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TITLE

Moses Mendelssohn as Exegete with special reference to the
Book of Ecclesiastes.

MOSES MENDELSSOHN AS EXEGETE
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO THE
BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

THESIS

Jerome Rosenbloom

February 1, 1932

Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For Degree of Rabbi

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Explanatory Statement

Chapter numbers of references to the Bible text alone are given in Roman Numerals.

References to the Commentary are given in Arabic Numerals.

All references to the Bible and to the Commentary are to the book of Ecclesiastes, unless otherwise stated.

Bible passages upon which comments are made are given in capital letters when translated.

References to Ginsburg, Barton, Rashi, Targum, Ibn Ezra, Preston, and Mendelssohn are in loco, unless otherwise stated.

MOSES MENDELSSOHN

AS EXEGETE

With Special Reference To

Ecclesiastes

CHAPTER I

Life and Works

Moses ben Menachem (Mendel) Mendelssohn, the man who was "responsible for the rejuvenation of a race which was so estranged from culture that the possibility for improvement¹ (was) doubtful" was born in 1729 in Dessau.² His father was an indigent writer of scrolls and from him Mendelssohn inherited an excellent handwriting and a refined, sensitive soul. He embarked upon the career of learning at the usual age under the direction of David Fränkel, rabbi in Dessau. Rabbi Fränkel left Dessau to take up a new post in Berlin and some years later³ Mendelssohn followed him in order to continue his studies. Fränkel engaged Mendelssohn in the task of copying his commentary to the Jerusalem Talmud, an occupation which was remunerative enough to maintain the meagre existence of a student.⁴ Berlin was at this period a liberal city under the rule of the enlightened Frederick the Great. It was in this city that the Jews imbibed the impulse to culture and the desire to imitate Christian habits.⁵ Mendelssohn absorbed the former but throughout his life resisted the latter tendency. From Israel Zamosz, Mendelssohn learned mathematics and logic,⁶ from Aaron Solomon Gumperz⁷ he became acquainted with the French and English languages.

His early attempts to master the intricacies of the Latin language were supervised by Abraham Kisch.⁸ But Mendelssohn may truly be called a self-educated man. These tutors merely introduced him into larger fields of learning; Mendelssohn, unaided, mastered them. It was during this period of intensive study that Mendelssohn entered into the Hebrew journalistic field and wrote semi-philosophical articles which were distinguished for their clear and fluent Hebrew.⁹

Mendelssohn's career would have been, perhaps, that of the ordinary enlightened Jew of the eighteenth century had he not met Lessing. The turning point of Mendelssohn's life may properly be taken as the year 1754, for it was at this time that he became acquainted with Lessing.¹⁰ From this friendship Mendelssohn carried away a sincere love of culture and the true spirit of scholarship. Henceforth, Mendelssohn became a distinguished member of the learned and polished circles of Berlin and from his contacts he carried away ideas and knowledge which ultimately redounded to the glory of Israel.

From this point on, interest in Mendelssohn centers chiefly around his literary and philosophical productions. In 1755 Lessing published Mendelssohn's "Philosophical Conversations"¹¹ and in the year 1763 Mendelssohn established his right to recognition by capturing the Berlin Academy Prize for his essay on "Are Philosophical (Metaphysical) Truths Susceptible of Mathematical Demonstration." This triumph he scored over Thomas Abbt and Emanuel Kant. The judges, however, admitted that Kant's essay was more profound than that of Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn's essay was given preference because it was

written in an intelligible style.¹² This statement offers us a clue to the character of Mendelssohn's writings; he was distinguished not so much for the profundity as for the lucidity of his literary creations. Both in his philosophic and exegetic studies he wrote not for his own edification nor for the approval of the erudite, but for the intelligent masses as a whole. Frederick the Great granted Mendelssohn the status of Shchutz-Jude and henceforth our author's position in Berlin was secure against arbitrary police expulsion.

To combat the materialism of the age, a materialism which denied the existence of the soul and adopted an agnostic point of view regarding the existence of God, Mendelssohn wrote the Phädon (1767), a dialogue in the Socratic manner, which sought to prove the immortality of the soul. This book became the most popular of its time and was translated into all European languages as well as Hebrew.¹³ For this book Mendelssohn became known as the "German Plato."¹⁴ It should not be inferred, however, that Mendelssohn's fame rests upon his philosophic work. His writings were entirely too popular to merit permanent fame. They were fortunate victims of circumstance, in that they appeared at a time which their appeal was strongest. They lack a profundity which cannot be counterbalanced by their sincerity or intelligibility. After two decades had elapsed, Mendelssohn's philosophical treatises were completely forgotten.

Nor should it be supposed that Mendelssohn devoted himself entirely to secular studies. Indeed, his fame rests most securely upon his Jewish writings. These may be divided into two classifications: philosophy of Judaism and exegetical

works. His philosophical studies of Judaism are best known through the Jerusalem (1783). In this book he defined Judaism as a system of revealed legislation in contradistinction to the current view of Judaism as a revealed religion. In this work he proved the right of the Jews to civic emancipation without surrendering an iota of Jewish custom and practice. One may believe as one wishes, freedom of conscience is an inalienable right, but one must act in strict accordance with the laws of the Torah and the Talmud.¹⁵ Civic emancipation without breaking a single binding Talmudic law was declared both ideal and feasible.¹⁶ Thus Mendelssohn defended and advocated the right of the Jew to emancipation in an age which found the Jew a foreigner in his native land.

The second type of Jewish literary activity, his commentaries and translations, is more germane to the present study which is limited to Mendelssohn as exegete. The Bible, especially the Pentateuch, had become strange and unintelligible to the Jews. Rabbinic and Kabbalistic expositors had distorted the literal sense of Biblical passages,¹⁷ for the Bible had become a "means of giving scriptural justification to a system of thought or practice. The Primary meaning of the text became the incidental or accidental elements in the prevailing types of exegesis... The period from the early thirteenth century to Mendelssohn's might be called the Dark Age of Peshatic exegesis."¹⁸ Mendelssohn had by dint of hard labor gained a command of a polished literary German style; his ambitions for his children were similar. He, therefore, wrote

a German translation of the Pentateuch for his children that thereby they might learn the Sacred Word and the German language simultaneously. He was urgently requested to publish this translation which was notable for its lucidity and adherence to the text. For this purpose an accompanying commentary was required. Mendelssohn availed himself of the assistance of his children's tutor, Solomon Dubno, who was to explain any necessary grammatical points and to justify Mendelssohn's divergences from traditional interpretation.¹⁹

The publication of a specimen evoked a two-fold reaction: great admiration from the Christian and liberal Jewish worlds, denunciation from the extremely orthodox group who rightly foresaw that a German translation (Mendelssohn used Hebrew characters) would lead the youth of the period into secular studies. Mendelssohn's translation was placed under a ban in Fürth (June 1779) and an additional interdiction was published by Raphael Ha-Kohen on July 17, 1781.²⁰

Mendelssohn answered the criticisms extended by his opponents, "The more the so-called wise men of the day object to it, the more necessary it is. At first I only intended it for ordinary people, but now I find that it is much more needful for rabbis."²¹

Dubno, however, resigned as Mendelssohn's assistant because of the interdict and Mendelssohn called upon Naphtali Herz Wessely, Herz Homberg, and Aaron Jaroslav for aid. The translation of Genesis appeared in 1780 and three years later the last translation, Deuteronomy, was published.²²

In the same year (1783) Mendelssohn's translation of Psalms appeared, first in German characters and then in Hebrew type. It

was accompanied with a commentary by Joel Löwe.²³ Five years later Mendelssohn's translation of the Song of Solomon was published by Joel Löwe and Aaron Wolfson who appended a commentary.²⁴

It is upon the translation of the Pentateuch that Mendelssohn's fame today rests. The effect of the translation was an awakening of the Jewish youth to a study of German literature and a desire for German culture and nationality (the cause of much apostasy). But even more important is the fact that the translation marked a new epoch in the history of exegesis. The Meschut, the simple, literal meaning of the text, returned to its own. Hebrew grammar became the object of careful study and the exact meaning of the Biblical words was no longer slighted. Mendelssohn's work was sedulously continued after his death by the Biurists, the school of expositors who followed Mendelssohn's lead. The first Biurists were pupils and personal followers of Mendelssohn and they were joined by other enthusiastic disciples in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The Biurist Bibles²⁵ prepared the soil for the new science of Judaism which was to be the most important fruit of Mendelssohn's activity.²⁶

Mendelssohn's earliest exegetical work, his commentary to Ecclesiastes (1770)²⁷ will be discussed in detail in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Mendelssohn's closing years were marred by a break in habitual philosophic calm. Jacobi had published a statement proving that Lessing had professed himself to be an admirer of Spinoza.²⁸ To Mendelssohn this statement was tantamount to treason,

for nothing was more abhorrent to him than Spinoza's impersonal, deterministic pantheism. He hastily wrote the Morgenstunden oder Vorlesungen über Dasein Gottes (1785) and An die Freunde Lessings (1786).in an effort to refute the philosophy of Spinoza and to defend Lessing from all imputation of taint. He was too feeble for such activity and on Jan. 4, 1786 succumbed²⁹ to an attack of apoplexy.

CHAPTER II

General Characteristics of Mendelssohn's Exegesis

Ecclesiastes represents Mendelssohn's first attempt in the field of exegesis. His commentary to this book appeared in 1770, ³⁰ three years before his translation of Genesis was published. Mendelssohn planned to compose commentaries on the Psalms, Proverbs, and Job, but evidently his commentary on Ecclesiastes did not meet with public favor or, just as likely a probability, he became ill. ³¹ Whatever the reason, he failed to publish the commentaries planned. However, Mendelssohn's exegetical work did not cease with Ecclesiastes for his hand is to be found in the commentary on every book of the Pentateuch. This, together with Ecclesiastes, represents ³² the extent of his exegetic work.

His commentary to Ecclesiastes is not overburdened with technicalities. He realized that this type of exegesis would discourage the average reader and therefore wisely confined most of his scholarly observation to the Introduction to the Commentary. This does not mean, however, that the commentary proper lacks full discussion; in many instances Mendelssohn enters into detail, but does so in as simple a manner as possible. (This point will be illustrated in the following chapters).

"Mendelssohn was not a creative or bold exegete, but rather a splendid builder. Taking the best of the grammatical and exegetic material that had been produced in the centuries

before him, he built a structure in which even the most orthodox could find nothing anti-traditional." ³³ The last clause of this statement is particularly significant, for we shall see that nowhere in his commentary does Mendelssohn express an opinion of a heretical nature through the mouth of Solomon. Indeed, he frequently has overlooked the simple Peshat in an effort to reconcile the text with orthodox theology. However, even the manner in which this reconciliation is made evokes admiration, for it is done in strict accordance with the rules of Peshatic interpretation; that is, Mendelssohn does not fall back upon the authority of the Midrash or Talmud to prove his point. He was a "splendid builder" in the sense that he rarely accepts an erroneous interpretation made by a predecessor, but, on the other hand, he frequently fails to see the merits of an excellent interpretation which had been suggested by a previous commentator. We shall now turn our attention to a specific study of the various characteristics of Mendelssohn's exegesis.

A. Method

In the introduction to his commentary to Ecclesiastes, Mendelssohn states the general method of exegesis which he intends to follow. He begins with a description of the four types of interpretation which may be followed and illustrates them. There are, he says, four kinds of explanations: Peshat, Derash, Remez, and Sod--all of them correct and all of them compatible. ³⁴ The Peshat notices the primary meaning of the passage and does not consider the individual words as ends in themselves. Thus synonymous words or phrases; e.g., *וְהָיָה* (Dt. 5:18) and

and ³⁵אֵל (Ex. XX:17) are to be translated as though the same words were used. In ordinary conversation synonyms having exceedingly small distinctions are frequently employed for stylistic purposes. The Peshatic method of exegesis treats the text from this point of view--seeking the primary and literal meaning of the words. However, the words of God or of him who speaks with the spirit of prophecy are not used accidentally. Subtlety is employed and figures of speech are used in order to hint at a recondite meaning. To uncover this meaning requires a method interpretation other than the Peshat. The Dérash, on the other hand, seeks the secondary meaning. Changes in words, the use of synonyms, figures of speech are not considered simply stylistic subterfuges, but are looked upon as definite and purposive. Thus, according to the Derash, the connection between verses is ignored; each phrase receives a separate interpretation as though it were an isolated passage. The third method of exegesis is Remez. According to the rules of Remez, the beginnings and endings of words, their combinations, or numerical values are of paramount importance. Thus, while Derash considers words or phrases as having special signification apart from the context, the Remez considers the letters of words as separate entities. The word ³⁶אֶלֶף (Gen. II:4) means "with the letter ³⁷א [of God's name] he created them". The fourth method of interpretation is called Sod. This is a type of Remez which is too profound to be revealed to the masses; it can be revealed only to a chosen few. ³⁸

Although a superficial study seems to prove these methods contradictory, a closer scrutiny reveals the fact that all of them are true and accurate. Each of the methods reveals the word of God from a different point of view and for a different purpose.³⁹

Mendelssohn then informs the reader that he^{has} chosen the method of the Peshat and intends to interpret the text according to the literal meaning of the words in harmony with the connection and sequence of the passages. His predecessors, great as they were, failed to interpret Ecclesiastes correctly in accordance with the sequences of the verses and, as a consequence, involved the author in a series of contradictions. A book with such defects would discredit an insignificant writer; we cannot possibly attribute them to Solomon who was renowned for his wisdom. Ibn Ezra had noticed many contradictions and inconsistencies, but Mendelssohn determined that a literal exegesis of the text would resolve all disharmonies.⁴⁰

Mendelssohn offers examples to illustrate the difference between his method and that of his predecessors. It is not necessary to enter into a detailed discussion of the relative merits of Mendelssohn's commentary, since the remainder of this thesis is devoted to a study of that problem. We need, therefore, cite only two of Mendelssohn's examples at this point of the discussion. The Zohar in commenting on 3:19 states that these words were not spoken by Solomon but only quoted by him from ignorant men who say that the same accidents befall both men and beasts. Mendelssohn refers the reader to his

commentary on 3:18 and promises to give the true meaning with reference to the antecedent passages.⁴¹ Mendelssohn's comment on this verse is: "If we were to judge man and his condition from what we see in this world, then the sons of men would be creatures of accident; they would have no enduring substance."⁴² This passage is analyzed in detail elsewhere in this thesis, and need not be discussed further here beyond demonstrating that Mendelssohn's interpretation is superior to that of the Zohar inasmuch as Mendelssohn attempts to prove a logical sequence in thought throughout this section of the discourse. Ibn Ezra's inability to resolve the contradictions with which the text seems to abound gave Mendelssohn further opportunity for demonstrating his exegetical method. In his commentary to 7:3, Ibn Ezra lists seven contradictory passages.⁴³ Mendelssohn takes it upon himself to resolve these contradictions. Thus VII:3 is opposed to VII:9 and I:18 contradicts XI:10. VII:3 and I:18 praise anger as being better than laughter and the result of wisdom, whereas ~~the~~ VII:9 and XI:10 condemn it as being the property of fools and advise its removal. Mendelssohn observes that⁴⁴ contradiction is involved: OYD (Mendelssohn translates it "boiling wrath") is good when it is opposed to a real wrong and is detrimental when opposed to a seeming wrong. But at all times it may bring man into suffering and pain.⁴⁴ Mendelssohn's analysis is good but not quite correct. The word OYD in I:18 does not mean "anger" the same sense as in the other passages. In this verse it means "sadness" resulting from sober reflection⁴⁵ or "vexation"⁴⁶ of an intellectual kind.⁴⁷ Both VII:3 and VII:9 are glosses and need not be in harmony

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with each other. Similarly *QW* in XI:10 does not necessarily mean "anger", but is opposed to the word "cheerful".

