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Book design by Gene Harris

First edition

Published by The Westminster Press®
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Crenshaw, James L.
Ecclesiastes : a commentary.

(The Old Testament library)
Bibliography: p.
1. Bible. O.T. Ecclesiastes—Commentaries.
I. Title. II. Series.
BS1475.3.C74 1987 223'.807 87-16053
ISBN 0-664-21295-6

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PREFACE

In writing this commentary I have received extraordinary assistance from three persons, Marti Steussy, Michael V. Fox, and Judy Matthews Taylor, to whom I hereby express my deepest appreciation. The first two read my manuscript and made valuable suggestions for its improvement, and the third transformed my handwritten text into a typescript that could easily be prepared for publication. In addition, Michael made available to me a copy of his forthcoming commentary on Qohelet, which is especially strong on the linguistic aspects of the book. Roland E. Murphy extended a similar kindness, allowing me to see the typescript of his commentary on Ecclesiastes that will appear shortly in the *Hermeneia* series. Both Michael and Roland shared offprints with me as well, and in this significant expression of collegiality others have also joined, most notably Robert Gordis (whose commentary on Qohelet was indispensable), R. Norman Whybray, Anton Schoors, Graham Ogden, John Gammie, and Addison D. Wright.

My indebtedness to others, with whom my relationship is less personal, is no less real. Any attempt to list those scholars—living and dead—who have informed my thinking about Qohelet is doomed to fail, but the following deserve special notice: Delitzsch, Barton, and Ginsberg for relentless attention to language and syntax; Podechard for thoroughness, especially the introductory material; Ginsburg for a history of research; Loretz for the study of the ancient Near Eastern parallels; Whitley for philological observations; Hertzberg and Lauha for comprehensiveness; Braun for the Greek background; Ellermeier and Kroeber for special syntactical problems; Lohfink for literary features; Zimmerli for theological insights; Lys for philosophical probings; and Barucq for cautious examination of the status of research on Qohelet.

A major portion of the research during the final stages of writing this book was made possible by a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation for the academic year 1984-85. That project, "The Depiction of Old Age in Ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature," focused on the exquisite poem in Eccl. 11:7-12:7 and enabled me to explore the larger context of Qohelet in a way that would otherwise have been impossible. I wish by this means to express my profound gratitude to Joel

cases where my answers do not seem adequate, the Bibliography will offer alternative views that may be more persuasive.

An ancient rabbi quipped that King Solomon wrote Song of Songs in his youth, Proverbs in mature years, and Qohelet in his senility. I do not agree that Qohelet's musings came from an intellect that had lost its sharpness. I think Qohelet's eyes were alert and his powers of observation undiminished. What he taught has remained fresh through the ages, for Qohelet spoke eloquent truth.

COMMENTARY

The Superscription

1:1

1:1 The words of Qohelet, David's son, king in Jerusalem.

Like many other books in the Bible, Ecclesiastes bears a superscription that places it within a larger context. The generalized form of the introductory comment calls to mind prophetic books and collections of proverbs. Even the identification of the author lacks precision, for *ben-dāwid melek* could refer to any number of kings who sat on the throne in Jerusalem, and except for the royal experiment in 1:12–2:26 the book does not adopt a royal perspective.

[1] Similar superscriptions occur in the book of Proverbs: "The words of Agur, Yakeh's son, the Massaite" (reading *hammaššā'î*,¹ Prov. 30:1) and "The words of Lemuel, the Massaite king, that his mother taught him" (Prov. 31:1). In Prov. 22:17 a superscription ("the words of the wise") seems to have been incorporated in the first line of the text. Although the initial word in Prov. 1:1 is *mīšlê* rather than *dibrê*, the entire superscription ("The proverbs of Solomon, David's son, king of Israel") is remarkably close to Eccl. 1:1. In Prov. 10:1 the short form, "The proverbs of Solomon," identifies the second major collection within the book, and Prov. 25:1 expands that brief attribution to read: "These also are proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed."

This type of superscription is not restricted to wisdom literature: "The words of Jeremiah, Hilkiyah's son, one of the priests who (lived) in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin" (Jer. 1:1); "The words of Amos who was among the sheepbreeders from Tekoa . . ." (Amos 1:1). In the latter case the superscription adds the verb *hazāh*, the nominal form of which occurs in Isa. 1:1 ("The vision of Isaiah, Amoz's son, which he saw concerning

¹Perhaps *hammaššā'* does double duty, referring both to the literary genre and to the author's country. In any event, the designation of what follows as a burdensome oracle is redundant, for the following *n'um haggeber* also includes an expression from oracular contexts, even if juxtaposed ironically with a human subject.

Judah and Jerusalem . . .”) and in Obad. 1:1 (“The vision of Obadiah”).

Egyptian Instructions have similar introductions. The Instruction of Ptahhotep begins: “The Instruction of the Mayor and Vizier Ptahhotep, under the majesty of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Izezi, living forever and ever.” Other texts of this type preface the technical word *sebayit* (Instruction) with the words “The beginning of.” The Instruction for King Merikare, The Instruction of King Amenemhet, The Instruction of Prince Hordedef, and The Instruction of Amenemopet begin with this preface.²

The reference to a book of Solomon’s *d̄bārīm* (I Kings 11:41) seems to play on the word’s ambiguity. Does the allusion presuppose an account of Solomon’s words or of his deeds? “Now the rest of Solomon’s *d̄bārīm*—everything he did and (all) his wisdom—are they not written in the book of Solomon’s *d̄bārīm*?”

The epilogue in Eccl. 12:9–11 virtually equates the respective words, *dibrē* and *m̄šālīm*. During his professional life, it observes, Qohelet listened, searched out, and arranged numerous proverbs, all the time striving for felicitous and reliable expressions. This epilogue also uses the expression “the words of the wise” as a broad category into which Qohelet’s *m̄šālīm* fell.

