books grouped before because of the intellectual activity they represent. משלי is primarily composed of משלים. R. B. Y. Scott has remarked that the reader of the literary proverbs is struck by the almost complete lack of continuity.¹² The folk proverbs he identifies only break up the prevalent monotony. This book is a collection or series of collections of the wisdom of Israel. In a sense it is boring. Collections simply do not make for the easy reading we find in Kohelet. When Kohelet uses a proverb, its context often enhances our appreciation. In 7:19 this is demonstrated.

החכמה העז לחכם מעשרה שליטים אקר היו בעיר

Wisdom strengthens the wise better than ten rulers who were in the city.

This proverb is an integral part of the passage as noted above when 7:15-22 was examined.¹³

The same may be said for Job. Its author has a command of proverbs. Yet unlike Kohelet Job is not the kind of book one could sit down to read in an afternoon. Job was written solely for contemplative reading. Kohelet, though best studied over the years, does lend itself because of its length and readability to a casual reading. This is a tribute to Kohelet's skills of communication. Kohelet is somewhere between the short proverbs of משלי and the Joban depths. Kohelet is developing his varied thoughts in relatively short spaces. His style is homiletical. In some ways his style is comparable to Ben Sirah. There too ideas are communicated in small passages. However Ben Sirah relies heavily upon proverbs and songs to wisdom and does not carry the freshness which Kohelet maintains throughout the book. Kohelet's talents as a writer set him off from the remainder of the Bible, while his message connects him to the biblical tradition.

The comparison created in 6:1-6 which was studied above¹⁴ bears out Kohelet's ties to the biblical tradition. 6:1-6 contain the content elements of observation, comparison and condemnation. Kohelet has observed the fate of the rich man who does not enjoy his wealth and condemns him, comparing him negatively to the לפני. He declares his message through descriptions of the rich man's plight and the stillborn's sorry state, which are replete with biblical imagery. What is most striking about this passage is Kohelet's vehemence when attacking the rich man. Anger which seems better suited to a prophet

than a sage. This attack certainly does not reflect the kind of conservatism of which Gordis speaks, which comes from Kohelet's close identification with the upper classes. These upper classes must have had among their ranks the kind of men Kohelet describes here. Would the spokesman for such a group have so chastized his own constituents? However Kohelet's traditional background is in a different way reflected in this passage.

In 7:15-22 Kohelet dealt with the familiar problem of how to live a righteous life. The question was traditional as was the solution yet it reflected Kohelet's unique perspective. Here Kohelet tackles a corollary of this question. He explores a life which he does not admire to discover its fault and condemn it. In this search the underlying issue is still the same. Kohelet seeks to discover the proper way to live. As stated before he shares this concern with Proverbs and Ben Sirah. Here Kohelet's condemnation of a group of men who may have wielded a good measure of power in the upper classes of Israel should not be labeled unconventional but brave. Beginning with the promise that the world lacks intrinsic worth (also a brave view) stated first in 1:2, it is logical from his point of view that pleasure in the here and now carries value. Yet his ability to examine a possibly influential group which thought itself well off and conclude that its members waste their lives is bravery. This bravery comes out of his traditional quest for a proper mode of behavior.

That the whole book reflects this search is demonstrated by the question posed by Kohelet at the beginning of the book.

מה-יתרון לאדם בכל-עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש

What profit does a man have in all his
labors which he completes under the sun?

I see this question as Kohelet's unique formulation of a question which is basic to Israel's wisdom search.¹⁵ The question is a further inquiry into the idea captured in Proverbs 14:23.

בכל-עצב יהיה ודבר שפתים אך למחזור

In all toil there is profit but mere talk
tends only to want.

Kohelet seeks to examine the nature of that profit. He finds that this profit is not lasting or meaningful on a cosmic level. This comes out of Kohelet's unique observation of the world of hevel. He discovers his profit in simple human pleasures. That Kohelet is able to talk positively about profit in a world marked by hevel demonstrates his predisposition to answer his initial question. The truly unconventional thinker, given Kohelet's observations about the world's hevel would have found no profit in life at all. Then, of course, this book would not have been written since its purpose is to identify the profit.

A. G. Wright has written a seminal article which employs "New Criticism" to analyze Kohelet.¹⁶ In his study he downplays the importance of this question by claiming that 1:2-11 is a poem which falls outside the tight structure of the book. Not surprisingly, without the introductory question Kohelet's greatness shrivels. According to Wright the book is divided into two parts. Part one (1:12-6:9) is an investigation of life followed by (6:10-11:6) Kohelet's conclusions. The work of this thinker is reduced to the

conclusions that man cannot find out what is good for him to do and man will not know what will come after him. This study based upon the appearances of key phrases throughout the book reduces Kohelet's sensitive observations and insights into world affairs to two dry morsels of bread. More to my liking is H. L. Ginsberg's division of Kohelet into four main sections.¹⁷ Ginsberg recognizes the importance of gaining pleasure from one's toil as its answer. This answer concludes the first section in 2:26 and is the "practical lesson of each one of the four Main Divisions (1:2-2:26, 3:1-4:3, 4:4-6:9, 6:10-12:8) of the book." While I am unconvinced as to the accuracy of such divisions or in fact the presence of such a structure in the book at all, Ginsberg highlights Kohelet's central focus.