Of even greater significance than Mendelssohn's strict adherence to the Peshat is his remarkable observation of the accents. This subject will be treated in detail in the next chapter, but at the present we must point out that not a single translation offered by Mendelssohn deviates from the traditional accentuation. Perhaps more *than* any other commentator *he has followed* ~~he has obeyed the laws of~~ the accents *in his interpretation*. His sincerity in seeking the literal and ~~original~~ meaning of the text could not be better exemplified than his slavish adherence to the accents.

Mendelssohn states that he has paid no attention to the traditional chapter and verse division and that in this respect he has followed the commentaries of his predecessors. The chapter and verse divisions were made to facilitate reference and usually have little relationship to the subject matter. However, in his commentary and the accompanying text Mendelssohn does not change the original chapter division because such procedure would confuse those followed the Talmudical index.⁴⁹ He has therefore merely indicated the proper division in his commentary and by calling the reader's attention to it at that place has accomplished his purpose. Mendelssohn divides Ecclesiastes into thirteen sections, each section representing a new topic of discussion. In his introduction he lists his own division, but makes no explanations concerning the subject matter of each section. The following is a comparative table listing the divisions made by Mendelssohn and Ginsburg:

	Mendelssohn	Ginsburg
1.	I:1-11	I:2-11
2.	I:12-II:11	I:12-26
3.	II:12-II:26	
4.	III:1- IV:3	III:1-V:19
5.	IV:4- IV:17	
6.	V:18- V:19	
7.	VI:1- VII:14	VI:1-VIII:15
8.	VII:15-VIII:9	
9.	VIII:10-IX:12	VIII:16-XII:7
10.	IX:13-X:15	
11.	X:16-XI:6	
12.	XI:7-XII:7	
13.	XII:8 to end	XII:8 to end.

We see from this study that Mendelssohn has broken the discussion into smaller groups than has Ginsburg. In this respect Mendelssohn's division is superior because Qoheleth rarely speaks about one subject at great length. Only in ^{one} division does Mendelssohn differ from Ginsburg in regard to the end of a discussion and the beginning of a new one. Ginsburg begins his fifth section with VIII:16 whereas Mendelssohn considers VIII:15 and 16 parts of the same discussion under VIII:10-IX:12. 50

Barton's division differs radically from both these tables, but most of the divergence is due to his recognition of glasses. The test of the understanding of Ecclesiastes is the ability to find the natural pauses in the discourse, for the book is planned very poorly. Mendelssohn has adequately proved his ability in comprehending the arrangement and treatment of the subject matter.

We have seen that Mendelssohn's purpose was to offer a literal interpretation which understood each passage in the light of the whole book. Each passage was, therefore, to be interpreted in such a manner that it became an integral part of the entire discourse. This task is an impossible one; Ecclesiastes

is not a unit, but a discourse which has been greatly interpolated. Mendelssohn's commentary, therefore is guilty of many errors. Frequently he has been forced to contradict the literal meaning of the text in order to fit the passage into the entire scheme. Even more deplorable is the fact that Mendelssohn has accepted the orthodox interpolations as the essence or theme of the book and so has misconstrued the original, sceptical portions. Thus Mendelssohn's commentary has little value for him who would read a modern, critical interpretation. However, in comparison with Rashi, the value of Mendelssohn's commentary is greatly enhanced, for he has offered a clearer, simpler, and more literal interpretation than his illustrious predecessor. Mendelssohn's commentary is also preferable to Ibn Ezra's, since Ibn Ezra frequently loses sight of the underlying philosophy and purpose of Ecclesiastes, as well as falling into error when he is carried away by his own astrological and philosophical notions. For the orthodox reader--and it was for him that Mendelssohn wrote--this commentary exceeds its predecessors. It reads well and offers logical explanations of the text without straying too far from the literal meaning. A detailed proof of these statements is given in the following chapters.

R. Authorship

The first problem of modern exegesis revolves about the authorship and date of the book under study. Ecclesiastes begins with the editorial heading: THE WORDS OF WISDOM, THE SON OF DAVID, KING OVER JERUSALEM (I:1). It is evident that

the person referred to is Solomon since he was the only son of David who was King. This statement is accepted literally by the Targum, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra as well as a host of Jewish and Christian commentators ranging from Talmudic times to the twentieth century. Mendelssohn also adopts the view that Qoheleth is Solomon and that he is responsible for everything in the book.⁵¹ A crucial passage in regard to the problem of

authorship is I:12, I, QOHELETH, WAS KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM. Mendelssohn ignores the use of the word ~~which~~³ which indicates that the author of the book is no longer king during the period of writing. Whether Mendelssohn's indifference to the peculiar wording of the text was accidental is problematical. It may be that he was dissatisfied with explanations⁵² of the Targum, Rashi,⁵³ and Ibn Ezra.⁵⁴ It is also possible that he felt that there was no problem involved. In other passages Mendelssohn's recognition of Solomon as Qoheleth is more explicit. Thus Mendelssohn's commentary to IV:15 states that the people were "murmuring against Solomon and were exalting⁵⁵ wereboam...as is seen from the book of Kings." Similarly Mendelssohn observes that the reason for the harsh statement⁵⁶ found in VII:28 is to be found in Solomon's many marriages.

These passages were chosen at random to prove that Mendelssohn adhered to the traditional view of the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes. Many other passages could be cited as additional proof, but Mendelssohn's opinion on this problem is so obvious⁵⁷ that it is unnecessary to elaborate.

Yet, as early as the sixteenth century, Luther stated⁵⁸ that "Solomon himself did not write the book of Ecclesiastes,"

and in 1644 Hugo de Groot (Grotius) held that "the book is not the production of Solomon, but was written in the name of this king." ⁵⁹ The opinions of these scholars were available to Mendelssohn but either he did not read their writings or he chose to reject their arguments. In either case, Mendelssohn is guilty of error since the evidence is now practically irrefutably against the Solomonic authorship. We need not go into detail on the problem, since it does not belong to the thesis proper. The date of book has been fixed as sometime in the third century b.c.e. and the beginning of the second.

Mendelssohn's erroneous opinion of the authorship of Ecclesiastes is responsible for misinterpretations of the text. Most of these passages will be discussed in the following chapters. ⁶⁰

If Solomon ~~was~~ was the author of the book, how can we account for those passages which defy a Peshatic interpretation which harmonizes the contradictory passages? For, although Mendelssohn did not agree with Ibn Ezra in regard to inconsistencies, he nevertheless recognized that many passages were contrary to the general tenor of the text. Mendelssohn's answer was the theory of the "objector". Solomon, our commentator says, frequently quotes the words of those who deny immortality because so wise a king weighed all the arguments before coming to a definite conclusion. The whole section from VI:1 to VI:9 are attributed to the objector. In his interpretation of III:12,13,14, Mendelssohn says, "Behold, I have already told you that not everything said in this roll is the real opinion of Solomon." ⁶¹ In this way Mendelssohn was

*possibly
Peshatic*

able to maintain the integrity of the book and the authenticity of the editorial heading (I:1) which ascribes the book to Solomon. Mendelssohn's theory of the objector will be discussed at greater length in Chapter IV. He has cleverly evaded the difficulty to be found in the contradictory passages and at the same time been able to satisfy even the most orthodox reader.

C. Purpose of Ecclesiastes

Mendelssohn nowhere speaks of the design of Ecclesiastes explicitly, but his opinion is to be inferred from his commentary. The main topics of discussion are the immortality of the soul and the necessity of leading ~~and~~^a cheerful and contented life. Interspersed in the discourse are recommendations on worship, politics, and domestic economy. ^{work} ~~is~~ the opinion of Mendelssohn. ⁶² modern commentators agree, although the discourse treating the problem of immortality is neither ~~so~~⁶³ marked nor as optimistic as Mendelssohn supposed it to be. Mendelssohn has understood the purpose of Ecclesiastes and underlying philosophy more correctly than his predecessors and in his commentary is usually successful in demonstrating the relationship of each verse to the general plan of the book.

D. Language

Mendelssohn's commentary is written in a lucid, fluent Hebrew. He rarely expands his statements to the point where he becomes repetitious. On the other hand, he avoids the evil which so often attends brevity--obscurity. The commentary offers little linguistic difficulty to one acquainted with rabbinic

Hebrew. His style resemble Rashi's although it is fuller and more developed. However, he uses a philosophic terminology which comes from the medieval Jewish philosophers. As in the German, so in the Hebrew he aims at intelligibility and does not overburden the reader with technical language. Some examples of the words which he uses will give the reader an adequate idea of Mendelssohn's Hebrew:

Philosophic Terminology	Literary Terminology	Grammatical Terminology
קבלה --perception	משל --metaphor	סוג --accent
דעה --opinion, doctrine	משל --parallelism	משל } varying
האמית הנכס --immortality		משל } accent
חכמה עליונה --metaphysics		משל
השגחה מלכות --divine providence		משל
רצון --free-will agent		משל
אקידה --accident		משל
זכמות --substance		משל
צורות --form		משל
קריה --experiment		משל

accusation relation to another

CHAPTER III

Mendelssohn's Exegetical Apparatus

In this chapter we shall study the various methods by which Mendelssohn demonstrates the meaning of a passage. The Scriptural verses will be discussed without analyzing their relationship to the rest of Ecclesiastes. This chapter is devoted to the purely technical elements of exegesis.

A. Grammar

A knowledge of grammar is indispensable for one who aspires to understand the meaning of a scriptural passage. The book of Ecclesiastes affords many opportunities for grammatical discussion, inasmuch as the Hebrew which is used is invested with many Aramaicisms. The grammatical elements play a large role in Ibn Ezra's commentary, but Mendelssohn has eschewed the numerous suggestions offered by his predecessor. Even those passages in which Mendelssohn enters into a grammatical discussion are not complete. The more difficult and technical grammatical elements play no rôle in his commentary. Indeed, the commentary seems to show a studied attempt to avoid these difficulties, in all probability because such discussions make difficult reading and dull the interest of the average student.

One reason probably because he was interested in the thought of the book; Pent. comm. accuracy, with details grammatical comment

It should not be supposed, however, that Mendelssohn himself ignored grammar. His commentary attests to the accuracy of his knowledge, but in most instances this fact is

implied rather than explicitly stated. A typical example to support this statement is 1:8. It is evident that Mendelssohn ~~has~~ read and accepted Ibn Ezra's analysis of חָזַק .⁶⁴ In his commentary he uses the word intransitively and translates: All things seem weary.⁶⁵

7:19 offers us an opportunity to study Mendelssohn's grammatical knowledge more explicitly, since he gives a detailed explanation. "The word חָזַק comes from חָזַז . It is an expression of strength and might and is applied to the soul as חָזַז 'חָזַז' (Is.LVI:11) and חָזַז 'חָזַז' (Prov.XVIII:23).It is here used as a thing strengthening itself in the mind of a wise man." Mendelssohn's analysis is correct: he has derived the word חָזַז from its proper root and uses it intransitively.⁶⁶ However, Mendelssohn errs on the word חָזַז which is found in the same passage. "The ב of חָזַז , according to⁶⁷ interpreters, is the Mem of comparison. But, in my opinion, it is the Mem of place." In accordance with Mendelssohn's interpretation the verse is to be translated: A wise man will learn the truth of this maxim [that there is no just man who does not sin] from any ten rulers who have been in a city. Mendelssohn's analysis of the word חָזַז is incorrect. The interpreter⁶⁸ whom he rejects was correct. The correct translation is: Wisdom is greater strength~~er~~ to the wise than ten rulers who are in a city.

Mendelssohn follows Ibn Ezra in his grammatical analysis of X:19. The word חָזַז may be understood as a Hiphil or a Qal.

Mendelssohn remarks upon this and gives the difference of translation which results from the two interpretations. The sense of the passage remains essentially the same, but the meaning of the verb *נָתַן* changes. Mendelssohn says: The meaning of

נָתַן is *קִיְּנָה*-brings--if used in the Hiphil and ~~לִלְלָה~~ lll. the meaning is: It [money] brings everything at the time that the wisher desire it. Or it may be an expression of *נָתַן* "response", as I explained it in reference to the phrase,

וְנָתַן אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַחֵן (3:19). (Mendelssohn translated V:19, "God responds⁶⁹ according to the cheerfulness of his heart") In this instance, Mendelssohn has clearly understood the possible variant meanings of the text and has explained⁷⁰ correctly. Of further interest in this verse is the fact that Mendelssohn takes *וְנָתַן* of X:16 as the antecedent for *וְנָתַן* and regards verses 17,18 as parenthetical remarks. Barton points out that both 18 and 19 are glosses ~~לְכָל~~ and that 19 refers back to 16. Thus Mendelssohn was^{able} at times to solve the problem raised by the presence of glosses.

Our last example⁷¹ of Mendelssohn's grammatical knowledge is taken from 12:14. The grammatical notation is simple and correct. Mendelssohn points out that *וְנָתַן* is read with the Segol and has the Zakeph; it, therefore, cannot be taken in the construct state with *וְנָתַן*. This comment is taken almost verbatim from Rashi.

This concludes our discussion of Mendelssohn's grammatical knowledge and the use to which he put in his commentary on Ecclesiastes. Instances are not numerous, nor do they discuss particularly difficult problems. In many cases his

comments are taken from Rashi or Ibn Ezra. From the scanty evidence which the commentary on Ecclesiastes offers it is difficult to appraise Mendelssohn accurately on the score of grammar.

B. Syntax

We shall now turn to an examination Mendelssohn's technique when he handles problems of syntax. His familiarity with Hebrew syntax seems to be greater than his knowledge of grammar. Although he has misconstrued many passages, we cannot conclude that his knowledge was inadequate when confronted with syntactical difficulties. In the following discussion we shall analyze those passages which have occasioned great difficulty and we need not be surprised therefore at any errors found in Mendelssohn's commentary. Our first example is taken from the commentary to II:2. Mendelssohn reads *לחוק אמרתי מהולל* as though it were written *לחוק על*. This is Ibn Ezra's interpretation who cites as analogous passages *אמרתי אהיה* and *לחוק אמרתי*; that is to say, it is to be translated "concerning". Ginsburg mentions Mendelssohn and Ibn Ezra, but rejects their interpretations. ⁷¹ Barton, however, inclines to Mendelssohn's translation and offers Ps. III:2; XXII:31 as analogous usages. ⁷² The Jewish Publication Society renders the passage in conformity with Mendelssohn's translation. Mendelssohn is undoubtedly correct, since his interpretation brings the passage into harmony with context. Qoheleth is here describing the results of his experiment with pleasure and therefore speaks of pleasure ~~in it~~ and not to it.