The name *Qōhelet* is a feminine Qal participle from the root *qhl*, meaning to assemble or gather. Because the term has come to designate an occupation, like *hassōperet* in Ezra 2:55 and *pōkeret haššebayīm* in Ezra 2:57 and in Neh. 7:59, a masculine verb follows. In Eccl. 7:27, the feminine verb probably arose through a mistaken division, when *ʾamar haqqōhelet* became *ʾamērah qōhelet*. This interpretation of the data seems to be confirmed within the book in Eccl. 12:8 (“says the Qohelet”) and outside it in the Septuagint. Twice Qohelet functions as a proper name: in 1:12 (“I, Qohelet, was king over Israel in Jerusalem”) and in 12:9–10 (“In addition to [the fact] that Qohelet was a sage . . . Qohelet endeavored to discover felicitous words”).

Ben-dāwid (son of David) does not necessarily mean one of David’s children. In Hebrew usage it can refer to grandchildren or simply to a remote member of the Davidic dynasty. Furthermore, the word *ben* also denotes close relationships of mind and spirit without implying actual physical kinship (sons of the prophets = disciples or guild members; sons of God = servants). Therefore *ben-dāwid* does not require the identification of Qohelet with Solomon, although that association was probably intended.

The oppositional phrase “*melek* in Jerusalem” refers to Qohelet, not to David. Proposals for repointing this word as “property-holder” (Ginsberg

²The first part of the Instruction of Ani is missing from the surviving text. In all likelihood, the same formula appeared in this lacuna.

1950), or “counselor” (Albright; see Lauha 1978, 2), or *Ratsherr* (Kroeber 1963) have not commended themselves to interpreters. Due to the author’s literary fiction of royal authorship in Eccl. 1:12 (abandoned in 2:26), Qohelet was identified with the king of legendary wealth and wisdom. This identification was logical, inasmuch as the author of Eccl. 1:12 had extracted a suitable pen name from the tradition about Solomon’s assembling of the people for the dedication of the temple (I Kings 8:1, *yaqhēl*).

The superscription does not come from the author of the book. Although the verse is often credited to the epilogist(s), that unlikely view introduces one difficulty. According to Eccl. 1:1, Qohelet was a king, but in 12:9 he is called a sage, that is, a professional wise man (*hākām*). The purpose of the superscription may have been to strengthen the case for canonical use of the book by attributing its observations to Solomon. The several collections in Proverbs and the Song of Songs bear witness to an effort to enhance the authority of various writings by linking them with Israel’s great king whose wisdom was legendary.

Motto and Thematic Statement

1:2–3

- 1:2 Utter futility! says Qohelet,
Utter futility!
Everything is futile!
- 3 What does a person profit
From all his toil
At which he works under the sun?

Ecclesiastes opens with a motto and a thematic statement (attributed to Qohelet himself) that brands reality as utterly absurd, transitory, and futile. Consequently, all human toil is wasted effort, completely devoid of profit. The rest of the book justifies Qohelet’s unorthodox teaching and draws significant lessons from the unpleasant fact that there is no lasting advantage for humans.

[2] The word *hebel* derives from a root that connotes a breath or vapor.³ In Ecclesiastes it shows two nuances: temporal (“ephemerality”) and existential (“futility” or “absurdity”). The name Abel connotes the first of these. The earliest Greek translations of the Hebrew rendered the word

³In this verse, *hebel* appears in an unusual bound form, *h^abēl*. The pointing is strange (cf. also 12:8, which forms an inclusio to the book). The form is probably an Aramaizing vocalization similar to *ʾabēd* in Dan. 6:21.

according to this category: *atmis* or *atmos* (breath). Jerome opted for the second category, which he expressed by the Latin *vanitas*. The Septuagint has *mataiotēs*.

The first category, breath or vapor,⁴ is reinforced by the image of chasing after or herding the wind (cf. 2:17). Wind, breath, and smoke are insubstantial when viewed from one perspective. Nevertheless, they are very real, even if one cannot see the wind or take hold of any one of the three. Although Qohelet and the person who wrote the inclusio normally prefer the second sense of *hebel*, this preference is not exclusive. Several uses in the book virtually demand the first meaning, that of fleeting appearance and ephemerality.

Hābēl hābālīm is an idiom that expresses the superlative, like *šīr haššīrīm* (the sublime song, song of songs), *šēmē haššamayim* (the highest heaven, I Kings 8:27), *‘ebed ‘abadīm* (servant of servants, Gen. 9:26); *qōdeš qodāšīm* (holy of holies, Ex. 29:37). Its preferred position in the sentence and its repetition following the verb and its subject emphasize the negative observation. Whereas the phrase “ultimate absurdity” might have left room for some exceptions, despite its double usage, the final statement “Everything is absurd” makes the judgment universal. Such a bold claim is extraordinary, especially as a thematic statement for the entire book (note its appearances as a summary statement in 12:8). Would not its readers have promptly set to thinking about life’s good things that might escape Qohelet’s harsh censure? Hence the importance of the identification of Qohelet with Solomon.

The verb *‘amar* in the Qal perfect can be translated by an English perfect (“Qohelet has said”), but it is better to render it like a Greek aorist (“says Qohelet”). This understanding of the verb emphasizes the permanent quality of Qohelet’s conclusion about reality. He did not reach this conclusion and quickly abandon it. Instead, Qohelet laid down a shocking verdict and tenaciously clung to that opinion as an accurate assessment of life according to his experience.