Ginsberg also points out something else about Kohelet. If we accept the question and solution format for the book, which seeks to deal with the real crisis of man to find meaning (or profit) in his life lived in a world of meaninglessness (hevel) by valuing pleasure, how do we understand Kohelet's remarks in 2:2, which criticize pleasure?

לשחוק אמרתי מהולל ולשמחה מה-זה עשה

Concerning laughter I think it is madness
and joy . . . what does it achieve.

Also Kohelet's praise of mourning over revelry in 7:2-4 raises questions as to Kohelet's commitment to pleasure. Both only show that Kohelet was a sensitive thinker who advised men concerning the benefits of pleasure but who did not advocate base pleasure seeking or elevate pleasure above all other values. These give us insight into other insights of Kohelet and place his views on pleasure into their proper perspective.

Returning to 6:1-6 I mentioned above the angry disdain Kohelet holds in the passage for people who fail to enjoy life though they have the means at their disposal.¹⁸ The anger generated by the contrasting images again shows Kohelet's homiletical skills in communicating his ideas. An unanswered question related to passages like this one which speak to us forcefully is what were their settings? An educated guess is the best we can do in answering it. If we begin our reasoning from a perspective discussed and doubted before, that Kohelet was some sort of teacher in a wisdom school we might assume the book to be a part of his teaching. Besides the weakness of the basic assumption that Kohelet was a teacher in a wisdom academy other considerations lead us away from viewing the book as a teaching tool. One has to wonder what place these teachings would have in a curriculum based upon the less challenging guidance displayed in Proverbs. Was Kohelet teaching advanced courses or was his school a radical one? Both questions strain our knowledge of the situation and compel us to seek another setting for Kohelet.

Perhaps it is composed of speeches or a speech given to a non-school audience, one well suited to appreciate his message. This view would comport well with the widely held understanding of קהלת as assembler or speaker. However the words of Kohelet don't really work as a speech. Kohelet changes subjects too quickly to consider the whole book as a speech while the individual passages are too short. Nor are the passages outlines of speeches since their well conceived literary structure suggests that they are in their final form at present, with no need to be fleshed out.

Instead I think that Kohelet's communication as presented in the book was written to be read. The book is composed of a series of passages centered around but not all dependent upon Kohelet's introductory question. They are his composed thoughts. Therefore I would understand קהלת to mean the collector as in the collection of Kohelet's observations and teachings.

This understanding of the book finds support in a recent article by Michael Fox. Fox examines the role of the editor of the book. He determines that the editor is really a frame-narrator who presents Kohelet's views in a literary format much like Deuteronomy (excluding 4:41-43, 32:48-52, and 34:1-12) is a frame-narrative containing Moses' first person monologue. Again similar to Deuteronomy the true author of the book is the editor although he may draw upon older material. Fox's work opens up a new path for the study of Kohelet. He has linked Kohelet to a literary form (frame-narrative) which understands the book as it is in regard to its style.

Another passage discussed at length before was 7:1-10. In this passage Kohelet deals with some of the less joyous aspects of life which he values for their benefit for man. The passage is centered around a series of מ...טו or "better than" proverbs. They demonstrate the depths to which Kohelet's creative roots go. Glendon E. Bryce in his article on these proverbs traces their origin back perhaps as far as 2600 B.C.E.²⁶ In the Egyptian Wisdom of Kagemni it says

Then it was good in their hearts more than
anything which was in this whole land.

Yet as Bryce notes Kohelet's use of these proverbs as a foundation of a passage is a literary advance. Graham S. Ogden followed Bryce and studied the "better than" proverb in Kohelet in his article "The 'Better' Proverb, Rhetorical Criticism, and Qoheleth."²¹ He described Kohelet's use of this proverb not only in 7:10 but in their other occurrences in Kohelet. He discusses 4:2-3, 6, 13, 17; 5:4; 6:3; 6:9; 9:4, 16, 17-18 plus those found in 7:1-13 which Ogden treats as a unity. These proverbs do not declare fixed values but often seek out relative values. Kohelet's broad use of the proverb tells us something about his thinking. Kohelet is not a rigid thinker. He is sensitive to relative values. As mentioned above while he advocates pleasure as the profit of life, he does not rigidly stand by pleasure seeking. Other values, like gaining a perspective on our human existence, which for Kohelet is necessary for one to realize the value of pleasure, is preferred before pleasure in 7:2-4. Kohelet is seeking out a way for man to cope in this world. He is open to a variety of avenues. Pleasure is not a value which is opposed to experiencing sorrow or going to a mourning house. Rather both can help man to cope with his reality.