Another example of Mendelssohn's ability to understand the text properly is to be found in his commentary to II:12b. Mendelssohn supplies the word ^{מלך} after ^{מן} and so translates it: What [can] the man do who comes after the King? Ginsburg translates: What is the man who comes after the King? but fails to offer cogent reasons for this rendering. Once again Barton and many commentators whom he quotes for support come to Mendelssohn's assistance and establish his translation. 73

An interesting interpretation by Mendelssohn is found in 5:8b, in which he translates ^{מלך} ^{מלך} ^{מן} - [even] the owner of a field is served [by others]. In defense of this translation Mendelssohn states that ^{מן} is frequently followed by the Lamed as in ^{מן} ^{מן}. Also ^{מן} applies to the owner of a field and is used synonymously with ^{מלך}. Arunah is called ^{מן}. Furthermore, in ancient times the person who presided over the work of the field was called "King" and carried a scepter. Mendelssohn's point in this verse is that we cannot judge the excellence of a land by its details, but only by its general condition. The king is not responsible for everything since he cannot observe the details of state matters. Even the owner of a field--whose kingdom is very small--must be served by others. The interpretations to this verse have been numerous and varied. Ginsburg translates: "And the advantage for the people is, that it [a system of check] extendeth to all; even the king is subject to the field." By the latter clause he means that even the king is dependent upon the industry of the people. Ibn Ezra's comment is substantially the same. Mendelssohn mentions the latter's interpretation (al-

though not by name) and rejects it on the grounds that ⁷³ and ⁷⁴ are joined by conjunctive accents and constitute a complete phrase separated from ⁷⁵ by a disjunctive accent. Mendelssohn's interpretation is altogether wrong, although his analysis of the accentuation is correct. ⁷⁶ at this verse means "king" and not the "owner of a field". Qoheleth is discussing the oppressions of a despotic government in this passage (V:7-8) and although Mendelssohn ultimately makes the application to a monarchy, he cannot derive this application by the Peshat from his translation.

These few examples close our discussion of Mendelssohn's knowledge of Hebrew syntax. We have seen that he has, at times, had a keener insight into the meaning of the text than some more modern scholars, but that at other times he has arrived at incorrect conclusions. His errors, however, usually originate in a too strenuous attempt to find the sequence of thought. In the last example we have seen that his own subtlety and ingenuity have misled him. His faults, therefore, cannot outweigh his merits as an exegete, since he frequently offers new interpretations and suggests new approaches.

C. Accentuation

In his introduction, Mendelssohn states that he paid particular attention the accent marks and adapted his translation to them. He implies that the Masoretic marks are sacred ⁷⁵ and were not to be ignored. Mendelssohn's commentary supports the statement made in the introduction, for

we have frequent references to the cantillation marks and at every point that this occurs Mendel⁷⁶sohn had adapted his interpretation to the demands of the accents. We have seen that his translation of V:8 was considerably influenced by his observance of the accentuation. Let us see how he adapts his commentary to the laws of accentuation elsewhere.

1:5 offers us an excellent example of Mendelssohn's use of the accents. Mendelssohn points out that *וְהָיָה* has the *סיוף* (disjunctive); *וְהָיָה*, the *קריב* (conjunctive); *וְהָיָה*, the *וְהָיָה* (conjunctive); and *וְהָיָה* has the *סיוף* (disjunctive). Therefore, "the accepted translation, according to the accents is like this: As the sun rises, so he sets; and ^{at} his place there [where he sets], he is panting [to arise] when he rises." In other words, the sun follows the cyclical law which rules the rest of the universe. Upon its rising it is already hastening to set. Mendelssohn arrives at this translation by obeying the accentuation. *וְהָיָה* cannot go with *וְהָיָה* *וְהָיָה* because it has a disjunctive accent and must therefore refer back to *וְהָיָה*. By the same reasoning *וְהָיָה* cannot refer to the phrase *וְהָיָה* because it is separated by the disjunctive under *וְהָיָה*. Therefore the sentence is to be translated as though it were written:

Rabbi, on the other hand, says that the sun is panting to return to the place from it rises after travelling all night therough a subterranean passage. Ibn Ezra agree that the sun is panting to return to the place at which it rises, but

he points out that each day its point of rising is changed as it makes its circuit from north to south, thereby scoring an astronomical point over Qoheleth. Ginsburg and Barton concur in the opinion that *pe* refers to the point of rising. Mendelssohn, therefore, has been misled by a too diligent study of the accents, although the views of the ancients concerning the movements of the sun are common knowledge and from this fact alone, Mendelssohn might have arrived at the correct interpretation. Barton mentions the fact that "many interpreters endeavor to adhere to this punctuation, but the results of their efforts are unsatisfactory."⁷⁷

Still another example of Mendelssohn's careful adherence to the accentuation is to be found in 3:21. This verse has given orthodox interpreters considerable difficulty since it seems to negate a belief in immortality. Mendelssohn's interpretation, like Rashi's, skillfully evades the negative implications of the question. Mendelssohn observes the fact that *וְיָדָע* has the *פֿירקל* (disjunctive); *וְיָדָע* has the *פֿירקל* (conjunctive). Mendelssohn then translates: He who knows, he will understand and discern the nature of the spirit of man--whether it goes upward, and the soul of the beast--whether it goes downward." This interpretation is substantially the same as Rashi's, but Mendelssohn, unlike his predecessor has offered proofs for his version. Mendelssohn further uses the accents to disprove the translation accepted by both Ginsburg and Barton (Ibn Ezra also except for slight changes): Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, whether it ascends upward and the spirit of the beast whether

it descends downward to the earth." ⁷⁸ If this translation were correct, Mendelssohn says, "the words *וְהָאָרֶץ* would have been more closely connected to the next part of the verse and the word *וְהָאָרֶץ* would have had the Zakeph. In this analysis, Mendelssohn is correct, but unfortunately the accentuation is not to ^{be} relied upon as an infallible guide.

Another example of Mendelssohn's close adherence to the accentuation is found in his interpretation of IX:4. Mendelssohn accepts both the Keri and the Ketib and finds that either makes good sense and the result is the same in meaning. The accentuation of the verse places a disjunctive accent upon *וְהָאָרֶץ* and Mendelssohn notes that *וְהָאָרֶץ* must belong to the predicate, *וְהָאָרֶץ*; and not ~~the~~ to the subject. He translates: Whomever among men you may choose, even if he be the humblest of men...he will be an assurance to all the living...that death which is not followed by life is an evil..." ⁷⁹ Mendelssohn's analysis of the accentuation is correct; The disjunctive over *וְהָאָרֶץ* is of the second class, whereas that under *וְהָאָרֶץ* is of the third class. This arrangement includes *וְהָאָרֶץ* in the predicate and excludes it from the subject. But the translation derived from adherence to the accentuation is completely wrong because it does not fit into the context as well as failing to make good sense in itself. ⁸⁰

Even those passages which the ordinary commentator leaves without explanation because of their simplicity or unimportance are occasionally commented on by Mendelssohn in some detail.. Thus III:11a ⁸¹ which meets with almost universal

agreement in interpretation is commented upon by Mendelssohn as though it were a highly controverted point. He points out that ו' has a conjunctive accent and must therefore be taken with לֹא. In this interpretation Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ginsburg, and Barton agree although they do not mention the accents or treat the passage as a difficult one.

We have seen that Mendelssohn follows the accentuation very carefully, so carefully in fact that he frequently must resort to ingenious and subtle interpretations which bring him into error. In one instance only does he admit that the accents seem to be wrong since he cannot translate the passage in accordance with them. He offers a correction but does not venture to make a translation in conformity with the emended text. The passage in question is XI:3. The accents as they stand require that the phrase וְהָיָה לְךָ אֶתְּנָתָא should refer back to וְהָיָה לְךָ אֶתְּנָתָא. The suggestion which Mendelssohn makes is the transposition of the accents over וְהָיָה and וְהָיָה. All the commentators whom we have have mentioned translate as though the transposition had taken place. Mendelssohn admits that he can offer no adequate literal translation which follows the accents. This passage concludes our discussion of Mendelssohn's use of the accents and offers us an excellent example of his close adherence to them. So important were they, that he refused to make a translation which opposed them, even though that translation made perfect sense.

D. Definitions

An exegete must have complete command of the vocabulary of the language which he is studying. A knowledge of the various shades of meaning, the derivation of the word, and its use in other contexts is very necessary to one who aspires to offer a correct and forceful translation or explanation. In this section we shall study several passages which illustrate Mendelssohn's ability along philological lines.

Our first example is especially interesting inasmuch as it affords us not only an opportunity to study Mendelssohn's philological knowledge, but also gives us added insight into his grammatical ability. The passage is XII:5, the crux of which is וְהָיָה כְּעֵץ הַשֵּׁמֶשׁ וְכִי יִבְרָא יִבְרָא. Mendelssohn says that commentators (Ibn Ezra and those mentioned by him) explain the passage: to mean that the genitals of the old man become burdensome to him. The word יִבְרָא is understood after וְהָיָה, which yields a translation: Carnal desire will break its covenant with the body. Other commentators hold that וְהָיָה refers to the genitals (from וְהָיָה). Mendelssohn then admits that he is not certain of the meaning of וְהָיָה and וְהָיָה. If they are names of trees, he suggests the translation: The symptoms of old age come quickly, just as the almond tree flowers and Hagab becomes laden with fruit' in a very short time--thus taking וְהָיָה to come from וְהָיָה. Mendelssohn admits his lack of knowledge on this point but does not accept the suggestion of the commentators. The

word Hagab means "grasshopper" and is translated by the modern commentators. The word is found in Leviticus XI:22. The grasshopper is noted for its tasty qualities, but it becomes "loathsome" (^{81a} פֶּחַח') to the old man (so Ginsburg); it is a very small animal but nevertheless becomes "burdensome" to the weakened old man (so Barton). The Abiyonah is a plant used as an aphrodisiac or stimulant to appetite; even this cannot stimulate the old man (so Ginsburg and Barton). Mendelssohn was entirely wrong in stating that פֶּחַח must come from פֶּחַח if אֲבִיּוֹנָה is the name of a tree. The translation "to blossom" misses the point entirely.

One other passage will be treated in detail. XII:11 is particularly interesting because Mendelssohn rejects the interpretation offered by Rashi which is substantiated by the modern critics and which is orthodox in tenor. The phrase in question is ^{מִכָּל סֵפֶר חָכָמִים} ^{מִכָּל סֵפֶר חָכָמִים} Mendelssohn derives the word חָכָם from חָכָם "to think" and defines it with the word חָכָם. He refers to Psalm 139; and points out that חָכָם is the same word. ⁸² His interpretation is: "All the proverbs and statements...even if they are collected from many books, all of them agree in ^{one} thing: teaching of wisdom, as if as if they had been given by one thinker and investigator." The word חָכָם is again used in the sense of "thinker" in Hosea XII:2, according to Preston who defends Mendelssohn's translation. Preston states that Hos. XII:2 is "the best parallel to the ^{use} of חָכָם in the sense which ⁸³ Mendelssohn here attaches to it". Brown, Driver, and Briggs

however, translates it "feed" taking it from "to pasture". It would seem, therefore, that Preston has harmed Mendelssohn's cause more than he had aided it. There is no doubt that Mendelssohn is wrong in his definition of the word, ⁷⁴⁷ "Shepherd" is the simplest and most literal meaning of the word. The passage is to be translated, They are given by one shepherd [God] ". The pastoral metaphor was a very natural one for the Jews through their Palestinian history. The sense of the passage is that the words of the wise, although uttered by different men, come from one source and aim at one object. Mendelssohn has again misunderstood the passage.

We cannot treat every instance of definition.

The following are definitions which are offered by Mendelssohn ⁷¹⁰⁷ and deserve brief comment. In 1:14 Mendelssohn translates ^{717 747} as "thoughts [composed] of wind". Mendelssohn has derived his definition from Ibn Ezra in preference to the one offered ⁸⁵ by Rashi. ⁸⁶ Modern commentators translate the phrase: a striving after wind. In 2:3 Mendelssohn correctly defines ⁷¹¹⁸ with the word ⁷³⁷⁸ , "to refresh". ⁸⁷ In 10:5 Mendelssohn leaves ⁷⁴⁴⁸ the word untranslated, but from the interpretation given ⁷⁴⁴⁸ it is apparent that the word is to given its usual definition: Error. In this Ibn Ezra and Barton agree. Ginsburg translates is "outrage" but his reasoning is fallacious. In 4:10 Mendelssohn defines ⁷⁴⁴⁸ as "falling ill". There is no reason to assume that the word means anything other than "fall upon the ground". Mendelssohn erroneously follows Ibn Ezra but adds still ⁸⁸ a second error. Our last example is taken from 5:9. Mendels-

translates *לִנְדָּה* as "multitude of men- and maidservants".

לִנְדָּה usually has the signification of "multitude" but *not always* in this passage it is to be translated "money". Some commentators even emend it to *לִנְדָּה*; in this way the parallelism is maintained and the text is relieved of obscurity. In this same verse, Mendelssohn defines *לִנְדָּה* as anything "which enriches a man and rewards him by his labor." In this definition he is correct.

This concludes our discussion of Mendelssohn's philology. We have seen that in many instances his analysis is incorrect, but that in an equal number of passages he has given the word under discussion an adequate definition. His knowledge of Hebrew, judging by the commentary on Ecclesiastes cannot be praised very highly, but at the same time we cannot state that it was so insufficient that he was arrogant in attempting to write a commentary. He has for the most part used traditional sources and where these have failed, Mendelssohn's definitions have been erroneous.

E. Isolated Interpretations

The book of Ecclesiastes contains many statements which are more or less isolated from the central theme of the discourse. A great many proverbs, some stated by Qoheleth, some by a glossator, are found imbedded in the discourse and serve only to interrupt it or obscure its meaning. In the next chapter we shall discuss Mendelssohn's interpretations of passages which belong to the central themes; at this point an analysis will be made of those verses which are not cen-

cerned with the main topics of the discourse, but which reveal Mendelssohn's exegetical technique.

We have chosen eight passages to illustrate Mendelssohn's commentary, four of which result in a favorable opinion and four in an unfavorable opinion of his value as an interpreter of texts. Our first example is taken from 3:18. Mendelssohn's comment on *וְהָאָדָם כְּהַבֵּשֶׁת* is "that men, when bereft of the providence of God and delivered over to themselves are no different from the beasts. For this purpose Qoheleth repeats the words *וְהָאָדָם כְּהַבֵּשֶׁת*. We would say, 'When forsaken they are like the beasts of the earth.'" In this interpretation Mendelssohn has wisely followed Ibn Ezra and Rashi whose comments are similar. (Ginsburg has read ^{a mistake} *וְהָאָדָם כְּהַבֵּשֶׁת* into the passage which cannot be derived by the *germane* rules of literal exegesis. He says that the only superiority God has given man over the beast lies in man's ability to understand that he is like the beast.) The meaning which Barton attaches to the passage is substantially the same as Mendelssohn's, except that the former states that God is proving that man is like the beast. Barton, however, deletes the words *וְהָאָדָם כְּהַבֵּשֶׁת* --which course was impossible for Mendelssohn. Critics ⁹¹ who preserve the textual reading, however, translate *וְהָאָדָם כְּהַבֵּשֶׁת*, "in reference to themselves"--a translation which compares favorably with Mendelssohn's.