Although Qohelet usually speaks of himself in the first person, in this verse and in 7:27 he employs the third person. This alternating persona concentrates the reader’s attention momentarily on the source of the weighty judgment and distances the author of the narrative from Qohelet. Therefore the references in the third person are not necessarily secondary glosses. Nor does the intensification of *hebel* in 1:2 and 12:8 require an author other than Qohelet. His facility with language was such that he

⁴The word was an appropriate designation for idols, for it declared them inconsequential nonentities.

⁵The inclusio in 12:8 lacks the repeated use of *hābēl hābālīm*, but some manuscript evidence (Peshitta) suggests its originality here.

could easily have varied the usage from the formula that occurs several times (1:14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8, 16; 5:9 [10E]; 6:2, 9; 7:6; 8:10, 14; 11:8, 10). The function of the motto is to guide the reader toward a proper interpretation of Qohelet’s words. He will validate this thesis in what follows, and that includes everything Qohelet says, including his advice to enjoy life insofar as possible.

[3] The rhetorical question of 1:3 explains and justifies the assessment of reality in 1:2 as utter futility. Because nature can achieve nothing new, human activity produces no profit. Such an assertion contradicts traditional teaching, for the sages who composed the book of Proverbs believed that wise conduct brought lasting gain. They subscribed to this conviction so tenaciously that a dogma resulted, often called the theory of reward and retribution. The belief that the deity rewarded virtue and punished vice functioned as a powerful motive for ethical action, but the conviction was eventually absolutized. The result was an encrusted system that admitted few exceptions, and the theological position of the friends in the book of Job demonstrates the extent to which this attitude was taken regardless of its harmful consequences for innocent victims of chance.

The word *yitrōn* (profit) is possibly a commercial term for what is left after all expenses are taken into account. In the Hebrew canon it occurs only in Ecclesiastes, although rabbinic literature uses the word. The fundamental notion is “advantage.” What advantage accrues to men and women (*lā’ādām*)? None. The universality of the point is reinforced in two ways.

First, the comprehensive term *b’kol* is used. No work, however devious or noble, secret or public, will have lasting effect. Therefore the claim that everything is futile, ephemeral, is deadly serious. All activity falls under the negative judgment rendered in 1:2. The preposition *b’* normally means “by” or “in,” but it sometimes has the force of “from,” as in Ugaritic.⁶ Perhaps the clearest instance of this use in Ecclesiastes is 5:14 (“Just as he emerged from his mother’s womb, naked he will return, going as he came, and he will take nothing from his toil [wealth?] that he might carry in his hand”).

Second, the phrase “under the sun” reinforces the universal sweep of the thematic statement and its rationale.⁷ Nothing falls outside the area circumscribed by *taḥat haššāmeš*, except Sheol and heaven, and the underworld

⁶Many interpreters view the *bet* as instrumental or *pretii* (of price), but Whitley (52–53) argues forcefully for “from.” He adduces II Sam. 22:14 (*min*) and its parallels in Ps. 18:14 (*b’*); II Kings 14:13 (*b’*); and II Chron. 25:23 (*min*). He also refers to the Abibaal Inscription (“the King Gebal from [b] Egypt”) and the Azitawadd Inscription (“and may he not carry me from [b] this resting-place unto another resting-place”). For Whitley, a recently published Ugaritic text clinches the case (“Koshar pours spirits from [b] the vat”).

⁷*taḥat haššāmeš* occurs in the Hebrew Bible only in Ecclesiastes (1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:12, 17 [13, 18E]; 6:1, 5, 12; 8:9, 15 [twice], 17; 9:3, 6, 9 [twice], 11, 13; 10:5).

brings no advantage to anyone. The expression "under the sun" is attested in the Gilgamesh Epic ("Only the gods [live] forever under the sun. As for mankind, numbered are their days; whatever they achieve is but the wind"), in the Phoenician inscriptions of Tabnit from the sixth century B.C.E., and of Eshmunazar a century later. A twelfth-century Elamite document also uses the phrase. Strictly speaking, therefore, it is not necessary to assume Greek influence on Ecclesiastes (*hyph' hēliō*). A variant (*taḥat haššāmāyim*) occurs three times in Ecclesiastes (1:13; 2:3; 3:1), but there seems to be no difference in meaning between the two expressions, "under the sun" and "under the heavens."

The repetition of the root *'amāl* characterizes existence in the same way the Yahwist did in the story of the Fall, although the vocabulary is different. In his view fallen humanity must eke out a livelihood by the sweat of the brow, always contending with adverse working conditions. The author of Ecclesiastes makes a similar point by choosing the word *'amāl*, which has the nuance of burdensome labor and mental anguish. But not always, for it appears that the word also came to designate the fruit of one's labor (wages), and by extension, wealth.

The second use of *'amāl* is verbal, and it has the relative particle *šē* as a prefix. The shortened form of *šē* occurs sixty-eight times in Ecclesiastes, whereas the longer form *šēr* is used eighty-nine times. The short form is ancient, appearing in Hebrew literature of probably northern origin (Judg. 5:7; 6:17; 7:22; II Kings 6:11). However, the particle *šē* came to be used widely in late Hebrew (Lam. 4:9; 5:18; S. of Songs [32 times, except in the superscription]; II Chron. 5:20; 27:27; Pss. 122:3-4; 124:1, 2, 6). It is used exclusively in the Mishnah except for three biblical quotations and one other instance of *šēr*.

Out of context, the rhetorical question "What does one profit from all his toil at which he works under the sun?" leaves open the possibility of responding that one reaps a bountiful harvest from a diligent labor. But the juxtaposition of this question with the thematic statement in 1:2 rules out any effort to offer specific instances of advantage from toil. Of course, something does accrue from the various activities that occupy human beings during their waking hours, and some individuals succeed in amassing a fortune by one means or another. Therefore the author must imply something in these two verses that will come to explicit expression later: the finality of death. Implicit within the word *hebel* is the sense of transience. Perhaps the word *yitrôn* points in this direction, for one cannot calculate the profit or loss of individual activity until it ceases. Prior to this final closure all judgments of expenditures and receipts are necessarily provisional.