Kohelet's openness to a variety of life experiences is captured particularly in 3:1-9. After explaining how there is a proper time for all behavior (verses 1-8) he asks

מה-יתרון העושה באשר הוא עמל

What profit has a worker in his toil?

The question is always at the center of Kohelet's search. This passage demonstrates the basic dialectic of Kohelet's thought. Two

items are played off each other throughout the book. One is Kohelet's observations of the world from הבל הבלים הבל to מר ממות את-האשה. The other is Kohelet's attempt to find the profit in man's existence and guide the individual to that profit. The second of these two as described above ties Kohelet to other wisdom writers. It is Kohelet's observations and the directions they force him to go which give the book its "unconventional" appearance and which highlights Kohelet's sensitivity. Crenshaw's view that Kohelet is a reaction to dissatisfaction with divine justice makes sense when speaking of his observations. The world for Kohelet is a cold abode for man. A place of cosmic injustices and human injustices. A place where both the rich and the poor as well as the beast lead equally poor lives. Kohelet observes all this in others and in addition in his life carried out a number of experiments (1:12-2:26) which really amount to his observing his own life. As a result of his observations and in response to his quest to discover the profit in man's labors he formulates his pleasure principle. As he says at the end of his experiments and elsewhere the ability to enjoy is divine (אלהים היא) (חיד) while the one who cannot enjoy the fruits of his labors will suffer from the lack of enjoyment and someone else will enjoy them. This too Kohelet observes is part of the hevel of existence. Similarly after Kohelet repeats his introductory question in 3:9 he observes the vexation (הענין) which afflicts man. It is his desire for meaning in the world as expressed in the search for eternity without the ability to comprehend at all the universe. So Kohelet recommends the available gift of God: the enjoyment of life.

So far I have described in terms of his writings. Can we from this understanding focus in on the person? From his experiments we learn that he was extremely rich, lived in Jerusalem and was King in Israel. Where fact ends and fantasy begins is difficult to determine with any accuracy. He could not have really meant that he was indeed מלך בירושלים king of course, unless we point מלך with H. L. Ginsberg and translate "property holder."²² Perhaps he only wrote of the holy city rather than in it. As for his money, his expenditures (2:4-10) cover them unless they only create an image, like the rich man of 6:1-6, drawn in the extreme. Kohelet claims to be the richest person ever to live in Jerusalem. Unless he was king he is lying to some point concerning his wealth. We will never learn the facts of Kohelet's life. At best we can get a feeling for his life. His observations say much about him. Though he recommends pleasure with his view of the human predicament I doubt he enjoyed much. He saw the world not as capricious but as a place whose mystery was unknowable and frustratingly painful. He could not help but to be deeply affected by injustice he saw in the envy between men to the very basics of the universe. Yet he defied his own pessimism seeking to alleviate the pain he sees in our lives with simple pleasure. He knew it was not a lasting value and perhaps for him it did not work anymore (2:2) but it is a way to cope. In short, he was a sensitive observer of human suffering who used his insightful mind to help suffering humanity cope.

CHAPTER IV

NOTES

- ¹ (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), pp. 15-23.
- ² Ibid., p. 17.
- ³ Kohelet - The Man And His World, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951), pp. 22-38.
- ⁴ (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), pp. 6-54.
- ⁵ "Zeitschrift für die alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft," 82 (1970), pp. 380-395 (=J. L. Crenshaw, Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom [New York: Ktav, 1976], pp. 289-304.)
- ⁶ See pp. 59-61, 64-65.
- ⁷ My dating of Kohelet comes from our ability to fix its terminus non post quem. Fragments of Qohelet were found at Qumram and dated ca. 150-125 B.C.E. (J. Muilenburg, Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 135 [1954] pp. 20-28.) Of course some time had to elapse between the book's composition and its appearance at Qumram.
- ⁸ Op. cit., pp. 59-62.
- ⁹ This places the book in the post-exilic period. Attempts to date the book with more precision are based on conjecture and not fact. See Gordis, op. cit., pp. 63-69, Ginsberg, "The Structure and Content of the Book of Kohelet," Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), p. 148, and Dahood, "Qoheleth and Recent Discoveries," Biblica 39 (1958), pp. 302-305.
- ¹⁰ Op. cit., pp. 22-38.
- ¹¹ For parallelism see The Babylonian Theodicy and The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer contained in W. G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 63-91 and 21-63 respectively. For proverbs see Ibid., pp. 222-282.