8:8 again demonstrates Mendelssohn's clear insight into the significance of the text. He translates *וְהָאָדָם כְּהַבֵּשֶׁת* as "wind" and says, "No man has power over the wind to restrain it from harming him." In so translating Mendelssohn has again

scored over his eminent successor, Ginsburg. Rashi and Ibn Ezra too are mistaken and Mendelssohn's rejection of their interpretations is praiseworthy. Qoheleth is here demonstrating man's powerlessness over nature. The commentators whom we have mentioned find in this a reference to the spirit or the soul. Barton supports Mendelssohn's interpretation which⁹² is undoubtedly correct.

A third example of Mendelssohn's aptitude for discovering the meaning of a text is found in his commentary on 10:10; he translates *ואם קרתה הסכנה והוא לא פנים קלף* : If the axe in his hand be dull and he has not sharpened its face, then it is necessary to use more strength. Both Rashi and Ibn Ezra translate *פ'ו* with "edge". Ginsburg reads *פ'ו* and derives the meaning, "beforehand". This reading is unnecessary since the proverb makes excellent sense without it. The passage is a gnomic saying introduced by the Hokma glossator⁹³ and is only loosely connected with the preceding verses. Mendelssohn's attempt to harmonize this passage with the remainder of the section is as creditable as those offered by Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Ginsburg. The passage is really divorced from the context.

Our last illustration of Mendelssohn's correct interpretations comes from 12:13. This passage has been variously translated, but Mendelssohn, who follows Ibn Ezra, has derived the correct signification: Everything has been heard. The end of the matter [is] : Fear God, etc. Ginsburg strangely translates *כל הנשמע* "everything is noticed [by God and will

be accounted for by Him ⁹⁴]. The phrase is the editor's conclusion, informing the reader that the end of the book has been reached, "everything having been heard." Here, as above, Mendelssohn has scored on the modern critics in discerning the true meaning of the text.

We shall now turn our attention to some typical passages in which Mendelssohn has misunderstood the text and in his interpretation has failed to consider the passage in its context. 4:16 offers an excellent example. Mendelssohn, in commenting *לֹא יִסְתַּחֲסוּ לְפָנָיו הָעָם וְהָאֱלֹהִים* says --the people "reject everything which is before them; they want new things every morning for they love change....The days are long before them and it is in their eyes as if there is no end or beginning to anything before them for they are impatient." Mendelssohn takes the Lamed of *לֹא* to mean "in the opinion of" and *לֹא יִסְתַּחֲסוּ* to refer to things in general with which the people are daily in contact; that is, in their own time. Ginsburg and Barton, on the other hand, see in this verse a direct continuation of the preceding one which describes the youth who is about to succeed the old king. They translate accordingly: There is no end to all the people [who crowd about the youth]. The phrase *לֹא יִסְתַּחֲסוּ* is trans-⁹⁵lated: All whose leader he was. This translation fits into the context perfectly, connecting this passage with the preceding one and furnishing additional proof for Qoheleth's conclusion: Even this is vanity. Mendelssohn's interpretation

is far from literal and breaks the continuity of the text.

Our second example is taken from 11:1,2. Many interpretations have been given for these passages. Ginsburg lists seven different interpretations and Barton who is less historically-minded, gives four. Mendelssohn finds in this verse advice to merchants and translates *מכירות*, "thy wares." According to Mendelssohn the interpretation is: Qoheleth advises the merchant to trade at distant parts and after some time he will receive ample compensation. *נשלח* is to be translated "send" or "ship". The following verse (2) naturally is translated in accordance with the above interpretation. Mendelssohn therefore continues with mercantile advice and counsels (in Qoheleth's name) the merchant not to invest all his money or wares in one enterprise. Mendelssohn has mistranslated these verse which are really proverbs counselling generosity and charitable gifts. *תתן* never means "wares". Mendelssohn's translation and interpretation, therefore, are inadmissible. These verses are proverbial statements which advise indiscriminate bestowal of charity because we know not what misfortune may overtake us and make us the objects of charity.

Our last illustration of Mendelssohn's misinterpretations is taken from 12:2. Mendelssohn misunderstands the phrase *קנה יראת ה' ויחזק*. He takes it to mean: "Recondite learning, reading, and research are not the fundamental and important activities; practice is." Qoheleth, however,

was not decrying study, but was advising the student to refrain from reading profane and unorthodox literature. ⁹⁸
Qoheleth declares that "much study is a weariness of the flesh" in order to deter the student from unorthodox literature. Mendelssohn, therefore, has missed the entire point of the passage.

We have seen that Mendelssohn's commentary has many points to recommend it, but that in general it falls below the standards of modern exegesis. Only in one respect is it superior to our modern commentaries: in its adherence to accentuation. But this characteristic was in many instances a distinct disadvantage, inasmuch as the accentuation is frequently faulty. In conclusion we may say that from the point of view from which this chapter has studied Mendelssohn, his commentary is superior to Rashi's, equal in merit (except for grammatical elements) to Ibn Ezra's, and inferior to those of the modern exegetes.

CHAPTER IV

Mendelssohn's Exegesis as Applied to his
Philosophic Interpretations

The book of Ecclesiastes is a philosophical discussion which touches upon almost all phases of life and death. It is written in a simple and, for the most part, lucid style which leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader concerning the final attitude of the author.⁹⁹ It represents an unsystematic treatment of the problems which confront him who seeks to unravel the mysteries of the ultimate goals of man. The discourse opens with the emphatic statement that life is a vain pursuit and a transitory one when compared with the eternal, but meaningless repetitive cycle of natural phenomena (I:2-11). To prove the statements of the prologue Qoheleth recounts his experiments to attain lasting and true happiness. His first experiment was with wisdom (I:12-16); the failure of wisdom to secure permanent happiness turned him to a trial of the sensual and material things of life (II:1-11). This too resulted in failure. His last experiment also proved abortive--indulgence in folly (II:12-17). Qoheleth then concludes that nothing can bring man greater good and satisfaction than to enjoy those fleeting, animal pleasures which are possible during life (II:18-26). Permanent happiness can never be achieved.

Then follow various sections which are only loosely connected and which treat of man's limitation in the face of oppressive government, man's oppression of his fellow-man,

and man's religious duties. The book closes, after a relentless probing of the whole of life, with a reiteration of the earlier conviction that man must enjoy that which is possible for him here on earth and should reckon upon a future bar of judgement. The nature of the future is not disclosed, but Qoheleth probably refers to the cheerless and unconscious existence of the soul in Sheol.¹⁰⁰

It will be easily understood, therefore, that the book offers great problems to the orthodox commentator and affords the interpreter many opportunities for personal observations. Such is the case with Mendelssohn. His problem, however, was mitigated somewhat by his acceptance of the book as a unit. Thus the pious comments of the glossator became ~~became~~ the central theme of Mendelssohn's commentary. Qoheleth himself nowhere attributes a personal and life-like immortality to the soul of man. The glossator, however, is responsible for several verses which clearly indicate life in the future state. Mendelssohn's task, like that of other orthodox commentators, was one of assimilating the original text to the interpretations. In the course of this endeavor, he has revealed much that is purely subjective and thus has given us a real insight into his own philosophy. We shall now turn our attention to these passages which reveal Mendelssohn's method of exegesis which concern his philosophical beliefs.

A. Knowledge

Ecclesiastes offers the philosopher many opportunities for discoursing on the problem of knowledge, the probability of attaining it and its value when once attained. Although Mendelssohn was more objective in his study of those passages in which Qohaleth discusses the problems contingent upon the attainment of real wisdom, our commentator nevertheless betrays his own opinions. However, Mendelssohn did not set forth a clearly defined theory of epistemology, nor do we find any wellordered treatment of the purposes to which wisdom may be applied.

The highest form of wisdom, according to Mendelssohn, is metaphysical. In his interpretation of VIII:1 he says: "He who would be wise with the highest, absolute knowledge which is [that which concerns itself with] divine providence and exalted and esoteric ways....knows the interpretation of every difficulty so that he can explain everything in all its particular manifestations: whence evil came, what its end will be, and how God changes it into good." 101 True knowledge cannot be derived from sensory perception, since the phenomena observable by the senses yield no clue to the ⁱⁿ true signification. "When I set my heart to attain wisdom [as to] which way a man should go to reach the Good and to perceive the meaning of which is done on the earth--that is to say, all the while I judged the thing according to visual perception--" I was led into error concerning the ultimate truth.(8:15,16). Therefore, I [Qohaleth] turned

back and said: If I wish to understand even a part of divine providence I must reflect on all God's work, that which was and that which will be in the world-to-come. For a man cannot attain any part of divine wisdom if he contemplates only that which is done under the sun--since this^{is} like a dream without an interpretation, a question without an answer. Nor can a man learn the explanation of actions or the decrees [of God] concerning them, if he does not lift up his knowledge to [understand] what is afar off and what shall occur in after-time."(8:17).¹⁰²

Knowledge of the laws by which God governs the universe and the reasons behind these laws constitutes real knowledge. It is not by a superficial study of natural phenomena that we come to ultimate wisdom, but by probing beneath the surface manifestations in order to uncover the divine plan. Thus Mendelssohn defines absolute knowledge.

But is such knowledge obtainable? Can the human mind with its manifold limitations unlock the mysteries of reality? Such knowledge can be achieved, but the way is difficult; many disappointments assail the seeker after truth, since "the more a man pursues philosophy, the more does his vexation and pain increase."(1:18) The reasons for the unhappy lot of of the metaphysician who seeks pure truth are threefold: a) his knowledge is limited and thus leads to error--a condition which discourages from further pursuit of that which is too profound for him; b) the seeming inconsistencies of Providence prevent the philosopher from achieving his goal; c) the envy of his fellow-men who hate and persecute a philosophic person.(1:18) |?

Although the way is difficult and despite the fact that the burden of the statement of 1:18 is "Blessed be ignorance!" Mendelssohn holds out a glorious reward to him who attains the wisdom which enables him to understand divine purpose. "It is certain that this divine wisdom would remove from him [the successful philosopher] all anger and repining--for this wise man rejoices in all that is done under the sun after he knows its meaning: why God has decreed that it should be [as it is] and how in the end it will be pleasing to God. For this reason such wisdom makes a man's face to shine and the brightness of his countenance will be twice that of others; he will not be angry or vexed, astonished or amazed; but his appearance will always be bright and his heart will rejoice in all God's works, both small and great." (8:1) ¹⁰⁴ Thus, despite the difficulties which beset the philosopher, he is urged to continue his endeavors until he has achieved true wisdom for then his lot shall indeed be a happy one.

We have spoken at some length concerning the highest form of wisdom, but have not yet intimated its nature beyond stating that it concerns the super-mundane order. The theological and philosophical worlds have debated the four great metaphysical problems of God, Freedom of the Will, Immortality of the Soul, and the Existence of Evil since man first began to speculate upon the imponderables. The first of these problems, the nature of God, is nowhere discussed specifically in Ecclesiastes and those remarks concerning this problem which are found in Mendelssohn's commentary are incidental to his discussion of the remaining three metaphysical problems. For it is precisely

these three problems which true wisdom attempts to solve. We shall discuss each of these problems in some detail.

B. Immortality

The chief obstacle to the orthodoxy of Qoheleth is his many references to the inequality of justice on earth and the miserable end to which both the good and bad, the wise and foolish come. Qoheleth's explanation that all things proceed according to an immutable design which was predetermined without reference to moral values is, of course, also unacceptable. Mendelssohn has solved the problem like many other modern scholars by saying Qoheleth, as a disinterested philosopher, ~~xxx~~ quotes the words of those who deny immortality. He then examines the merits of their arguments and finally rejects them because they are fallacious. Thus Qoheleth, after much wandering, arrives at an orthodox conclusion.

Although the problem of immortality is not systematically discussed until VIII and IX, Mendelssohn finds hints and prefatory comments in earlier chapters. III:17 is a strong statement in favor of immortality, ~~sch~~Mendelssohn states. His proof rests in the fact that the wicked prosper and righteous suffer in this world; therefore, immortality of the soul must be inferred, since the judgment--which is inevitable--must be delayed until the death of the body. ¹⁰⁵ III:19 is clearly an argument against the immortality of the soul, yet Mendelssohn finds in it support for an affirmation of a future state. He says: "If we were to judge man and his condition from what we see in this world, behold everything is accident.

There is no substance in them. They Beast too is accident. The same accidents belong to them [both man and beast] in all the changes which occur in the world." By supply¹⁰⁷ the word of Mendelssohn makes this statement a postulate on the part of Qoheleth and throws the verb into the subjunctive of statement-contrary-to-fact, whereas it is used by Qoheleth in the indicative mode and represents an emphatic statement of fact.

This type of exegesis is continued in 3:22-4:3 which Mendelssohn classifies as a discussion anent the "burdens of this world."¹⁰⁸ In 3:22 Mendelssohn states: "Except for the strong proof offered above for immortality [III:17] and retribution in the world-to-come, I would have seen that there is nothing better, etc." IV:1 continues the same thought, according to Mendelssohn, who goes so far as to say that Qoheleth returns to a better proof of immortality. He says, "I [Qoheleth] perceive that investigation of the soul does not deliver men from from doubt; so I contemplated the oppressions done under God's rule. 'The oppressed have no comforter nor savior'... Hence, I inferred what I said above [III:17]: There is a time for every business and work there; God will bring the oppressed into judgement and give them their reward."¹⁰⁹ The following verse is again thrown into the subjunctive by Mendelssohn who prefaces the text with ¹⁰ ⁸ ¹⁸ ¹ ³, a reading the author never intended, and so also with the following verse (IV:3) which praises the unborn over the living and dead. On this verse Mendelssohn says: "It is certain that not for evil and vengeance, Heaven forbid, did God create man on earth, but in His great kindness: in order to pour out His goodness on him. And where is this goodness?--if man lives only a few years to see the tears of the oppressed and himself to be oppressed and crushed and afterwards to die like the beast--forever

lost. Not these are God's ways! It can only be that God will judge the righteous and the wicked, as we have said."