The thematic statement in 1:2 and its rationale in 1:3 make optimal use of rhetorical devices: two exclamations, an attribution, and an assertion in

1:2; and a rhetorical question in 1:3. The choice of vocabulary and idiom reinforces the sentiment expressed: everything is futile. Together these verses prepare the way for a prologue (1:4-11)⁸ that justifies the pessimistic view of life by examining the pointless movement of nature and the meaningless activity of people. Verses 4-7 draw an analogy from observable reality, to which Qohelet responds (1:8), setting forth a conclusion (1:9) that is then reinforced (1:10-11).

Nothing New Under the Sun 1:4-11

- 1:4 A generation goes, and a generation comes,
But the earth always remains.
- 5 The sun rises, and the sun sets,
Panting to its place;
There it rises.
- 6 Blowing southward and circling northward,
Circling, circling, the wind blows,
And on its circuits the wind returns.
- 7 All streams flow into the sea,
But the sea is never full;
To the place from which the streams flow,
There they flow again.
- 8 All words are wearisome;
A person is not able to speak them;
The eye is not sated with seeing,
Nor the ear full of hearing.
- 9 Whatever has happened is what will occur,
And whatever has been done is what will be done;
And there is nothing new under the sun.
- 10 There is something about which they say,
"Look, this is new!"
It happened already in aeons
That preceded us.
- 11 No one remembers those who came before.
Nor will anyone recall people who come later;
For them there will be no remembrance
Among those who come after them.

This poem characterizes nature as an endless round of pointless movement, a rhythm that engulfs human generations as well. Oblivious to the

⁸Some critics connect 1:3 with the prologue rather than with what precedes it.

relentless striving of heavenly and earthly bodies, the earth remains unchanged. The sun makes its rounds, as does the wind, and each one returns to start the process again. Streams flow to the ocean in a never-ending process, but they fail to fill the sea. Humans talk incessantly without fully expressing the wearisome nature of things. The eye always increases human desire, and the ear never hears enough. The past repeats itself ad infinitum, so that there is nothing new under the sun. Things only seem new because of a human tendency to forget the past.

[4] The prologue offers a justification for the pessimistic view of things expressed in 1:2–3. It emphasizes the ceaseless activity of the natural world (1:4–7), a constant movement that has no discernible purpose or result. But the prologue also hints that human actions (1:8–11) always fail to reach their goal.

The initial unit (1:4–7) deals with the four elements of the universe as discussed by ancient philosophers: earth, air, fire, and water. The remaining unit (1:8–11) refers to the quality that distinguishes human beings from animals, the capacity for speech, and isolates two aspects of the affective dimension, sight and sound. The section concludes with a denial that novelty occurs anywhere and a bold assertion that everything is destined to oblivion.

The word *dôr*, an appropriate choice because of its ambiguity, suggests both nature and people. The primary sense here is probably the former: the generations of natural phenomena. But the other nuance must also be present, lending immense irony to the observation that the stage on which the human drama is played outlasts the actors themselves.

A traditional response to the earlier question about profit might have pointed to the quest for progeny: it is advantageous to have children, for one's name survives in them. Qohelet undercuts such an argument. Only the earth endures for long, he observes. With these Qal participles for the passing of one generation (*hōlēk*) and the coming of another (*bā'*) a significant feature of the book, antithesis,⁹ first comes to expression. In this instance the same word is modified by contrasting ideas. One generation dies and another is born.

The participles indicate continuous action; the dying and birthing happen again and again without end. Qohelet's use of *hōlēk* to specify death (cf. 3:20, "All go to one place; everything came from dust and everything returns to dust"; and 5:15, "And this is also a grievous injustice; precisely as he came so shall he depart, and what advantage did he possess that he toiled for the wind?") is an extension of the phrase "to go to his fathers." The verb *hālak* has the sense of dying in several biblical texts outside Ecclesiastes (Ps. 39:14 [13E]; Job 10:21; 14:20; II Sam. 12:23).

⁹Unless *yitrôn* in 1:3 contrasts with *hābēl* in 1:2.

The sequence (death-birth) is striking, for one normally expects the opposite order. Both the anterior position and the repetition of *dôr* give this word a force equal to the weightier notions of dying and coming into being. But the twofold occurrence of *dôr* already offers a hint of things to come, the monotonous recurrence of purposeless activity. Like generations, which are ongoing and repetitious, nature moves ceaselessly in circuits that are monotonous and futile.¹⁰

Not everything is caught up in the endless process of going and coming. Whether the endurance of the earth is meant to be contrasted with the transience of generations, in the aggregate or separately, depends on the way one reads the conjunction *wē*. It is possible to understand the verse to mean that a generation always succeeds its predecessor, so that (or while) the earth continues for a long time. However, the *wē* probably means "but." Despite continual departures and entries of separate generations, both human and natural, the earth stands intact. The feminine participle *ōmadet* denotes duration. Jerome perceived the irony in this observation about ephemerality and permanence. He wrote: "What is more vain than this vanity: that the earth, which was made for humans, stays—but humans themselves, the lords of the earth, suddenly dissolve into dust?"