- 12 "Folk Proverb of the Ancient Near East," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada Volume 15 (1961), pp. 47-56.
- 13 See above pp. 13-16.
- 14 See above pp. 19-28.
- 15 For a complete discussion of the role of this question in biblical wisdom literature see W. Zimmerli, "Concerning the Structure of Old Testament Wisdom," Trans. B. W. Novacs, Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom, Ed. J. L. Crenshaw (New York: Ktav, 1976), pp. 175-207. (Originally published as: "Zur Struktur der alttestamentlichen Weisheit," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft X:3 [1933], pp. 177-204.) Zimmerli feels that Kohelet is not able to answer this question in a meaningful way.
- 16 "The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qohelet," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 30 (1968), pp. 313-334.
- 17 "The Structure and Contents of the Book of Kohelet," Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 3 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), pp. 138-149.
- 18 See above pp. 58-59.
- 19 "Frame-Narrative and Composition in Qohelet," Hebrew Union College Annual 48 (1977), pp. 83-106.
- 20 "'Better' Proverbs: An Historical and Structural Study," Society of Biblical Literature 1972 Proceedings, Volume 2, pp. 343-354.
- 21 Journal of Biblical Literature 96 (1977), pp. 489-505.
- 22 Studies in Kohelet (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), pp. 12-15.

CHAPTER V

KOHELET WITHIN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

What was Kohelet's relationship to Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature?

This chapter will investigate Kohelet's Ancient Near Eastern connection. I will divide my work into three parts. First, I will describe the general considerations which come into play when examining Kohelet's relationship to the literature. Second, I will focus in on Kohelet's use of literary forms in common with other literature and third, I will focus in on themes and content of this wisdom relationship. Afterwards I will draw my conclusions.

In the last chapter Kohelet's ties to other intellectual creations of the biblical tradition were examined. I agreed early in that search with the basic thesis of R. N. Whybray concerning the interrelationship of these authors and their common roles in Israelite culture.¹ Simply put, Whybray contends that on the basis of hard evidence we are in no position to speak of the existence of "wisdom schools" neither as academics nor thought traditions for ancient Israel. Since we cannot speak of an organizational structure for wisdom writers to which Kohelet belonged we cannot speak about the Ancient Near Eastern wisdom traditions influencing or serving as the model of Israel's tradition. Therefore the maximum amount of influence we can assign to extra-biblical wisdom will be limited because of the lack of formal con-

nection between nonexistent wisdom schools. At the same time this influence is potentially more significant for our study since its importance cannot be diminished because of supposed mediation through Israel's wisdom schools.

Like the books of the Bible which reflect intellectual activity Ancient Near Eastern writings are marked by their use of certain literary forms. Kohelet relies heavily upon proverbs in his writing as explained above.² Proverbs are found in various places within passages and even form the basis of the passage which begins chapter seven. This form is also present in Babylonian and Egyptian writings. The common use of this form by writers in all three places by itself tells us little concerning any possible connection between these writers. As was the case with the shared use of proverbs among Israel's sages, this may reflect only a common folk wisdom background. The proverb is such a basic wisdom form in so many places it is difficult to draw conclusions from its use throughout the Ancient Near East. However from Kohelet's usage of proverbs a certain link to other Ancient Near Eastern wisdom can be observed.

In an article previously cited Glendon Bryce traces the use of a certain type of proverb from an Egyptian work, The Wisdom of Kagemni to Kohelet.³ I called this comparative proverb the "better than" proverb because of its structure (ḥ...ḥḥ) and because its function is to compare one item as more favorable than another without necessarily conveying the real value or lack of it in either item. This function of the "better than" proverb is especially important for Kohelet in expressing his message, since in his understanding

of the world nothing has lasting value and all is hevel. Therefore it is not surprising that this form is so important for Kohelet. As mentioned above Kohelet uses this form in two important ways. First he creates triple comparisons as in 4:2-3. Second he bases 7:1-10 on this type of proverb. Kohelet's innovative use of this older form does not prove Kohelet's relationship to older sources where this form is found but it does point to the developing character of the wisdom form over the centuries and the ability of Kohelet to adapt a form and make it his own.

Michael Fox in a previously cited article calls Kohelet a frame-narrative.⁴ If he is correct it would link Kohelet to other frame-narratives. Fox cites three such narratives from Egypt: The Instruction of Kagemeni, The Prophecy of Neferti and The Complaint of Ipuwer.

Looking eastward to Babylonia we do find direct evidence of a possible direct connection between Kohelet and another proverbial-like source. Aaron Shaffer in his article "הרקע המיסופוטאמי של קהלת ד, ט-יב" attempts to find a connection between Kohelet 4:9-12 and Akkadian and Sumerian sources.⁵ He cites lines 99-107 of the myth of Gilgamesh in the Land of the Living. Chart number one contains Shaffer's transcription of the text, his Hebrew translation, S. N. Kramer's English translation of the same text and Kohelet 4:9-12.⁶ The comparison of the texts indicates two things. First is the occurrence in both texts of the same three ply item as a metaphor indicating strength in numbers. Second, both texts use the proverbial saying as the "proof" of the preceding line which speaks of the strength of two working

ס. טובים השנים מן-האחד,
 אשר יש-להם שכר טוב בעמלם;
 י. כי אם-יפלו, האחד יקים את-חברו,
 ואילו האחד שיפל, ואין שני להקומו.
 יא. גם אם-ישכבו שנים וחם להם,
 ולאחד איך יחם?
 יב. ואם-יחקפו האחד, השנים יעמדו נגדו,
 והחום המשלש לא במהרה ינחק.