But there^{are} passages which even more emphatically deny the values of life. To invest with orthodox beliefs, demands far-fetched, ludicrous interpretations. Whatever Mendelssohn's faults, whatever his strong adherence to the way prepared for him by his predecessors, he could not violate the text to the extent necessary for a harmonization of the sceptical, pessimistic passages with traditional belief. Mendelssohn, therefore, hit upon a new ¹¹⁰ plan of interpretation. He placed these words in the mouth of an "objector" whose arguments Qoheleth considered and finally answered. Thus we find that the entire section of VI:1-9 ~~xxx~~ is attributed to an "objector", one who denies immortality of the soul. Qoheleth's answer is found in the following verse. Mendelssohn's commentary at this point reads: He mentions the argument of an objector against divine providence and judgment, particularly concerning this vanity of the world: that sometimes God gives wealth and property and honor to a man, so that if he wanted to, he would lack for nothing. But with all this he derives no enjoyment from his property, but leaves it to others who are not his children....Is not this vanity and an evil practice? ¹¹¹ The objector continues: Even if there is some advantage, what [important one is there] which the wise man has over the fool? There is certainly an advantage if both of them are equal in the goods of this world. But what does the intelligent poor man achieve, if he acquires

great and honorable knowledge, but remains poor and indigent? 'What good is to him to walk against life', to seek only those things which are adverse to man's life, not to rejoice or to have pleasure...but to satisfy himself with knowledge? ¹¹² The objector concludes his arguments, according to Mendelssohn, with the remark: Is not that which the eye sees clearly, better than all that the soul seeks in dark thoughts and secret reflections which have no substance in them and do not come under sensory perception? (6:9) ¹¹³

Despite Mendelssohn's statement that "thus far [Qoheleth has quoted] the words of the objector and now will answer them: "This too [i.e., their arguments] is vanity and a striving after the wind" (6:9), ¹¹⁴ the following verses fail to answer any of the objections directly and specifically. This defect in Mendelssohn's theory that VI:1-9 are spoken by one who denies the immortality of the soul is so apparent that we cannot but wonder at his failure to observe it. Certainly, Qoheleth's answer could not be the unreasonable, categorical, and dogmatic answer: This too is vanity and a striving after wind. Perhaps Mendelssohn felt this defect in his theory, for he attempts to show that the following verses are answers to the arguments submitted by the objector. However, it became apparent the Qoheleth cannot give direct answers to the proofs advanced by the heretic; Qoheleth monotonously responds: Man does not know what is good for (6:11; 7:1,8,9). Interpolated among these verses are remarks which have no relationship whatsoever to the objector's statements. After a brief discussion of man's impotence before Fate (VI:10-12), the text follows with a series of proverbs which do not show

any real sequence or coherence of thought (VII:1-14). Yet Mendelssohn purports to find in this illogical sequence a well developed treatise affirming immortality.

Mendelssohn's argument that Qoheleth affirms immortality of the soul is carried on throughout the remainder of Ecclesiastes at every point that the author allows a loophole. IX:3,7,9,10,11 which are direct evidences against a belief in immortality are disposed of by two methods: a) the insertion of the words, "if there were no immortality, then...." and b) by placing them in the mouth of the objector. Since we have seen that the former method violates all syntactical and grammatical law and the latter is an assumption unjustified by the text, we need not discuss these passages in detail.

Mendelssohn arrives at the conclusion of the discussion of immortality in 9:12 and 12:7. Both passages are important for revealing Mendelssohn's manner of harmonizing philosophical beliefs with exegetical law. Since his comment to IX:12 is very long, it will be summarized here: Qoheleth compares men to fish and birds which fall into a snare unwittingly. There is no pity, for that is the purpose for which they were created. This would ^{i.e.} be the case with man, if there were no immortality. Consider how bitter are the waters of disbelief. If there be no immortality, then God has created the world ~~only~~ to injure intelligent creatures. Where, then, is God's glory for the sake of which he created the universe? Where is God's mercy if he created us only to injure us? How shall man know what is good and is evil, whom

to hate and whom to love? Such a condition cannot exist. Our blessing in life is immortality which rectifies earthly wrongs. Now I have given you what I think is the true meaning of the passage. Qoheleth surely did not desire to arouse disbelief; on the contrary, it was his aim to establish the truth which is revealed in the Torah as a fundamental principle. ¹¹⁵ 12:7 is Mendelssohn's last word on the subject and may be appropriately quoted. "Here the wise king reveals his opinion--in harmony with the Torah and wisdom. The spirit of man is given to him by God and the soul is not an accident of the body, but was created by itself, clearly and distinctly apart from the body. It is not limited to any place and it exists after the death of the body. It returns to God who created it at the time when the body becomes dust. From this you see that what I explained in chapters 3, 8, 9 is correct. It was never the ^{intention} ~~expression~~ of the wise man to stir up doubts concerning the fundamental principles of the law without showing that this was not the work of wisdom." This last passage ascribes far more to Qoheleth than can be assumed with overstepping the bounds of scientific exegesis. Whether Qoheleth had any concept of "substance" and "accident" remains to be proved. Yet there can be no doubt that this passage is far more definitely in favor of ascribing ^{to} a belief in immortality than any other passage in the book of Ecclesiastes. Ginsburg understands the immortality here referred to as a personal one which justifies the entire book. "This, then, is the momentous and all-important conclusion to which Qoheleth brings," after having led us through the various perplexities

and conflicts of the world to the sure and certain hope of victory in the world-to-come." [Barton, however, warns us that "even a pessimist may quote Scripture without reading into it all the hopes of an optimist." Ginsburg's description of the warm welcome awaiting the weary soul is entirely unwarranted because it anticipates later eschatological speculation.] Certainly this verse indicates a belief in the continuance of the soul after the death of the body. As such, it is the one sure foundation upon which Mendelssohn built. His other interpretations, we have noted, have been built upon a false exegetical structure and can be disproved without great difficulty. But here he stands triumphant, if too exuberant and enthusiastic. For Qoheleth does not intimate the kind of immortality to which he referred-- and immortality may range from a bleak, quasi-consciousness (probably so here)¹¹⁶ ~~xxx~~ to the concrete banquet halls and fair women of the Koran. Indeed, the closing words of the book proper, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,"¹¹⁷ cannot be considered other than a reiteration of the pessimism which gives color to the entire book. "Ad Qoheleth look~~d~~ upon the "return of the spirit to God who gave it" as a justification for the tribulations of this life, it is doubtful whether he would have chosen to conclude with the repetition of ^asymphony of hopelessness. Thus we can come to the conclusion that Mendelssohn not only misinterpreted many passages in his desire to prove Qoheleth's belief in immortality, but also misunderstood the spirit of the book.

C. Fate

The second metaphysical problem which confronts the philosopher is that of Freedom of the Will. Again the book of Ecclesiastes does not undertake to treat the question systematically. We shall however, attempt to gain order out of chaos and demonstrate both Mendelssohn's philosophy and his exegetical methods simultaneously. Qoheleth is a pessimist and one of the chief reasons for his dark outlook on life is the fact that he disbelieved in freedom of the will. Everything in the universe preordained; nothing can check the relentless progress of inexorable fate. Indeed, one of the most widely quoted Biblical passages is III:1-18 which begins with the compelling statement, "Everything has a fixed season and there is a time for every business under the sun." The burden of this section is that man's activities are limited to certain times and seasons in which he necessarily goes his little round doing what has been done before him with equal necessity. Mendelssohn seems to agree with Qoheleth since his only comments which contradict the Scriptural author's statements are those which justify God. Mendelssohn's attitude is logical insofar as he attributes omniscience to the deity ~~and~~ but he becomes illogical when the problem of evil and the punishment for it enters the discussion. We cannot censure Mendelssohn for this defect since a strictly orthodox view which meets the demands of logic has not yet been formulated. Mendelssohn's commentary to III:1 displays a sympathetic agreement with Qoheleth: "He

[Qoheleth] proceeds to explain by means of trial and examination that all things are according to a preordained decree and are determined by God. He says, 'To everything there is a specified time and a fixed season; it is not in the power of man to defer and hasten that time.'"¹¹⁸ Similarly his commentary on III:15 agrees with Qoheleth's point of view, although this time Mendelssohn expresses himself more fully and more technically. "That which happened can not be changed. Therefore the future event is established by God as if it had already happened, since he has decreed concerning it that it should be. You cannot find any real difference between past and future, for one is past and has been, but when its time and season has come the future will become past. Nevertheless, God desires that one thing should come and roll after another as though the future always pursued the past. This is the meaning of ~~AND~~ GOD SEEKS THE PURSUED [God requires the past to be pursued by the future] -- that according to preordained decree the one should be the foundation of the other, so that they are held and ~~clever~~¹¹⁹ *held together* together to each other like the links of a chain." We see here that Mendelssohn agrees with Qoheleth and even goes beyond him by making explicit that which the Preacher left implicit. Mendelssohn holds to a causal sequence that is absolute and immutable. And since this causal nexus began with first act of creation, all which has followed is inexorably fixed.

The cosmic chain has bound man with the rest of creation. Lest man think that he is superior to the remainder

of the univers, Qoheleth hastened to disillusion him. "I [Qoheleth] know that the good for man is that he should be happy and do good in his life, but this goodness is not entirely given into [the power of] man, but is the gift of God, since I saw that even the least of the pleasures and deeds of man are in accordance with God's decree. For every-thing which God does and decrees.....to it nothing can be added nor anything taken away from it. If this, be, it is certain that happiness and cheerfulness in labor is not given to man, for this too is from God. He has appointed and willed that a created being cannot add to His work or diminish it, in order that men might not trust in their deeds, but should fear before him" (3:12,13,14).¹²⁰ Still stronger is the statement found in II:2. Mendelssohn's comment reads: 20
 "I [Qoheleth] will labour and enjoy myself in my lifetime and will not be concerned with what may happen after my death. Behold, also this happiness depends upon a decree from God and not in man's endeavor or choice." One more passage will suffice to illustrate Mendelssohn's acceptance of Qheleth's immutably fixed cosmos; "Behold, it is no great good or happiness for man that he derives no advantage from his labor except what he eats and drinks and enjoys. But even this small good is not in man's hand, but comes from God."¹²² (2:24)

It is clearly evident that Mendelssohn accepts Qoheleth's statements far more gracefully and enthusiastically than those which discussed immortality. Mendelssohn's exegesis, as a result, improved; he was under no compulsion to distort the

text and was able to proceed with due regard to the literal meaning. In those passages in which Mendelssohn found references to immortality and proofs of Qoheleth's orthodoxy, he was forced to read far more into the text than was intended. As a result his commentary, as Peshat, suffered (although its edifying value was, no doubt, increased). This section, which deals with the problem of fate offered an opportunity for Mendelssohn to prove his exegetical value. The opportunity was successfully seized.

D. The Problem of Evil

If all things are preordained by God and man is merely an automaton who blindly obeys laws superimposed from without, how shall we attribute sin to him and upon what grounds may we punish him in a future world for his lapses from the moral life? In other words, how can we erect a set of moral values, with its consequent retributive system, if man acts always and inevitably in accordance with a preordained decree? This is a question which Mendelssohn nowhere attempts to answer in his commentary to Ecclesiastes. His failure, however, is not a signal one since no answer has ever been formulated which included both omniscience and freewill and which evaded internal contradictions. The problem of evil, however, meets with a comparatively full discussion in Mendelssohn's commentary although it is illogically divorced from the subjects with which it should make an integral unit: super-mundane retribution and freedom of the will.

That evil is rightly subsumed under metaphysics is

clearly indicated by Mendelssohn: "I TURNED MY HEART TO...
SEEK WISDOM; that is, divine administration. AND [ITS] SUM
(or ACCOUNT); that is, the order and relationship between
natural evils and their causes of origin." (7:23) ⁵ Thus,
the problem of the existence of evil is to be sought, not
through investigation based upon observation of natural
phenomena, but by metaphysical speculation.

The existence of evil is an established fact;
but was it always so with the human race? To this question,
Mendelssohn replies in the negative. "Furthermore, I [Ecclesiastes]
have found this source of evil in the world...It is that God
made man upright on the earth because all the powers and
faculties implanted in man's heart were given to him by God
for perfect good. So man was before he sinned.... But they,
i.e., Adam and Eve. and their sons after them, have sought
inventions and lewdness by means of which they corrupt the
righteous and embitter the sweet. However, this was not always
the state of the world, but all labor and successful work
which we now...think necessary to the existence of mankind did
not [originally] exist. Since that time man left the upright
path for which he was created and sought crooked ways. From
these devices came jealousy, love of money and power, which
are the cause of evil and the fount of many sins in this
world. But if man had remained in his original state, he
would have been saved from all these evils." (7:29). ¹²³ Indeed,
Mendelssohn's view of man's original perfection led him to
misunderstand VII:24. Mendelssohn's comment reads: "What
was at the beginning of creation when man had attained the

highest degree of happiness before he had sinned--this is very far from me and very deep-- so that it is difficult to understand its true meaning by the intelligence. Man as he is now, is far from this perfection." This verse strikes a note of doubt that is not to be heard in the comment to VII:29. The latter passage is very emphatic in the belief in man's original happiness and implies that "labor and successful^{work}" were not necessary for existence. In this passage, Mendelssohn merely tells us that human intelligence is incapable of comprehending that original state of blessed virtue.

Originally evil did not exist in man's life, but because of the devices of his heart it came into the world. Man's nature was the general cause; but what specific part of man's being can be called the immediate source of evil? Mendelssohn gives us an answer to this question. "Since evil does not come from God, necessarily it must come from a defect. [This defect is ignorance] Therefore, ignorance causes man to sin; because of his lack of knowledge, he acts madly and wickedly. Ignorance in itself is no sin; it is the fountain of sin and its cause. Therefore he [Solomon] seeks to know how folly turns into wickedness and ignorance into madness." (7:25)¹²⁵

However, Mendelssohn involves himself in a contradiction in the course of the discussion concerning the origin and nature of evil. We have seen that he held that man was originally perfect and that evil, therefore, did

not exist. Its cause is imperfection in man; specifically, man's ignorance. Yet Mendelssohn holds that the happiness of the wicked, their prosperity and joy (the chief reason for imputing the existence of evil this world) are necessary in the divine scheme, "for if there were no passing good and semblance of good for the wicked, man would be almost compelled to do good and refrain from evil.... If good were always pleasant and sweet and evil offensive and bitter, the man whose ^{acts} evil would not be a sinner, but a madman." (8:13).¹²⁶

Therefore, the ultimate source of evil is God who tests man by offering him the semblance of good as a reward for acts of wickedness. On the other hand, Mendelssohn has previously stated that man comes into evil because of ignorance of the nature of ultimate good. Still another passage is interpreted in such a manner that it assigns the ultimate cause of evil to the deity. In commenting on VII:44, Mendelssohn says: 14!

Also God counterbalances good with evil. He distributed the one to correspond to the other and connected them together."¹²⁷

If there must be an evil act for every good one performed, the sinner is rendering the saint an act of kindness; why then should the former suffer? Furthermore, if man was originally perfect and without sin, why should God--after decreeing that he should fall from his perfect state (for everything is decreed)--have punished him and tempted him to further evil? These are inconsistencies which Mendelssohn does not attempt to resolve. His discussion of the problem is very faulty and much of his difficulty has come through a misinterpretation of the text.

Mendelssohn's concluding advice to those who suffer from

the manifold injustices of life counsels patience and confidence in God. "If man knew all the details of providence and its mysteries, there is no doubt that he would rejoice in its wise judgments and give thanks to it. Therefore, this anger ~~(against Providence)~~ is born only in the lap of folly and ignorance." (7:9) ¹²⁸ "The patient spirit who bears the burden with love and keeps silent before God and waits for Him, is better off than the proud spirit who rebels and increases complaints against God and the wisdom of Providence." ¹²⁹ (7:8) Mendelssohn's solution to the problem of evil is in harmony with the traditional view. We do not understand the workings of the divine plan, but we must have confidence that in the end all will be proved just--the wicked punished and the righteous rewarded.