How long did Qohelet think the earth would remain? The word *l'ōlām* indicates continuity for a long time, although it lacks the modern sense of eternity, that is, time without end. The idea is that the earth will last as long as the mind can project into the future. Nevertheless, human beings realize no profit, for they pass from the scene forever.¹¹

[5] Ancient Egyptians thought of the sun as conveyed on a ship during its nocturnal journey from west to east, and the Greeks pictured Helios driven by steeds on its daily circuit. According to Ps. 19:5 the sun leaves its chamber like a bridegroom and returns like a strong man, having run its course with joy. Qohelet's description lacks this mood of celebration and wonder. Instead of picturing a vigorous champion who easily makes the daily round, he thinks of strenuous panting to reach the destination. Having arrived, an exhausted sun must undertake the whole ordeal again.

Whereas Qohelet placed the subjects before the participles in 1:4, they follow the participles in 1:5. The repetition of the subject in each verse (*dôr* in 1:4; *haššemeš* in 1:5) achieves perfect symmetry in the first four words of these two verses. But the balancing of subject and participle is broken

¹⁰Elsewhere the perpetual cycle of generations was likened to a tree's shedding its leaves and putting on new ones (Sir. 14:18–19; cf. Homer, *Iliad* 6.146ff.). In anticipation of standing naked before God the blushing trees cast off their garments one by one, while the deity averts the all-comprehending glance until the naked are fully clothed once more.

¹¹The Instruction for Merikare has an interesting parallel: "While generation succeeds generation, God who knows characters is hidden; one can not oppose the lord of the land, He reaches all that the eyes can see."

at the level of meaning, for the sense of *bā'* in 1:4 does not extend into 1:5, where the meaning of *bā'* approximates that of *hōlēk* (sets, dies). Furthermore, the extreme brevity of 1:4, which echoes the succinct form in 1:1-3, disappears. The additional phrase "there it rises" advances the thought from exhaustion after an arduous journey to monotonous repetition of drudgery.

Again participles call attention to the durative nature of the action. Although the first *zōrēah* is pointed as a Qal perfect, the prefixed *w*^e poses a problem. In all probability the original participle (*zōrēah*) lost its *waw* by metathesis, giving rise subsequently to its present pointing. The root *šā'ap* occurs in the sense of panting with anticipation (Ps. 119:131, "With open mouth I pant, because I long for thy commandments") and from exhaustion (Jer. 14:6, "The wild asses stand on the bare heights, they pant for air like jackals; their eyes fail because there is no herbage"; cf. Isa. 42:14, a woman gasping in travail; Job 7:2, a slave longing for a shadow). The accents separate *šō'ep* from *w'el-m'qômô*, but this is undoubtedly a mistake.

Thus far the prologue has made two sweeping claims. Human beings and natural forces in their individuality and as an aggregate vanish from the scene on which the drama of life is played. The earth alone endures. Moreover, the most visible of the heavenly bodies is consigned to perpetual drudgery. The sun's task is not unlike the punishment imposed on Sisyphus, who was condemned to an eternity of rolling a boulder to the top of a hill only to have it return to the starting place over and over again.

[6] The withholding of the subject is the most striking stylistic feature of this verse. The subject was the opening word in 1:4 and the second word in 1:5, but 1:6 holds it in abeyance until five participles have made an appearance. The immediate effect is to create the illusion that the movement of the sun is still being described. The south-north direction of the wind corresponds to the east-west movement of the sun, thus completing the four points on the compass.

Another stylistic characteristic of this verse is the repeated use of two participles, *sōbēb* and *hōlēk*. The threefold occurrence of *sōbēb* and two fold use of *hōlēk* serve to simulate the feeling of restlessness generated by the constant blowing of the wind. This sense of being caught in a rut reaches its peak in three successive participles *sōbēb sōbēb hōlēk* just before the subject *hārūah* is introduced. Even the next clause returns to this relentless striving for sameness, for it repeats the subject *hārūah* and employs a form of the root *sbb*.¹²

¹²The translation "from its rounds" is based on general Semitic use, a point that Whitley (9-10) has made and for which he has given a number of examples: Esarhaddon ("loyal conduct was taken away from ['*elī*] my brothers"); the Ahirom Inscription ("And may tranquillity flee from ['*alī*] Gebal"); the Moabite stone ("And Chemosh said to me, Go, take Nebo from ['*al*] Israel, and I went by night"); Dan. 6:19 [18E] ("And his sleep fell from him")

Some interpreters have used this verse among others to argue for a Palestinian composition of the book as opposed to an Egyptian setting. The argument is based on the observation that the wind is more tranquil in the land of the Nile. However, a literalistic reading of the verse hardly supports the claim, for the prevailing winds in Israel are from the direction of the Mediterranean Sea, that is, from the west. Poetic imagery must not be pressed in so literalist a fashion. The author engages in a little exaggeration for maximum effect. In his view the relentless blowing of the wind was no more effectual than the sun's daily round or the passing and coming of countless generations.

[7] The fourth example of pointless activity concerns the remarkable fact that countless streams flow into the sea without filling it to overflowing. The Dead Sea offered a particularly striking instance of such a phenomenon, for this small body of water demonstrably had no outlet and still it remained unfilled. From this observable instance, the same conclusion could be reached about other seas. Aristophanes perceived the same thing, writing that "the sea, though all the rivers flow to it, increaseth not in volume" (*The Clouds*, 1294).

This description of the insatiable sea continues the extravagant use of participles, particularly the repeated use of single images. By means of this poetic device, 1:6 reaches a crescendo with three instances of the participle *sōbēb* and another use of the root *sbb*; it now begins to subside in 1:7. But a new twist emerges to fill the gap; an infinitive with a prefixed *lamed* employs the verbal root that occurs in participial form two other times in the verse. The breadth of nuance is remarkable, for *hōlēk* yields the following senses: die (1:4), blow (1:6, twice), flow (1:7, twice).¹³

The rendering in the Septuagint and Vulgate imply that the point of the verse was not the continual flow of streams so much as their constant cycle. Such a view brings the verse into line with the preceding observation about the sun. The final clause can be translated: "and to the place whence the streams flowed, there they returned in order to flow (once more)," but this interpretation requires an assumption of haplography, a putative *mem* having been assimilated from the relative particle *šē* to the preceding *mem*. Of course, this way of understanding the verse precipitated discussions about the function of underground streams, which served to convey the waters back to their place of origin.