99. O my master, journey thou to the 'land,' I will journey
 to the city,
 100. I will tell thy mother of thy glory, let her shout,
 101. I will tell her of thy ensuing death, [let her] shed bitter
 tears."
 103. "For me another will not die, the loaded boat will not
 sink,
 104. The three-ply cloth will not be cut,
 105. The ... will not be overwhelmed,
 106. House (and) hut, fire will not destroy. (110)
 107. Do thou help me (and) I will help thee, what can
 happen to us?

99. lugal.mu za.e kur.šè u₃.a gá.e
 uru.ki.šè ga.u₃
 100. ama.zu.ur l.ti.zu ga.na.ab.du₁₁
 zú.zú hé.gir₁₀.gir₁₀
 101. egir.ra ba.ug₆.zu ga.na.ab.du₁₁
 ír.zu ḫé.scs₄.scs₄
 102. *Gilgameš inim mu.na.ni.ib.gi₄.gi₄
 103. gar.ra Enkidu lú.2 nu.ug₆.e giš.má.
 da.lá nu.su.su
 104. éš.3.tab.ba lú nu.kud.dè
 105. bàd.da.a lú nu.šú.šú
 106. é.gi.sig.ga izi nu.te.en.te.en
 107. za.e gá.e daḫ.ma.ab gá.e za.e ga.mu.
 ra.daḫ a.na.me lú ba.an.tum₄

99. מלכי. לך-לך לארץ (הארזים), ואני אלך לארץ
 100. כאשר אספר לאמך כי חי אתה, יצהלו מניח;
 101. וכאשר לאחר-מכן אספר כי מת אתה, מר תבכה עליך.
 102. עונה לו גלגמש;
 103. עצור, אנקידו לא ימות השני, הספינה הנגררת לא
 תטבע;
 104. את החום המשולש איש לא ינחק;
 105. בחסות החומה איש לא יישטף;
 106. בסוכה הקלועה לא חכבה המדורה;
 107. עזור לי אתה, ואעזור לך אני - ומי יוכל להטרידנו?

Gilgamesh in the Land of the
 Living, translated by S. N.
 Kramer in Ancient Near Eastern
Texts, J. Pritchard p. 49,
 (line 102 omitted).

אהרן שפר, "הרקע המיסופוטאמי של קהלת ד, ט-יב,"
ארץ-ישראל (תשכ"ז), דף 247.

together. For Shaffer this indicates Kohelet's awareness of the Summerian texts as mediated through a composite Akkadian text. This text he mentions in a follow-up article exists only in fragmentary form (chart number two).⁷

Did Kohelet have this passage in front of him? Did he model his passage upon this Gilgamesh myth? Supporting this view is a similar connection between Kohelet 9:7-9 and the Akkadian text Vat 4105 column iii⁸ which is presented in chart number three along with W. A. Speiser's translation.⁹ H. L. Ginsberg in "The Quintessence of Kohelet" claims that Kohelet was influenced by the Akkadian.¹⁰ In this instance the comparison is striking, yet the theme is not unique. On chart number four is the Egyptian text A Song of the Harper.¹¹ This text also has a similar ring to it. Still on its own merits the common use of the metaphor of a three ply item may indicate Kohelet's awareness of the text in question, or it might indicate Kohelet's awareness of another source which makes use of this metaphor. This metaphor might have even been part of a folk wisdom tradition used by both Kohelet and the Babylonian author in a literary form. What I do see in the two occurrences of this image is the use of a proverb to seal an argument and the common use of an image of three to seal an argument about the strength of two. This signifies at least a similar approach to proverbs and their role in a text.

Other Babylonian literary works point to a possible similarity between themselves and Kohelet. The Counsels of a Pessimist speaks of remaining pious though cognizant of the impermanence of human endeavors.¹² Kohelet too argues for respect for the cult 5:3-4

Obverse, Col. I

- 2' a-na 20 Danna ik-su-pu ku-sa-pu
3' a-na 30 Danna is-ku-nu nu-bal-lu,
4' 50 Danna il-li-kuu ka-lan UD-mu
5' ma-lak ITU u UD.15.KAM ina bal-su UD-mu il-
lu-u a-na-u kur il-ba-na-nu

Reverse, Col. IV/V?