E. Worship

The book of Ecclesiastes contain several passages which refer to the worship of God. These passages are not numerous, yet they offer the commentator a point of departure for expressing his own views on the subject. Mendelssohn has grasped the opportunities offered and has given us an insight into some of his own views on the subject. The discussion may be divided into two sections: a) worship in the Temple, b) worship out of the Temple.

The first section reveals several interpretations and exegetical examples. We are warned that careful attention must be paid to the words of our prayers "for God over you, sees you and hears your words.... Therefore, do not

multiply words without due attention lest you be endangered."

¹³⁰
(5:1). It is better to come to the Temple to learn how to act uprightly than to offer sacrifices atoning for past sins. "The fear of God should be upon you continually as is fitting for one born of woman who goes to pray before God."¹³¹

Know that he who draws near to hear God's word is better and more acceptable than a fool who sins and sacrifices--for to hear is better than to sacrifice, as the prophets admonished Israel at length."¹³²(4:17) Mendelssohn concurs in the belief that Temple services are not designed primarily for the sinner, but for him who is already righteous and wishes to remain upon the moral path. The prayers offered are not to be murmured mechanically nor is the Temple to serve purely as a place which erases the sinner's guilt. The Temple's function is wider in scope; it is an institution for the dissemination of moral teachings. Mendelssohn has incorporated into Qoheleth's preaching the idea that the Temple is not only a Beth T'fillah, but also a Beth Midrash.

The second division of prayer deals with service to God outside the Temple. It is chiefly concerned with the fulfillment of vows. "Why should your mouth cause sin and bring evil to yourself, [as is the case] if you do not fulfill what you have promised. AND DO NOT SPEAK IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MALACH, the messenger that comes to claim the charity offering which you devoted in public,"¹³³(5:5) It is unnecessary to make vows, since abstinence from vowing does not constitute a sin (5:4).¹³⁴

Vows, however, are not the only manifestation of the

religious spirit. Nor can man confine his religion to the Temple alone. "There is nothing pleasing in fools who chirp Religious responses and keep festivals while their hearts are not with them." (5:3) ¹³⁵ It is necessary that the spirit as well as the letter of the festival be observed if our worship is to be acceptable before God. Furthermore, everything which is ours may be consecrated to the service of God who will assist us in this noble enterprise. "He should remember that God...approves of it and gives his consent; for He has given him wealth and property and the ability to do with them as is good in his own eyes. He who desires to purify himself is assisted by heaven." ¹³⁶ (5:19)." This passage sums up Mendelssohn's attitude toward the whole of life. God has given us everything we possess; it is His wish that we use them for good and not for evil. If we choose the former, God will lend His assistance.

F. Politics

Qoheleth lived under the yoke of oriental despotism with its arbitrary justice, its luxurious court, and its suppression of the masses. Consequently Qoheleth found great cause for complaint. Ecclesiastes contains many passages which advise the subject about the nature of his duties to king and offers in addition many bits of practical wisdom. It was impossible for Mendelssohn to understand the necessarily veiled complaints which Qoheleth uttered, because our commentator attributed the book to Solomon. Naturally it would not have occurred to Mendelssohn that Solomon should depict

the miserable condition of his own kingdom. We shall see that Mendelssohn has made many mistakes in his interpretations because of his belief in the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes. Furthermore, Mendelssohn himself labored under the handicap of being a Jewish subject of a despot (even though called "enlightened") and was perforce careful ~~xxx~~ in expressing his own point of view.

The king's first duty lies in administering to the needs of the kingdom; only after ^{he} has discharged his royal functions should he seek his own, personal pleasure. ~~Even~~ then the king and his ministers should "eat only for necessity--in order to increase their strength and power for the general good." (10:17). The ruler must "observe the subject matter of the oath of God; whether he ^{is} under oath to ~~M~~Him who setteth up kings to do good with ~~his~~ servants and people, or was under oath at the beginning of reign not to break the laws of the kingdom. (8:2)" ¹³⁷ The "Well-born king" whom Qoheleth praises in contrast to the reigning monarch is one who serves his country first, himself last.

But whether the monarch comports himself properly in office or whether ~~he~~ exploits the kingdom for his own pleasure, his word is all-powerful. "Wherever the king's word and law reaches, he is master" ¹³⁸ and none can question his actions. (8:4) This rule is a very important one for the peace of the kingdom inasmuch as it is "impossible for a ruler to be absolutely just in such a manner that he ¹³⁹ does ~~not~~ nothing but good for all his subjects? (7:19,20).

This sad condition is occasioned by the king's dependence upon assistants. "If you see that at times they oppress the poor and wrong the just and righteous in a state, neither wonder nor be surprised at this sight nor be surprised at the king who takes pleasure in this, according to your opinion.... Do not blame the king, since in a state there is one higher than the other and he [the king] does not supervise everybody in a lower rank, but only the one immediately below him, etc. AND THERE ARE GREAT ONES ABOVE HIM; that is to say, all the great ones supervise only those men whom they are immediately set-over, those next below in rank. For such is the way of administration. Each one has his specified charge and it is impossible for him who is highest, the king, to supervise every particular that is done under his rule... Therefore, be not astonished if the administration is not highly excellent in every particular and is not free from defect in all its parts." (5:7)¹⁴⁰ Mendelssohn believed in an absolutism which permitted no rebellion of any kind. In fact,¹⁴¹ suggests extenuating circumstances which would account for an unjust reign.

The duties of the subjects are no less clearly defined. The primary obligation of a subject is loyalty, absolute and unquestioning. "I [Solomon] warn and command every one of the people to obey the word of the king, for he is the ruler of the people and can do as he wishes... According to custom, there is no one who can judge a king except God... This is an important rule in a kingdom: | ?

that the people be not permitted to judge the king's conduct, whether good or bad. The king judges the people, not the reverse; if this were not so, the land would have no rest from rebellion.¹⁴¹ (8:2)". The first duty of the subject to the king is adherence to the oath of allegiance and fealty which is sworn at the coronation ceremony. This is the purest kind of loyalty, but unfortunately it is the rarest. For those who are less idealistic, Mendelssohn points out the practical benefits to be derived from remaining loyal and submissive. "Should the anger of the ruler come against you, do not hasten to leave thy place and flee from him....for a submissive neck and a gentle answer atone for great offenses and in the end you will allay his anger¹⁴² (10:4)." Even more practical is this bit of wisdom: "Do not hasten to go from his presence and to leave him as soon as he does something not in accord with your wishes. Don't accept the advice of rebels in whom an evil desire against the king is framed. For he [the king] is able to do with you as he pleases since he is the ruler of his people and the supreme might and power. There is none over him except God.¹⁴³ (8:3)".

Mendelssohn's advice, although practical, is not particularly inspiring nor does it give cause for great optimism on the part of the down-trodden masses. It would be quite against tradition for Mendelssohn to drop the matter with this melancholy and uninspiring bit of advice. He, therefore, offers encouragement and hope to those who suffer

"Not forever will wicked rulership exist. There is an appointed time and after that it will be destroyed. For it is contrary to experience and wisdom that many should be subdued by one and hearken to his voice when it is not to their own good but to their hurt. Such a condition cannot last forever."(8:9)¹⁴⁴ With this comforting assurance we close the discussion of Mendelssohn's attitude toward government.

CHAPTER IV

Mendelssohn's Relationship
to his Predecessors

In his introduction to the commentary, Mendelssohn acknowledges the assistance which Ibn Ezra and Rashi offered him through their commentaries on Ecclesiastes. He states that wherever Ibn Ezra has given a literal interpretation which was good he has quoted him. That Ibn Ezra was thoroughly studied and highly esteemed by Mendelssohn is evidenced by the fact that our commentator¹⁴⁵ attempts to resolve the nine contradictions which Ibn Ezra¹⁴⁶ discovered in Ecclesiastes. Rashi also received careful consideration, but as we shall see his commentary was not as acceptable as that of Ibn Ezra because it lacks the Peshat.

A. Mendelssohn and Ibn Ezra.

A word concerning the nature of Ibn Ezra's commentary will suffice for characterization. The commentary is outstanding chiefly for its grammatical notes and the lucidity of interpretation. Ibn Ezra, however, frequently deviates from the Peshat in order to introduce his peculiar philosophical and astrological notions with the result that they interfere considerably with the commentary and obscure the meaning of the text (l. 7:19 et pas.) Although Ibn Ezra accepts the Solomonic authorship he does not refrain from noting the presence of several contradictory passages which cannot be resolved properly by him. This evidences a Peshatic tendency since he does not resort to Midrashic interpretations of these passages in order to harmonize them.

We have already mentioned Mendelssohn's acknowledgment of his debt to Ibn Ezra for many literal and sensible interpretations of Scriptural passages. Let us now examine the two commentaries in order to learn the extent and quality of this debt. Both Ibn Ezra and Mendelssohn refer V:1 and counsel short prayers before God. Mendelssohn quotes Ibn Ezra at some length and changes the remainder of the comment only slightly. However, he omits Ibn Ezra's reference to the nature of the high priest's prayer on the Day of Atonement, perhaps because his generation was no longer interested in the sacrificial cult. Similarly in 5:3 Mendelssohn quotes Ibn Ezra with only minor changes in discussing the fulfillment of vows made to God. Mendelssohn again avails himself of Ibn Ezra's brevity and lucidity in his interpretation of VII:10. In explaining the passage which exhorts man not to repine over the lost happiness of past days, Mendelssohn quotes the latter part of Ibn Ezra's interpretation, but rejects the former part.

Ibn Ezra frequently mentions variant commentaries and interpretations. In quoting Ibn Ezra's comment on IX:14 Mendelssohn does not cite the Midrashic interpretation mentioned by Ibn Ezra and rightly accepts Ibn Ezra's Peshatic interpretation. Ibn Ezra completes the comment with the definition of the word $\rho' 2/3$ but Mendelssohn (as he frequently does) omits this type of notation. Both Mendelssohn and Ibn Ezra are in agreement with Ginsburg on the word $\rho' 1/2$ "over it" (i.e., the city was situated in a low valley and the fortress towered above it).¹⁴⁷

Mendelssohn also quotes Ibn Ezra loosely on the following verse although the interpretation is not correct. Ibn Ezra states that the poor man had not been noticed before in the city and implies (by omission of further explanation) that henceforth the poor wise man achieved considerable fame. The verse, on the other hand, indicates that even after the rescue was effected by the wise man he remained in indigent circumstances. ¹⁴⁸

We have listed here a few of the passages which have been taken directly from Ibn Ezra's commentary by Mendelssohn. Many of the interpretations found in Mendelssohn's commentary are paraphrases of Ibn Ezra's comments. It is unnecessary, however, to discuss them at this point since those passages which are significant to a study of Mendelssohn's exegesis have already been remarked upon ~~in~~ ¹⁴⁹ and the relationship between Mendelssohn and Ibn Ezra observed.

Although Mendelssohn was particularly interested in the Peshat and unfavorably inclined to the Derash in interpreting Scripture, we find that there is little grammatical notation in Mendelssohn's commentary to Ecclesiastes. This fact stands out in direct contradistinction to the commentary of Ibn Ezra who offers grammatical clues to unravel the meaning of almost every verse. Mendelssohn's process seems to have been one of selection, since most of his grammatical notes are to be found in Ibn Ezra's commentary although they represent but a small fraction of the material offered by the latter. Any attempt to demonstrate

the relationship between Mendelssohn and Ibn Ezra must contain a brief discussion of the use which the former made of the latter's grammatical knowledge.

III:7b is one of the instances in which Mendelssohn acknowledges his exegetical source by specific mention of the name of his authority. The passage in question reads, *מלך את כל ימי*. Mendelssohn rightly follows Ibn Ezra in stating that the verb is masculine and the last word feminine. Therefore a word of masculine gender must be inserted before *מלך*.¹⁵⁰ X:19 is a typical example of Mendelssohn's dependence on Ibn Ezra for grammatical notations--although Mendelssohn does not acknowledge his source. This passage has been discussed in detail elsewhere¹⁵¹ and need not be analyzed at this point. So also with II:2. These examples have been recalled in order to stress the value and importance which Mendelssohn attached to Ibn Ezra's commentary and the frequency with which he quotes or paraphrases it.

From the foregoing discussion it might be inferred that Mendelssohn adhered slavishly to Ibn Ezra's commentary and thereby failed to offer an original contribution to the study of Ecclesiastes. Such inference would be erroneous for although it is evident that Ibn Ezra was highly esteemed by Mendelssohn, it is equally clear that our commentator did not consider his predecessor infallible. On several occasions Mendelssohn quotes Ibn Ezra for the purpose of refuting him. One such passage is V:8b. Mendelssohn begins his interpretation by stating that many interpreters have declared that this

passage is not connected with preceeding one. Mendelssohn flatly contradicts Ibn Ezra's interpretation because it is contrary to the accents. We have already noticed that Mendelssohn was mistaken in his interpretation of this verse. Still another example of Mendelssohn's independence ~~as~~ attested to in 12:2. In this instance Mendelssohn accepts an interpretation which is mentioned and rejected by Ibn Ezra. In discussing AND THE CLOUDS RETURN AFTER THE RAIN, Mendelssohn says: "Because of old age the moisture of the eyes becomes thickened and it always seems as though the clouds were passing before his eyes and the light of the sun is taken away; that is, the moisture of the eyes runs continually until it covers the eyes." Ibn Ezra rejects this interpretation and understands the passage to refer to failing eye-sight in old age which observes the world in darkness as the clouds darken the sun. Mendelssohn's interpretation was probably suggested to him by the traditional interpretations which find in the reference to the "sun", "light", parts of the anatomy. Modern commentators, however, find both comments unacceptable because they are too far-fetched. (Barton holds that the figure is a carelessly drawn metaphor which describes the melancholy of old age, of which fading light is characteristic. According to Ginsburgh the phrase means the approach of old age and a gathering storm is symbolically depicted here. Mendelssohn has deviated from the Peshatic discipline to which he proposed to subject himself.)

However, every instance of difference in opinion between Mendelssohn and Ibn Ezra does not result in the latter's favor.

Were this the case, it would reflect sadly on the progress of exegesis during the intervening centuries. That Mendelssohn improved upon his forerunner¹⁵³, XII:10b uses the phrase *דברים נכונים* which Ibn Ezra interprets as the name of a commentary on the book *דברים*, which no longer exists. Mendelssohn more correctly states that the phrase means "words of truth, written correctly--i.e., sweetly."¹⁵³ Similarly Ibn Ezra's comment to the first half of this verse is erroneous. Mendelssohn does not accept the translation of metaphysics for the phrase *דברים נכונים*, but translates, "pleasant, graceful" and refers it to Qohoeleth's style.¹⁵⁴

One more passage will suffice to demonstrate the difference between the commentaries of the two men whom we are comparing and will throw further light on Mendelssohn's qualifications as an exegete. The verse is XI:9. Ibn Ezra attempts to explain away this recommendation to enjoy life by regarding it as an ironical observation.¹⁵⁵ Mendelssohn, on the other hand, takes the entire verse literally and renders an adequate interpretation: ".....The sum and substance of the matter is that your duty is made up of fear, love, and cheerfulness...nor is humiliation and fasting ...more acceptable than cheerfulness...provided your cheerfulness is under due regulation and with a perfect heart. The meaning here is: Be cheerful, oh youth, in your childhood, for those are the days of cheerfulness.... You may walk in the ways of your heart and the satisfaction of your eyes without being guilty of sin, if you ever remember and forget not that God will bring you into judgment concerning all these things." This interpretation is lucid and does not distort the text. [Ginsburg makes the

same comment: We must enjoy life here but with reference to a future bar of judgment and cultivate cheerfulness when it is most innocent and natural--during childhood. ¹⁵⁶

These passages conclude our study of the relationship between Mendelssohn and Ibn Ezra. We have seen that Mendelssohn drew freely from the this veritable mine of information, but never does he fall into slavish adherence. He has accepted that which he considered correct and has rejected that which, in his opinion, was erroneous. On some occasions Mendelssohn's judgment is to be criticized adversely, but, on the whole, it may be said that his commentary evidences a careful and correct discrimination.