[8] Like the wind, which may blow with incredible force, then subside to the point of imperceptibility, the poem has introduced tangible realities against a backdrop of wonders beyond apprehension. The generations of the

[*qīlōhī*]; Ps. 16:2 ("I said O Yahweh thou art my God, my good is indeed from thee" [*šāleykā*]); the Mishnah ("But if they receive food from him" [*šāw*], *Maas.* 3:1).

¹³Three times counting the infinitive *lālāket*.

universe, the sun running its daily round, the elusive wind—these phenomena lie outside human grasp. With rivers and the sea a rapid shift takes place, for the tiny rivulets, rushing streams, and surging deeps can be seen and touched in a manner that differs appreciably from the way the sun's rays or the breezes are experienced. With this verse the author internalizes ceaseless and pointless movement. What can be observed about nature is also true on the human scene.

The translation "words" may be too restrictive, for Qohelet frequently uses vocabulary that connotes two different meanings at the same time. The translation of "things" provides a fine transition from nature, summarizing what has gone before and anticipating the meaning of the root *ḏbr* in the rest of the verse. The argument that all other uses of the plural *ḥadd^hḇārīm* in Ecclesiastes (5:1, 2, 6 [2, 3, 7E]; 6:11; 7:21; 9:16; 10:12, 13, 14) connote "words" and therefore this one does too is persuasive only for interpreters who posit absolute consistency of linguistic usage to the author.

This focus on the human arena concentrates on the faculties of speech, sight, and hearing. The sequence is reminiscent of that represented by the generations, the sun, and the wind.¹⁴ One hears the constant talking of endless generations, beholds the sun in the heavens, and listens to the sound of the wind. In the case of the waves, both sight and hearing come into play. The observations about natural phenomena have vacillated between the themes of relentless movement and ineffectual activity. Both ideas continue in the comments on speech, if *ḥadd^hḇārīm* carries this meaning. The insatiable aspect of seeing and hearing is prominent as well; moreover, this endless looking and listening invariably falls short of its goal.

Does Qohelet launch an attack on traditional wisdom at this point? The choice of illustrations certainly fits such an interpretation. The quest for the right word for the occasion is futile, the observations that arise from experience are incomplete, and the "hearing" is insufficient.¹⁵

[9] An obvious consequence of successive generations, the sun's relentless pursuit of its daily rounds, the cyclical blowing of the wind, and the endless flow of streams to the sea is predictability. The sages before Qohelet had exulted in the universe's orderly pattern. Qohelet does not. His startling conclusion divests the orderly universe, so dear to the sages, of its positive dimensions. The search for analogies between natural phenomena and human conduct retains its validity, but the insights that emerge do not enable the discoverers to extricate themselves from a paralyzing repetition

¹⁴If, that is, one understands *ḏōr* as deliberately ambiguous. According to Ps. 19:2-4 even natural phenomena are credited with unusual communicative powers, speech that dispenses with words.

¹⁵The evocative employment of *ʾayin* ("eye," recalling the solar disc?) and *ʾōzen* is not matched by a comparable expression for speech (cf. 8:2, *ḇi-melek*). *ʾēš* may be chosen to contrast with *ʾādām* in 1:3, hence a specific individual rather than humankind in general.

of the past. Individuals are destined to lives that never achieve fulfillment. Existence under the sun is marked by inadequate speech, insatiable eyes, and partial hearing.

For persons who exalted eloquence—a sense of timeliness, restraint, integrity, persuasiveness—to the status of supreme virtue, the denial that speech can ever be adequate would undercut the entire wisdom enterprise. Furthermore, observation, the technique by which insights into reality were discovered, is judged faulty. But the most burdensome claim must surely have been the assertion that teaching failed to achieve its goal. The hearer did not embody the transmitted teaching, a problem that Egyptian Instructions take into account (cf. Ptahhotep and Ani).

In the view of this poet, present and future are so closely bound with the past that nothing new ever bursts forth. Unlike those who posited golden ages at both ends of the historical time line, Qohelet rejects the thesis that paradise is both a memory and a hope, a past accomplishment and a future possibility. A myth of eternal return does not lurk beneath Qohelet's reminder that the past repeats itself. Rather, the emphasis falls on the burdensome monotony of everything in nature and among human beings.

Modern linguists may differ with Qohelet about novelty, for the use of the interrogative *māh*, coupled with the shortened relative *šē*,¹⁶ itself departs from earlier usage, causing difficulty for the translators of the Septuagint and Vulgate. This late feature of the Hebrew language occurs often in Ecclesiastes (1:9; 3:15, 22; 6:10; 7:24; 8:7; 10:14) and is equivalent to Aramaic *māh-dī* (Dan. 2:28-29) and *māh-zī* in early extrabiblical Aramaic documents. The Mishnah uses *māh-šē* as an indefinite pronoun just as Qohelet does (*Abot* 5:7, "concerning what he has not heard"; and *B. Bat.* 6:7, "whatever he gave, he gave"). Occasionally, *māh* serves as an indefinite substantive (I Sam. 19:3, "and if I see anything I will tell you"; II Sam. 18:22, "and whatever happens I will run"), and occasionally as a relative (I Chron. 15:13, "for that which was at first" [Whitley 1979a, 10-11]; II Chron. 30:3, "to what was sufficient"; Esth. 9:26, "what they saw").