- 1 muš-baš-ši-tüm-ma iuŋ/iit-[xxx(x)] 2-tim
2 2-ra (= šitta) ur ka a iu n[ui-xxx(x)]
3 aš-lu šu-uš-lu-š[ui-u xxx(x)]
4 'x-x(x)' dan-nu a-mi-ra-[xxx(x)]

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- ה'תשנ"א.
 1. תלמידי חכמים
 2. 50 שנה
 3. 30 שנה
 4. 20 שנה
 5. 10 שנה
 6. 5 שנה
 7. 1 שנה
 8. 1 חודש
 9. 1 שבוע
 10. 1 יום
 11. 1 שעה
 12. 1 דקה
 13. 1 דקה
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 97. 1 דקה
 98. 1 דקה
 99. 1 דקה
 100. 1 דקה

אזהרה

- 1 הלאו הוא הממערד (אזעט ברקעט) ש... לא... שטת...
2 ...ש...
3 הוזט המש'ש...
4 ...ש...
(המדובר בחוכה / חקקה, שזר יר-הארזים)

אָרץ-יִשְׂרָאֵל, ט (תשכ"ז), דף 159.

1. "Gilgamesh, whither rovest thou?
2. The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find.
3. When the gods created mankind,
4. Death for mankind they set aside,
5. Life in their own hands retaining.

1. גלגמש, אנה תתרוצץ?
 2. את החיים אשר תחפש לא תמצא
 3. בברוא האלים את האדם.
 4. למות יקדו את-האדם
 5. ואת החיים, בידיהם-הם אחזו.
- לשם השוואה נביא כאן את שאר דבריה של בעלת

VAT 4105, Col. III

6. Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly,
7. Make thou merry¹⁰⁰ by day and by night.
8. Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing,
9. Day and night dance thou and play!
10. Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,
11. Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.
12. Pay heed to the little one that holds on to thy hand,
13. Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!
14. For this is the task of [mankind]!"

6. *at-ta ḡiṣ lu ma-lī ka-ra-aš-ka*
7. *ur-ri ù mu-ši ḥi-ta-at-tu at-ta*
8. *u₄-mi-ša-am šu-ku-un ḥi-du-tam*
9. *ur-ri ù mu-ši su-ur ù me-lī-il*
10. *lu ú-bu-bu šu-ba-tu-ka*
11. *qá-qá-ad-ka lu me-si me-e lu ra-am-ka-ta*
12. *šú-ub-bi še-eḥ-ra-am ša-bi-tu qá-ti-ka*
13. *mar-ḥi-tum li-iḥ-ta-ad-da-a-am i-na su-ni-ka*
14. *an-na-ma ši-pi[r awilūtim]*

תרגום

6. ואשר לך, גלגמש, תמלא כרסך
7. יומם וליל יתך לבך,
8. יום-יום רבה חדווה.
9. יומם וליל סוז ושחק;
10. יהיו בגדיך לבנים.
11. יהי ראשך רחץ, במים תסבול.
12. שים עינך לילד האוחז בידך.
13. תתעלס רעייתך בחיקך.
14. זה חלק בני-אנוש

קח'ט

- ו. לך אכל בשמחה לחמך ושתה בלב-טוב יינך...
- ת. בכל-עת יהיו בגדיך לבנים. ושמן על ראשך אל-יחסר.
- ס. ראה חיים עם-אשה אשר אהבת... כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך אשר-אתה עמל תחת השמש.

The Epic of Gilgamesh,
translation by W. A. Speiser
in Ancient Near Eastern Texts,
J. Pritchards, p. 90.

אהרן שפר, "הרקע המיסופוטאמי של קהלת ד, ט-יב,"
ארץ-ישראל ח (תשכ"ז) דף 247.

The song which is in the House of King Intef, the triumphant, and which is before the singer with the harp.

Prosperous is he, this good prince,
 Even though good fortune may suffer harm!^a
 Generations pass away, and others remain
 Since the time of the ancestors.^a
 The gods who lived formerly rest in their pyramids,
 The beatified dead also, buried in their pyramids.^a (5)
 And they who built houses—their places are not.
 See what has been made of them!
 I have heard the words of li-em-hotep and Hor-dedef,
 With whose discourses men speak so much.^a
 What are their places (now)?
 Their walls are broken apart, and their places are
 not—
 As though they had never been!
 There is none who comes back from (over) there,
 That he may tell their state,
 That he may tell their needs,
 That he may still our hearts,
 Until we (too) may travel to the place where they
 have gone.

Let thy desire flourish,
 In order to let thy heart forget the beatifications for
 thee.^a
 Follow thy desire, as long as thou shalt live.
 Put myrrh upon thy head and clothing of fine linen
 upon thee, (10)
 Being anointed with genuine marvels of the god's
 property.
 Set an increase to thy good things;
 Let not thy heart flag.
 Follow thy desire and thy good.
 Fulfill thy needs upon earth, after the command of
 thy heart,
 Until there come for thee that day of mourning.
 The Weary [of Heart] hears not their
 [mourning].^a (vii 1)
 And wailing saves not the heart of a man from the
 underworld.

REFRAIN: Make holiday, and weary not therein!
 Behold, it is not given to a man to take his property
 with him.
 Behold, there is not one who departs who comes back
 again!