B. Rashi

It is a rare occurrence to find any Biblical exegetical work written by a Jewish author later than the twelfth century who does not quote Rashi. Mendelssohn forms no exception to this rule, for throughout his commentary he shows evidence of having read Rashi with great care. Quotations of Rashi by our commentator are fairly numerous and in most instances Mendelssohn has exercised sound judgement. In 3:17 Mendelssohn quotes Rashi with but slight changes. Rashi implies that this verse alludes to retribution in the next world and Ibn Ezra states that the word על is a hint concerning the world-to-come. Mendelssohn, however, states that immortality and supermundane retribution are definitely stated in this verse. Ginsburg upholds Mendelssohn's contention.) Modern critics admit that this is the meaning of the passage but

attribute it to the Chasid glossator. Mendelssohn has retained Rashi to good advantage and has improved upon him, although he did not recognize the hand of a glossator.

Mendelssohn's ability to use Rashi properly is best exemplified in his adaptation of Rashi's comment to X:18. Mendelssohn quotes Rashi in part, but Rashi refers the verse to the study of the Torah. Mendelssohn, on the other hand, has a more literal interpretation and shows the relationship between this passage and the preceding and following ones, which discuss the problem of unjust government. Ginsburg confirms Mendelssohn's interpretation by stating that the miserable condition of the country is caused by profligate rulers. So also Barton, who once again ascribes the passage to the glossator.

Rashi's commentary was less useful than Ibn Ezra's because of the former's tendency to the Midrashic interpretation. The unorthodox statements of the text offered little difficulty to the "light of the exile." He merely found in them historical allusions, exhortations to study Torah, and the like. Mendelssohn carefully avoided these interpretations and sought only the Peshat. Instances could be adduced, but so frequent are the illustrations that we need list nothing more than the passages: VII:10; IV:15; III:4. Particularly striking are II:3; V:3, and IX:8. In all these passages (and many more) Rashi has solved the textual problems by offering a Midrashic interpretation. Mendelssohn stoutly refused to be led astray; he chose the more difficult path of the Peshat, but in the end was rewarded for his commentary is immeasurably superior to Rashi's and provided an example of literal exegesis for the generations which followed.

NOTES

1. Graetz, H.; History of the Jews (VI volumes); Philadelphia, 1891. Vol.V, 292.
2. Jewish Encyclopedia, (XII Volumes); New York, 1907. Vol. VIII, Art. Mendelssohn, Moses, p. 479. Margolis, Max L. and Marx, Alexander; A History of the Jewish People; Philadelphia, 1927. Page 592. Graetz, op.cit., V,292 gives August 1728.
3. Mendelssohn was then 14 years of age.
4. Graetz, op.cit. V,294
5. Ibid., V,295
6. Ibid., V,295
7. Margolis and Marx, op. cit.,594
8. Jew. Ency., VIII, 479
9. Graetz, op.cit.V,296
10. Ibid., V,297
11. Ibid., V,298
12. Ibid., V,303-304
13. Ibid., V,305-307
14. Jew. Ency., VIII, ~~312~~ 481
15. Graetz, op.cit., V,362
16. Margolis and Marx, op. cit., 599
17. Graetz, op. cit., V,328
18. Englander, Henry; Mendelssohn As Translator and Exegete; Cincinnati, 1929. Page 329. Pagination here follows that found in the Hebrew Union College Annual, Vol. VI.
19. Englander, op.cit., 331
20. Jew. Ency. art. Bible Translations, III,192
21. Graetz, op. cit., V,321
22. Jew. Ency.,III,192. The dates of Publication are: Genesis,1780; Exodus, 1781; Leviticus, 1782; Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1783. All in Berlin. The commentators are: Genesis--Mendelssohn (first Parasha) and Dubno. Exodus--Mendelssohn with gram-

mathematical material by Dubno. Leviticus--Wessely with remarks by Mendelssohn when the latter differed. Numbers--Jaroslaw and others who are not known. Deuteronomy--Homberg and others who are not known. Englander, op.cit. 333

23. Jew. Ency., VIII, 483

24. Ibid., VIII, 483

25. The period of the Mendelssohnian Biurists ends with the Bible published by Moses Landau (20 parts, 1833-37).

26. Jew. Ency., art. Bible Exegesis; III, 172-3

27. Englander, op. cit. 334, note 13.

Jew. Ency., III, 172 gives the date, 1773. Englander is correct. The

חנה מאיר
עם תרגום אלכנאי ופאר
Wien, 1818, begins:
שנת תר"ז ה'תקצ"א נאמר המלך המזרחי
את פירוש... על מנחת קהן

The year T'kal is 1770.

28. Graetz, op. cit., V, 372.

29. Jew. Encyc., VIII, 484.

30. See note 27.

31. Englander, op. cit., 334.

32. Ibid., 334

33. Ibid., 332

34. Hamesh Megilot; Introduction to Eccl., p. 1 "א. par. 1.

35. Ibid., א' a, par. 2.

36. Ibid., א' b, par. 2

37. Ibid., א' b, par. 3. Mendelssohn also cites Rabbi's translation of Gen. 32:4 in which

38. to תר"ז, the 613 commandments.

38. Ibid., א' b, par. 3.

39. Ibid., א' b, par. 4.

40. Ibid., א' a, par. 4.

41. Ibid., א' b, par. 2.

42. Pages 44-45

43. VII:3 vs. VII:9; I:18 vs. XI:10; V:17 vs. VII:2; VIII:15 vs. II:2; VI:8 vs. II:13; IV:2 vs. IX:4; IX:10 vs. III:17.
44. Hamesh Megilot; Introd. to Eccl., p. 6^a a, par. 2.
45. Ginsburg, Christian D., Qoheleth, commonly called The Book of Ecclesiastes: Translated from the Original Hebrew, with a Commentary, Historical and Critical. London, 1861. ~~xxxxx~~
46. Barton, George Aaron, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book Of Ecclesiastes; New York, 1909. in the International Critical Commentary Series, vol. 25. ~~xxxxx~~ loco.
47. Ibid., in loc.
48. Ibn Ezra on VII:3 says that one of the commentators explained the contradictions by saying that QOHELETH means an "assembly" of the disciples of Solomon and their different opinions are recorded in this book. This commentator was correct in the sense that many opinions are found in this book which did not emanate from Qoheleth, but from glossators seeking to make the book more orthodox.
49. Hamesh Megilot; Introd. to Eccl., p. 1^a a, par. 2
50. Page 44-45, also not 107
51. A modification of this statement will be found below.
52. Targum: Because of Solomon's sins he was forced to wander throughout the world, saying, "I am Qoheleth whose name was formerly called Solomon, who was King over Israel in Jerusalem." The Targum realized that not everything in this book could refer to Solomon's reign and therefore uses the figure of Solomon speaking in the spirit of prophecy (132, et. pas.) In this respect the Targum scores over Mendelssohn, altho it is possible that Mendelssohn, whose aim was Peshat, rejected this circumvention of the problem.
53. Rashi: "I was king but am not now."
54. Ibn Ezra does not discuss the problem raised by I WAS.
55. Mendelssohn's interpretation of this passage is very poor. His explanation isolates the passage from the rest of the text.
56. Ginsburg, op.cit., cogently asks: If the use of "one thousand women" refers to Solomon's wives, what specific meaning can we attach to "one thousand men." If, however, the latter phrase refers to the male sex in general, why should not the former refer to the female sex in general?

57. An interesting passage is II:19. Mendelssohn says that Qoheleth did not wish to reveal the thing in a curse and therefore leaves the matter in doubt: as though he did not know whether his son was to be a wise man or a fool. Mendelssohn is evidently under the spell of the Targum which continually refers to Solomon as one speaking with the spirit of prophecy. See note 52.
58. Barton, op. cit., p.21
59. Ibid., p.21. So also Michaelis (1751), Bishop Lowth (1753), Eichhorn (1779).
60. The verses which are of primary importance in refuting Solomonic authorship are I:12; I:16; II:7; II:18,19; VIII:2-9; X:16-19. This is Ginsburg's analysis, p.245-53. Barton differs, but not considerably.
61. So also the Zohar to III:19 which Mendelssohn quotes in his introduction. See page "111".
62. Ginsburg, op. cit., p.16,17.
Barton, op. cit., p.50
63. Qoheleth's thought is "chilling and disappointing"--Barton, op. cit., p.50. Mendelssohn offers a warm assurance to the righteous.
64. Ibn Ezra's comment: Some interpret ^{וְיָסַפֵּן} transitively, "wearying others" like ^{וְיָסַפֵּן}, but this is incorrect. ^{וְיָסַפֵּן} is neuter, like ^{וְיָסַפֵּן} (Dt.25:18). If it were as they interpret it, it would be ^{וְיָסַפֵּן}.
65. Ginsburg translates ^{וְיָסַפֵּן}, "words". In this he disagrees with both Ibn Ezra and Mendelssohn who are correct.
66. So Ginsburg and Barton although Ginsburg is wrong in stating that ^{וְיָסַפֵּן} is never used transitively; cf. Psalm 68:29.
67. Ibn Ezra: "There is more might and strength to wisdom than the might of many rulers."
68. So also Barton and Ginsburg. Preston supports Mendelssohn but his arguments are untenable.
69. Barton renders ^{וְיָסַפֵּן}, "occupies." However, there is strong argument for both translations.
70. Barton, op. cit., in loc.
71. Ibn Ezra, in loc.
Ginsburg translates, "O Mirth, I said, Thou actest foolishly."
72. Jewish Publication Society of America, The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text, etc. Philadelphia, 1917.

73. Mendelssohn mistranslates 12 a. He inserts a Mem Before והאדם and reads, "I turned back from looking for happiness from madness and folly, even though they are done with wisdom." This is very poor.
74. Barton differs with both Mendelssohn and Ginsburg. He translates, "But an advantage to a country on the whole is a King--(i.e.) an agricultural land." Thereby making Qoheleth say that despite all the disadvantages of a monarchy, it is the best form of government in the long run for an agricultural country.
75. Preston, Theodore, והאדם The Hebrew Text, and a Latin Version of The Book of Solomon, called Ecclesiastes, etc. London, 1845. page 3
76. Page 24-25
77. שקיל means "panting with exhaustion" (so Ginsburg and Barton) and therefore would refer to the time after the sun has set, since upon rising the sun is refreshed. Mendelssohn takes it mean "panting from haste and eagerness." In this he is wrong.
78. This is Barton's translation. Ginsburg's is the same except that he does not put the sentence into the interrogative form, but begins, "No one knoweth..." Ginsburg notes that אין is interrogative and frequently is used for emphatic denial.
79. According to the Qeri: "He who is joined by body and soul or is made up of two parts is an assurance to all the living...." This is wrong.
80. Ginsburg accepts the Ketib and translates: "Who is excepted? To all the living there is hope..." In this he follows Mendelssohn's analysis of the accentuation, altho his translation of אין is more appropriate. Barton states that the Ketib does not fit the context, in which he is incorrect judging by Ginsburg's translation and critical note. Barton translates: "For whoever is joined to all the living, there is hope (for him)...." This is simple and fits the context.
81. The remainder of this verse has occasioned difficulty because of עולם, which Mendelssohn translates "[this] world." Ginsburg translates, "eternity." So also Ibn Ezra with some slight deviation. Rashi translates, "wisdom of the world...but God, every one only a little so that man might not know all the work of God." This compares favorably with Barton who reads אין, "ignorance." Rashi says the word is written defectively, signifying "hidden."

- 81a. Raahhi renders it "hips", reading פֶּה.
82. Psalm 139;2. Mendelssohn is correct in this reference.
83. Brown, Francis; Driver, S.R.; Briggs, Charles A.
A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament;
Oxford University Press. First edition, 1906. My edition
is the Impression of 1928.
84. Barton gives a full analysis.
85. Ibn Ezra, "thoughts of wind". Rashi derives it from נֶחֱם
which means "to break." In this he is wrong. The
word follows the analogy of other Lamed-He verbs, נֶחֱם, נֶחֱם;
נֶחֱם, נֶחֱם; נֶחֱם, נֶחֱם.
86. Ginsburg and Barton. Ginsburg quotes Ibn Ezra in sup-
port of his own translation, but apparently has misunder-
stood him.
87. Rashi uses the word נֶחֱם to define נֶחֱם. Ginsburg and
Barton agree with Mendelssohn's definition although Ginsburg
retains the literal meaning in his translation.
88. Ibn Ezra defines נֶחֱם "to fall sick", but states that only
one person becomes ill and the other helps him. Men-
delssohn says that even if two people become sick, they
can help each other. This is unwarranted.
89. Driver, S.R., Ecclesiastes in Kittel, R., Biblia Hebraica,
2 vol. Stuttgart, 1925. in loc.
90. Barton and Ginsburg translate, "wealth." Ibn Ezra mentions
commentators who translate as Mendelssohn does. He
himself prefers to translate, "clothing or merchandise",
in contrast to נֶחֱם "money." נֶחֱם is used in the
sense of wealth in Is. LX;5; Psalm XXXVII:16; I Chr. XXIX:16.
91. Delitzsch, Franz (Das Buch Koheleth) and Wright, C.H.H.
(Ecclesiastes). My authority is Barton, in loc.
92. Mendelssohn, however, errs in his interpretation of
נֶחֱם. Mendelssohn reads it: "reseau"; i.e., no
one can escape his doom. The word really means "furlough"
(so Ginsburg and Barton) and refers to the fact that no
foreign mercenary could obtain a discharge while his
employer was at war.
93. Barton; in loc.
94. Barton; in loc. Mendelssohn mistranslates נֶחֱם
which should be read, "every man" and means: "This is
what every man is destined for and should be absorbed in."
(Barton; in loc. So also Ginsburg). Mendelssohn trans-

1. lates: "this is the root and perfection of man." J.P.S. says substantially the same thing: "This is the whole of man."
95. Barton and Ginsburg differ. The sense, however, is much the same.
96. Rashi translates *וְיִשְׁכַּח* --they multiply and increase more than is sufficient. Although Rashi's interpretation is largely Midrashic, he seems to have understood the syntactical problems of the text. Ibn Ezra does not offer much assistance on this verse.
97. Rashi and Ibn Ezra also interpret this verse to refer to charity donations. Rashi, however, interprets *וְיִשְׁכַּח* not "as being in need of charity yourself", but as being deprived of the ability to give charity." In this he is wrong. Ibn Ezra also errs in his interpretation of SEVEN OR EIGHT. He finds esoteric implications in the use of these numbers.
98. So Ginsburg and Barton.
99. The glosses of the Rhodanus glossator are responsible for most of the confusion which has resulted from a study of the text.
100. Driver, S.R., An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament. New York, 1931. p. 472.
101. See note 104
102. Mendelssohn's commentary is incorrect at several points. He unites VIII:15 with 16. In this he is wrong: verse 15 marks the conclusion of a discussion on the results of righteousness (VIII:10-15). This verse sums up the results of Qoheleth's investigation: Since the righteous and the wicked meet with a like fate, it is best that we eat, drink, and rejoice. So Barton and Ginsburg. *וְיִשְׁכַּח* begins a new section which describes man's inability to acquire knowledge (VIII:16-IX:1). v. 16 is the protasis, 17 is the apodosis of a thought which states that man cannot fathom the mysterious dealings of divine providence. So Barton and Ginsburg. Qoheleth is thoroughly disillusioned and sceptical about man's powers of comprehension, whereas Mendelssohn states that Qoheleth has concluded that we cannot fathom God's ways by observing mundane phenomena. We must turn to the super-mundane world if we wish to be successful in our attempt to comprehend the universe.
103. Ginsburg translates *וְיִשְׁכַּח* "sadness." Barton, however, takes it to mean "vexation." Mendelssohn translates, "boiling wrath." See pages 12,13.