Some biblical authors also believed new things came to pass. They announced that God was about to institute a new covenant and a new exodus, or they envisioned Israel as the grateful recipient of a new heart.

[10] Sages commonly introduced a striking observation by the particle *yēš*.¹⁷ Qohelet uses this protasis often (1:10; 2:21; 4:8, 9; 5:12; 6:1, 11; 7:15; 8:14 [3 times]; 10:5). The Hebrew particle of existence takes on an ironic dimension in his hands, for it calls attention to bogus claims. The labeling of something as new, like the modern fashion, particularly in the arts, of

¹⁶The twofold repetition of *māh-šē* and *ḥū' šē* reinforces the claim of recurrent phenomena.

¹⁷Prov. 12:18; 14:12; 15:10; 16:25; 18:24; 20:15; 26:12; 30:11-14. The juxtaposition of the particle of existence and that of nonexistence (*'ēn* in 1:9, *yēš* in 1:10) is especially effective.

freely bestowing the adjective “creative,” is stripped of its cogency. Qohelet’s argument rests on the identity of past and present, a point emphasized by illustrations from nature and human history.

The particle *hinneh* often signals a shift in point of view.¹⁸ Here Qohelet uses *neh* in a similar manner. Countering the claim to newness, he places the adverb *kebar* (already) in the emphatic position. This word, which seems to indicate duration, occurs in the Massoretic Text only in Ecclesiastes (2:12, 16; 3:15 [twice]; 4:2; 6:10; 9:6, 7). The plural *’ōlāmîm* is governed by a singular verb here and occasionally outside Ecclesiastes (Whitley lists Isa. 26:4; 45:17; and Dan. 9:24 [1979a, 11; all subsequent references will be to this volume]).

[11] Qohelet ascribes claims of newness to a colossal ignorance of the past, a failed memory.¹⁹ Previous generations are quickly forgotten, and future generations will fare no differently. Although some interpreters relate the *rišōnîm* and *’ah’rōnîm* to things, particularly to the *’ōlāmîm* (ages) in 1:10, the usual impersonal form is feminine plural. Therefore, it is better to understand the words as indicating generations past and future.

In this prologue Qohelet has laid down the grounds for reaching his conclusion that life is futile and that there is no profit from endless activity on earth. He supports the intellectual position by appealing to nature’s ceaseless movement, which achieves no surplus, and by referring to human striving, which fails to reach its goal. The examples stress the monotony, repetition, and unfulfilled nature of constant activity. The prologue serves as a suitable introduction to the whole book, just as Prov. 1:2–7 introduces the initial collection (1–9), and perhaps the rest of the book as well.

The Royal Experiment

1:12–2:26

1:12 I, Qohelet, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.¹³ And I determined to search out and to explore by rational means everything that is done under the heavens; it is grievous business God has given people with which to occupy themselves.¹⁴ I saw every action that is done under the sun, and everything is futile and shepherding the wind.

¹⁸The accentuation requires a translation such as: “Look at this! It is new” (Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*; Eisenbrauns, 1983).

¹⁹The unusual form *zīkrōn* is a construct before the preposition *le* rather than an absolute (which occurs as *zikkārōn* in the second half of the verse). Gordis lists the following examples of *zīkrōn* before *le*: Hos. 9:6; Ps. 58:5; Prov. 24:9; I Chron. 23:28; Isa. 9:1; Ps. 2:12; *Abot* 5:14.

15 The crooked cannot be straightened,
and the missing cannot be counted.

¹⁶I said to myself, “Look, I have achieved intellectual superiority over all who preceded me in Jerusalem, and my heart has observed much wisdom and knowledge.”¹⁷I determined to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I understood that this also was shepherding the wind.¹⁸For much wisdom is great trouble, and whoever acquires more knowledge increases care. 2:1 I said to myself, “Come, let me test you with pleasure and look on good things”; but this also was futile.²Of laughter I said, “Madness!” and of pleasure, “What does this accomplish?”³I explored in my mind how to sustain myself with wine—now my mind continued to conduct itself with wisdom—and to lay hold on folly until I could see what was good for human beings to do under the heavens the few days of their lives.⁴I performed impressive feats: I built for myself houses, I planted for myself vineyards.⁵I made for myself gardens and parks, and I planted there fruit trees of every variety.⁶I made for myself pools of water from which to irrigate a forest sprouting with trees.⁷I bought male and female slaves, and their children became my slaves. I also had much cattle, oxen, and sheep, more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.⁸I collected for myself both silver and gold, as well as the treasure of kings and of provincial rulers; I had for myself male and female singers, also the delights of men—a mistress, many mistresses.⁹I increased greatly, more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem; my wisdom remained with me.¹⁰I did not withhold anything that my eyes asked for; I did not deny my heart any pleasure, indeed my heart rejoiced in all my earnings and this was my portion from all my toil.¹¹Then I turned to all my achievements that my hands had done and to all my wealth that I had worked to acquire; and, oh, everything was futile and shepherding the wind, and there was no profit under the sun.¹²Then I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the person do who comes after the king? What he has already done!¹³Then I perceived that wisdom is superior to folly as light is superior to darkness.