A Song of the Harper, translated by J. A. Wislon in
Ancient Near Eastern Texts, J. Pritchard, p. 467.

while he observes the impermanence of our works. In the Dialogue of Pessimism a slave finds reasons to agree with his master's fickle whims.¹³ Finally after several changes of mind on the master's part he asks the slave to speak his mind on what is good to do. The slave recommends death. The ability of this author to see two sides of various activities might be seen as reminiscent of Kohelet's openness. For example Kohelet recommends pleasure yet calls it folly and prefers sadness to it. The upper class setting is also similar to Kohelet. However the connections between these works and Kohelet are superficial. More important for us to note is the lack of connection between the pessimism of these works and Kohelet. For example though Kohelet at one point praises the dead over the living he does not consider death a good thing.

כי-לכלב חי הוא טוה מן-האריה המת

Better a living dog than a dead lion. (9:4b)

shows that he prefers life to death. More importantly Kohelet's whole tone is not pessimistic. His observations might be labeled as pessimistic yet his purpose is to find that which is positive in existence.

Kohelet's ability to rise above his pessimistic observations while in Babylonia they were composing pessimistic works points toward our next area of study. This is the content of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian wisdom traditions themselves and how they relate to Kohelet. Are the purposes for composing other wisdom pieces similar to Kohelet's purposes. For the wisdom works of Mesopotamia the answer is a qualified no.

W. G. Lambert in the introductory essay to his volume, Babylonian Wisdom Literature denies the existence of an organized wisdom tradition for Mesopotamia on the lines of the tradition often claimed for Israel.¹⁴ He uses the term only "for a group of texts which correspond in subject matter with Hebrew Wisdom books."¹⁵ Nevertheless Lambert indicates a fundamental source of inspiration for this literature. This is the change in the conceptualization of the gods in this region. These people went from understanding their gods as resembling the forces of nature in their moral conduct to a conceptualization reflecting personification. This change took place in the beginning of the second millenium B.C.E. When this occurred they "tried to fit the universe into moral laws springing from the human conscience."¹⁶ Lambert continues, "like all such attempts this raises intellectual and moral difficulties and these are the background against which the texts here edited are to be set."¹⁷ As mentioned above Crenshaw sees a similar process at work in Israel. For Kohelet his conclusions make sense in a limited way. Kohelet's observations, which form the first step of his search for value in life, is a reaction to a belief in a moral God whose actions are predictable in human terms (though Kohelet concludes that God's actions are in fact unpredictable). This connection between Kohelet and Mesopotamian thought does not constitute a causal relationship but it can provide a perspective from which to view the thought of both. One Mesopotamian development which parallels very closely the thinking is in Gilgamesh in the Land of the Living. In this previously cited passage, Gilgamesh faced with the inevitability of death, which may have been seen as unjust, is

advised to enjoy life (cf. Kohelet 9:7-9). Other passages do not make such complete parallels with Kohelet. Though they come out of the anguish with the real difficulties concerning the difficulties of a belief in moral gods, they do not reach a positive conclusion on how to cope. The Dialogue of Pessimism for example concludes that suicide is only good for the master to do. The author was unable to go beyond his pessimism. The reasons for this are unknown but perhaps that which caused Kohelet to seek an answer to his question מה יתרון לאדם rather than just report his observations was missing for this author.

Egypt's wisdom literature instead of reacting to an unworkable conceptualization of divine morality is rooted in the positive affirmation of such a reality. The concept of Maat is central to all Egyptian wisdom literature. According to Henri Frankfort, Maat can be defined as "the divine order erected at the time of the creation; this order is manifest in nature through the normal course of events; it is manifest in society as righteousness; and it is manifest in the life of the individual as truth."¹⁸ Ernest Würthwein in his article "Egyptian Wisdom and the Old Testament"¹⁹ follows up on this understanding of Maat and its centrality to Egyptian wisdom. He characterizes Egyptian wisdom's understanding of existence in the following manner. "First life proceeds according to a fixed order. Second, this order is teachable and learnable. Third, man is thereby handed an instrument with which to determine and secure his way through life. Because, fourth, God himself must pattern himself according to this order, this law."²⁰

Kohelet, as Würthwien notes, does not share this understanding. He is willing to accept the existence of a cosmic ordering of the world. God's actions are everlasting (3:14). Each action is done in its correct time (3:1-11). Yet wisdom, the way one might think to gain an understanding of this order is powerless to puzzle it out.

כאשר נחתי את-לבי ידעת חכמה ולראות
את-הענין אשר נעשה על-הארץ כי גם ביום ובלילה
שנה בעיניו איננו ראה: וראיתי את-כל-מעשה האלהים
כי לא יוכל האדם למצוא את-המעשה אשר נעשה
תחת-השמש בשל אשר יעמל האדם יבקש ולא ימצא
וגם אם-יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא:

When I applied my mind to know wisdom and observe
the business which is done on earth for neither
day nor night one finds rest, I observed the
work of God in that man cannot discover the deed
done under the sun. No matter how much a man work
to discover it, he will not find it. Also even
if a sage claim to know he cannot fathom it. (8:16-17)

Kohelet, however, does describe the cosmic order without attempting to comprehend it. First, as noted before, Kohelet states that each event does have a specific moment for its existence. Second Kohelet notes that death ends at least from the human perspective this cosmic order. Death ends all ranking.