104. Barton ascribes this verse to the Chokma glossator. This passage gives two gnomic sayings. In the interpretation of the meaning of the verse, however, Barton and Ginsburg agree with Mendelssohn except that neither ascribes this cheerfulness to faith in the deity.
105. Barton; in loc. This verse interrupts the thought and the idea is "entirely out of harmony with the context." It is a gloss.
106. מִן־כָּל is the opposite of כָּל־מִן .
107. This passage can be interpreted only this way if we watch its role in the development of the text. v. 18 is a weak statement of this belief; v. 20 a very definite one. v. 19 serves to connect the passages and leads to a natural climax.
108. Barton, in loc.: III:22 is the concluding statement of III:16-22 which discusses human oppression and injustice. IV:1-3 is part of IV:1-12 which deals with man's inhumanity to man. Ginsburg's division reads III:1-V:19 and is entitled, The vanity of industry and the necessity to serve God acceptably.
109. No modern critics find any reference to immortality here.
110. Barton, p.23, cites Yeard, A Paraphrase upon Ecclesiastes (1701), Herder; Eichhorn who state that Ecclesiastes is a dialogue between a refined sensualist and a sensual worldling. Others regard it as a book expressing various moods of the same author.
111. VI:1,2. Mendelssohn's reading of the text is excellent. He understands by 'נָכַר', not "foreigner", but מִן־כָּל־מִן . This agrees with the reading of Ginsburg, Barton. It has been interpreted variously as "foreigner," "bandit," etc., all of which are wrong. Raahii understands 'נָכַר' to mean כָּל־מִן־כָּל־מִן who shall take the property to give charity away?
112. 6:8. Mendelssohn's interpretation is very poor. He supposes that מִן־כָּל means "against life," and that the poor, wise man is always at odds by denying himself physical pleasures in order to acquire wisdom. Barton interprets the verse: "What advantage has the poor man ~~wise~~ man who has got on in the world by knowing how to walk prudently and successfully, before his fellow-men." Ginsburg supplies מִן before 'נָכַר' and reads: What [advantage hath] the poor man over him who knoweth to walk before the living. Mendelssohn has erred seriously in reading 'נָכַר' as though it were 'נָכַר' and making

it an adjective, whereas it is an attributive participle. Mendelssohn's reading is taken from Ibn Ezra.

113. Mendelssohn again errs in interpreting the word ^{בְּצֵל}, which here means "wandering desire" (Barton and Ginsburg). Qohleth states that it is better to take those pleasure are present than to seek those which may be found in the future.
114. THIS ALSO IS VANITY refers to ^{בְּצֵל} ^{הַנֶּפֶשׁ} ^{הַזֶּה} ^{הַזֶּה}.
115. Ginsburg correctly states that the passage emphasizes the vanity of wisdom which does not even lift us above the simple fish. Barton's comment is to the same effect although not as clear.
116. Driver, S.R., op.cit. p.472.
117. ^{וְכֵן} ^{וְכֵן} is an insertion. Barton views this as the last passage in the book. The following verses are glosses from the hand of late editor who praises the book (XII:9-12) and the Chasid's final gloss (XII:13,14).
118. Ginsburg and Barton agree with Mendelssohn.
119. Mendelssohn's interpretation is superior to any commentary which I have read insofar as intelligibility and consistency with the text are concerned. Ginsburg: God recalleth what is past; this refers to the cycle in nature. This adds no new development to the text. Barton: God shall seek that which is driven away. This is obscure but evidently refers to the cycle of nature. Rashi: God avenges the persecuted. This is nonsensical. Ibn Ezra: All God's actions are on one path; i.e., He is consistent. This forces the text.
120. Qoholeth implies that even the fear of God is predetermined. The rabbinical statement, "Everything is in the power of Heaven except the Fear of Heaven" is quoted by Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn accepts the rabbinical statement and must therefore reject this passage. He attributes the passage to the "objector".
121. There is no reference in the text to a pre-ordained decree. Qohleth simply states that he despaired because the future disposition of his property remained unknown to him.
122. Modern critics agree with Mendelssohn. Barton: "Qohleth, as a Hebrew, believes that this [the lack of permanent values] would not be the order of life, if God had not ordained it." Mendelssohn's commentary on II:14, III:19,

VI:10 has high exegetical value. Particularly 6:10 is excellent as an example of our commentator's ability to understand and explain a text. Unfortunately the comment to the next verse is very poor. Mendelssohn has missed the point of Qoheleth's remark. Qoheleth says that man is so powerless against God that it is futile even to discuss the problem.

123. Ginsburg agrees with Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn's lengthy explanation leads us to suspect that he is expressing his own point of view more than Qoheleth's. Barton regards this verse as an interpolation of the Chasid glossator, perhaps intending to show that the harem (see the preceding verse) was one of man's devices. Mendelssohn uses the words אריות יקרות which are found in Ibn Ezra's commentary. Both Rashi and Ibn Ezra express the point of view found in Mendelssohn's commentary.
124. Mendelssohn's commentary has entirely missed the point of the passage. The verse reiterates Qoheleth's pessimism concerning the value of wisdom. That which was far from his understanding of the moral government of the universe before he attained wisdom remained far after he had acquired it. So Ginsburg, who translates: "Far remaineth that which was Far, and deep, deep! who can find it out? This agrees with the thought of VIII:17. Barton agrees with Ginsburg. He translates: "Far off is that which exists...." and understands by "that which exists" the "true inwardness of things, the reality below all changing phenomena."
125. Mendelssohn translates: "To know that the cause of wickedness is folly and of madness, ignorance." This violates the word order and misconstrues the meaning of ידע which it takes to mean "to know the cause of." Ginsburg understands ידע, ידעו, ידעו and ידעו to be used "metonymically for origin, source, or cause of these evils" and translates: "in order to know the cause of wickedness, vice, and mad folly." This translation although superior to Mendelssohn's, does not translate the last phrase of the passage correctly. Barton translates: "To know that wickedness is foolishness; and folly, madness." This knowledge constitutes the results of Qoheleth's experiments--it is all that he could assert in concerning the nature of ultimate reality. The J.P.S. has rendered this passage happily: "To know wickedness to be folly, ignorance to be madness."
126. Mendelssohn reads this passage interrogatively. His translation reads: "...And why should the wicked not have happiness and length of days which is only as a shadow' which vanishes and passes away, 'because he does not fear God'" If read as a statement of fact this

verse contradicts verse 12 which says that it¹⁵ well with the wicked man. Mendelssohn's translation of v.13 harmonizes the two statements. Ginsburg makes no effort to resolve the contradiction beyond stating that v. 12 holds good if there is no future bar of judgment. Barton ascribes both verses to the Chasid glossator and simply states that "this (v.13) seems to contradict vs. 12." Preston points out that Mendelssohn is the only commentator to read this verse interrogatively. Altho the Hebrew lacks any indication of interrogation, it must be admitted that Mendelssohn's explanation gives these verses more coherence than the interpretations of the other commentators. However, the idea that happiness resulting from evil is only a test for the moral qualities of the individual is nowhere stated in Ecclesiastes.

127. Mendelssohn's commentary on this verse may be challenged on almost every word. He understands ^{דק} to mean contemplation from a distance, that is: as though the object had no direct relationship with the observer. He stops at ^{דק} which has the ethnach and takes ^{דק} as the object. Ginsburg, on the other hand, takes the remainder of the passage as the ^{דק} object. His translation is preferable: "In the day of prosperity, be therefore in prosperity, and in the day of adversity consider that God hath also made this as well as that..." The antecedent of ^{דק}, according to Mendelssohn is God; whereas properly interpreted it is "man." The meaning of the passage is that man cannot tell the future. Ginsburg and Barton interpret it in this manner. Mendelssohn translates ^{דק} with the phrase ^{דק} is. It really gives the motive or occasion of the action, and should be translated, "so that" (so Ginsburg and Barton.)
128. See Page 12.
129. Mendelssohn follows Ibn Ezra. Ginsburg holds that ^{דק} refers to a reproof, which at the beginning may cause one to rebel, but the value of which we realize at the end. Ginsburg's interpretation is unwarranted.
130. Ginsburg draws a distinction between THY MOUTH and THY HEART, referring the former to words and the latter to thoughts. This distinction is a good one, but unnecessary. Barton holds that the verse anticipates v.4 and therefore refers to vows. Mendelssohn applies it to prayer, in which view he is supported by Ginsburg. Mendelssohn is probably correct. His source is Ibn Ezra.
131. Ginsburg holds that GUARD THY FEET is a figure of speech teaching us to lead a moral life. In this he is wrong.

Mendelssohn's interpretation is confirmed by Barton.

132. Ginsburg again disagrees with Mendelssohn. He takes ^{עליו} as an adjective of comparison and translates: "For it is nearer to obey than to offer the sacrifice of the disobedient." Barton takes it as an infinitive used as the subject and translates it in accordance with Mendelssohn. The last clause of the passage is entirely misunderstood by Ginsburg who translates: "For they who obey know not to do evil," thus interpreting ^{לעולם} as the antecedent of ^{עליו}. However, ^{לעולם} is the antecedent and the word "except" must be inserted by emending ^{לעולם} to ^{לעולם}. So Barton. Rashi and Ibn Ezra as well as Mendelssohn agree with the modern commentators altho they do not emend the text.
133. Mendelssohn rejects the interpretation of ^{לעולם} as meaning "to afflict thyself". He understands its meaning as "to bring evil punishment upon thyself." Ginsburg adopts the rejected interpretation and offers a more acceptable translation. The word ^{לעולם} is mistranslated by Mendelssohn; he follows Rashi and uses ^{לעולם} as a synonym. Ginsburg, Barton, and Ibn Ezra find in it a reference to a celestial being. Ginsburg takes it to the angel who presides over the altar; Barton thinks it is "God" since the Greek and Syriac read "God" here. Mendelssohn's interpretation is mentioned by both Ginsburg and Baron and is rejected.
134. This interpretation was taken from either Ibn Ezra or the Talmud. The evidence points to the latter source.
135. ^{לעולם} 'K, perhaps, "no fixed will?" So Ginsburg.
136. Mendelssohn quotes Ibn Ezra.
137. Mendelssohn translates this verse according to the accents. ^{לעולם} has the Zakeph Katon and must be separated from ^{לעולם}. He therefore translates: "I advise thee to observe the king's word; [thy] prince fulfilleth the word of the oath to God." Mendelssohn is entirely wrong on the meaning of ^{לעולם}. It is to be taken with ^{לעולם} to mean "especially because of" (so Ginsburg) or "even" on account of". This clause gives the reason for obedience: the oath of allegiance taken by the people.
138. Mendelssohn follows Ibn Ezra and the Targum in translating ^{לעולם} as ^{לעולם}. Rashi reads it properly, ^{לעולם} "inasmuch." Ginsburg and Barton concur in Rashi's translation. Mendelssohn's translation makes this verse a needless repetition of 3b, whereas it really shows the reason for the preceding passage.

139. Mendelssohn states a similar thought in his commentary to ~~VIII:3~~, in which he says: "Do not try to ascertain the degree of excellence of a government by its details. The excellence of a country consists in its entire state, in general administration, not in detail, as any intelligent man knows."
140. Mendelssohn's explanation has much to recommend it, but it is erroneous in some minor points. The word ~~וְהוּא~~ is translated as "will" or "purpose", following the Targum, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra who, however, use "God" as the subjective genitive. The word here means "matter" (so Ginsburg and Barton).
~~וְהוּא~~ is translated "astonished, surprised" by Mendelssohn in which meaning Barton concurs. Ginsburg renders it "struck by fear", "alarmed" but there is no need for this translation. It is used in the sense of "astonish" in Is. XLIII:8; XXIX:9; Jer. IV:9; Psalm XLVIII:6. Mendelssohn breaks with the Targum, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra in interpreting FOR ONE HIGHER THAN THE HIGH WATCHTOWER, AND THERE ARE HIGHER THAN THEY. The traditional interpretation referred the passage to God. Mendelssohn's interpretation is in accordance with modern commentators. He ascribes this verse to an earthly system of government. Ginsburg says that it is a system of checks making for moral government. Mendelssohn has more correctly stated that this system is responsible for corrupt government. Barton sees in this verse a description of the Satrapial system which impoverished the masses.
141. Rashi states that one should obey the king only as far as their commands do not make us transgress the oath of obedience to God. He misunderstands ~~וְהוּא~~ which means an oath in which God's name is used, not an oath to God.
 For critical interpretation of this passage see note 137.
142. This translation is correct.
143. Ginsburgh translates ~~וְהוּא~~ "do not even stand up because of an evil word." This does not add much to the preceding clause. Mendelssohn's translation is superior. He follows Rashi, but is more specific.
144. Rashi translates ~~וְהוּא~~, "to his own hurt." Mendelssohn's translation is correct.
145. See the Introduction.
146. Ibn Ezra's commentary to VII:3
147. Preston, Barton, and J.P.S. translate "against it."
148. Ginsburg and Barton.

149. 4:4,5,6; 5:18; 6:8,11,26; 7:28; 9:11; 10:1; 12:3 are typical passages which illustrate the strong resemblances in thought and language between Mendelssohn and Ibn Ezra. So evident is the resemblance that there can be no doubt that Mendelssohn used Ibn Ezra.
150. So also Preston, who as usual agrees with Mendelssohn.
151. Pages 21-22.
152. Ibn Ezra in particular.
153. Barton: "He wrote uprightly words of truth; he never sacrificed matter to form. The editor's apology for some of the statements in Ecclesiastes is stated in this verse. Ginsburg: He wrote "frankly".
154. So also Barton and Ginsburg.
155. So also Rashi.
156. Barton excluded the latter half of the verse on the grounds that it is a gloss; it become unnecessary to harmonize 9a with 9b.
157. Baron, in loc.