In my opinion Kohelet's and Egypt's attempts to define a cosmic order, like Mesopotamia's attempt to assign human moral qualities to the gods, is evidence of their common effort to use their intellects to comprehend existence within their given worlds. Yet Kohelet rises above the temptation to order creation. Observing the harsh amoral realities of existence he does not claim to completely comprehend it all. The most obvious of the realities, death, is for Kohelet the border of his knowledge of the cosmic order.

The writers of Mesopotamia also speak out of their anguish over what they observed as the unfair suffering of the righteous. However they were unable to take the next step. Kohelet within this troubling reality seeks value for man. This value he finds in pleasure. Even in the passage quoted above where Gilgamesh is advised in the face of death to enjoy, which parallels Kohelet 9:7-9, pleasure is advised only as an alternative to the quest for immortality. In Kohelet it is awarded value on its own.

In conclusion, on the level of literary forms as exemplified by the use of proverbs, little may be said with certainty about a connection between Kohelet and Ancient Near Eastern wisdom. Parallels do exist but do not necessarily indicate influence. Such influence may indeed have existed but our knowledge of the nature of wisdom, especially in regard to Israel, prevents us from saying more.

When speaking of the perspective from which this wisdom was written we can say more. Kohelet's perspective is fundamentally different from the view of Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom. Kohelet, like other sages, begins with an intellectualization of reality. However we are unable to identify a source of influence for this universal activity. Regardless Kohelet's own perspective goes beyond this. He recognizes the limits of his mind and yet goes on to seek value for man. Kohelet in this respect stands alone.

CHAPTER V

NOTES

- ¹ See above pp. 50-52.
- ² See above pp. 31-46.
- ³ See above pp. 63-64.
- ⁴ See above pp. 63.
- ⁵ אהרן שפר, "הרקע המיזופוטאמי של קהלת ד, ט-יב," ארץ-ישראל ח (תשכ"ז), דפים 246-250.
- ⁶ Gilgamesh in the Land of the Living, J. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 47-50.
- ⁷ אהרן שפר, "ידיעות חדשות על מקור 'החוט המשלש,'" ארץ-ישראל ט (תשכ"ז), דפים 159-160.
- ⁸ אהרן שפר, "הרקע המיסופוטאמי של קהלת ד, ט-יב," ארץ-ישראל ח (תשכ"ז) דף 247.
- ⁹ The Epic of Gilgamesh, J. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 90.
- ¹⁰ Biblical and Other Studies, Ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 47-59.
- ¹¹ A Song of the Harper, Trans. J. A. Wilson. In J. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 467.
- ¹² W. G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 107-109.
- ¹³ Ibid., pp. 139-149.

- ¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 1-20.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 1.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ancient Egyptian Religion (New York: Haper, 1948), p. 63.
- ¹⁹ Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom, Ed. J. L. Crenshaw, (New York: Ktav, 1976), pp. 113-133, (originally published as "Die Weisheit Ägyptens und das Alte Testeament; Rede zure Rektorat-sübergabe arm 29. November 1958," Schriften der Philips-Universität Marburg, Volume VI (Marburg: N. G. Elwer Verlag, 1960).
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 119.

CONCLUSION

Kohelet was a perceptive observer of life. His observations show his unique abilities to see the world without recourse to rose colored glasses. Yet the root cause of his dire outlook was a general dissatisfaction with a world which failed to comport to a moral world view. He is a unique observer who stood within a tradition.

Kohelet's conclusion that we should enjoy ourselves is also unique. He gives value to pleasure. Yet this advance in biblical thought comes out of his desire to fulfill the sage's traditional role to provide a proper way for men to live.

The same is true for his use of literary forms and styles. His tools are the traditional tools of the sages. However Kohelet forges with these חפץ דברי all his own. The beauty of his words show an artistry rare in a sage. Kohelet combines the חכמה of the poet with that of the sage.

Therefore Kohelet is unique but not without ties to his world and its past. He stood alone yet others stood behind him. After all it was he who said, "There is a דבר about which someone says, 'See this is something new!' Behold it has existed for generations which were before us." Kohelet's words are חפץ דברי and yet they existed for generations.

ביבליוגרפיה

בן סירא. ספר בן סירא. המילון ההיסטורי ללשון העברית, ירושלים: האקדמיה ללשון העברית, תש"ג.

גינזברג, ח. א. קהלת. הל אביב: מ. ניומן, תשכ"א.

פוקס, מ. מ. ספר קהלת ויחסו לאסכולת החכמה, חיבור לשם קבלת וואר דוקטור לפילוסופיה, אוניברסיטה העברית, בירושלים, תש"ב.

שפר, א. "הרקע המיסופוטאמי של קהלת ד, ט-יב," ארץ-ישראל, ח (תשכ"ז), 246-250.

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