14 The wise person has eyes in his head,
But the fool walks in darkness;

yet I also know that one fate will come upon both of them.¹⁵And I reflected, “Like the fate of the fool will my fate be, and why then have I been so very wise?” And I reasoned that this is also futile.¹⁶For there is no remembrance of the wise, as there is never any of fools, because both are already forgotten in the days to come, and the wise die like fools!¹⁷Then I hated life, for the work that was done under the sun was grievous to me because everything was futile and shepherding the wind.¹⁸And I loathed all my wealth for which I had labored under the sun because I must leave it to another who will succeed me.¹⁹And who

lant of the appetite. The Targum renders this word as a reference to sexual desire, which vanishes with age, and so does Šabb. 152a. The absence of any reference to dwindling sexual desire in the description of old age makes this an attractive reading; and sexual desire is broken.¹³³

The second half of the verse is reasonably clear. It refers to the death of human beings, who go to the grave, their eternal home, and to the mourners who go about the streets. Although the phrase *bêt 'ólāmô* occurs only here in Biblical Hebrew, the expression was well known in the ancient world. Whitley cites a Palmyrene inscription from the end of the second century C.E. (*bt 'lm' qbr' dnh dy bnh zbd'th*, “the house of eternity, that grave which Zabdeateh built”). The Egyptians referred to the grave as an eternal house, according to Diodorus Siculus. A Punic inscription has *hdr bt 'lm* (“the chamber of the tomb”). The pronominal suffix on *'ólām* occurs only here in the Bible, but the Talmud has it (*Abod. Zar.* 10b). The expression “house of eternity” also appears in the Targum on Isa. 14:18 and in *Sanh.* 19a). Tobit 3:6 has *topos aiōnios*.

[6] Two images seem to occur here: the breaking of a bowl after the cord that held it on the wall has snapped, and the smashing of a vessel after the pulley that assisted in raising and lowering the jar has shattered. The relation between these metaphors is not clear.

The word *gullat* occurs in Zech. 4:2–3 with reference to a golden lamp. Proverbs 13:9 uses the image of an extinguished lamp for death (*w'nēr ršā 'im yid'āk*, “but the lamp of the wicked will be extinguished”). In Greek mythology the severing of the cord or thread of life conveyed this idea.

The verb *yērāhēq* (is distant) and the alternative Qere reading (*yērātēq*, is joined) yield little sense, prompting interpreters to read *yinnātēq* (is torn) with the help of Septuagint (overthrow), Peshitta, Symmachus (cut), and Vulgate (break). The verb *tāruš* derives from *ršš* (to break) and is treated like an *ayin waw* verb. Many versions also read this verb in 6b (for *nārōš*; so Septuagint, Syro-Hexaplar, Peshitta, Targum). The Vulgate distinguishes between the two (*recurrat*, from *rūš*, to run; *confringatur*, from *ršš*).

The noun *hammabbūa'* (the fountain) occurs elsewhere only in Isa. 35:7 (*w'šimmā'ōn l'mabbū'ē māyim*, “and the thirsty springs of water”) and 49:10 (*w'al mabbū'ē mayim y'nahalēm* “and will lead them by springs of water”). The picture of a fountain in disrepair suggests that the water of life can no longer be drawn, and the end has come.

[7] The allusion to Gen. 2:7 and 3:19 does not contradict Qohelet's earlier denial that the human spirit ascends to God and the animal life

¹³³On Qohelet's attitude to old age, see my article “Youth and Old Age in Qoheleth,” *HAR* 11 (1987), forthcoming.

principle descends to the earth. There is nothing comforting about Qohelet's acknowledgment that life comes from God, who breathed into the human nostrils and now sucks the breath back out. The jussive form *w'yāšōb* is unexpected in this verse, especially when the usual imperfect occurs in the second half of the verse.

Thematic Statement (Inclusio)

12:8

12:8 Absurdity of absurdities, says the Qohelet, everything is absurd.

[8] This verse forms an inclusio with 1:2 for the words of Qohelet, which end at 12:7. A few manuscripts and Peshitta repeat *h^abēl h^abalīm* after *haqqōhelet* to conform with 1:2. If 12:7 contained any word of hope, this refrain would be entirely inappropriate. Its presence here refutes the claim that Qohelet hoped for immortality of the soul.

The Epilogue(s)

12:9–14

12:9 In addition to being a wise man, Qohelet also taught the people knowledge, and he weighed, searched out, and arranged many proverbs. ¹⁰Qohelet sought to find pleasing expressions, and he faithfully wrote trustworthy words. ¹¹The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails, planted tightly, are the collected sayings; they were given by one shepherd. ¹²In addition to these, my son, be on your guard; there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wears the body. ¹³The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of humankind. ¹⁴For God will bring every deed into judgment concerning everything that is secret, whether good or bad.

Two epilogues bring the book to a close, each beginning with *w'yōtēr* (besides, in addition to). The first epilogue focuses on the professional activity of Qohelet and the nature of his teaching. The second epilogue characterizes the intellectual process as endless and exhausting, offers some advice on what is really important, and warns that a judgment day is certain. The style is generally consistent with Qohelet's, although the con-

tent of the second epilogue differs sharply from his thought. Furthermore, the only occurrence of *b'ni* (my son) in the book takes place here (12:12). The point of view in the first epilogue is that of a devoted student who reflects on Qohelet's activity. The second epilogue seems to be the work of a detractor who thinks of Qohelet's teachings as inadequate and perhaps perverse.

The first epilogue ignores the earlier literary fiction of royal authorship and identifies Qohelet as a professional *hakām*, a sage. His audience is said to be all-encompassing (*hā'am*), and his expertise beyond question. Three verbs describe his research that produced numerous proverbs (he weighed [or listened], examined, and arranged). In addition, he is praised for achieving compositional integrity and elegance. Recognizing the pessimistic tone and realistic truth inherent in Qohelet's teaching, this epilogist understands both aspects positively. They prod one to think more profoundly, and they act as fixed points of reference, for they derive from a single source (one shepherd). This observation extends to the achievements of others besides Qohelet (the words of the wise: *h'kāmim*, among whom he is but one).

An apologetic note may reside within this concession about sapiential teachings: they are like cattle prods. This feature becomes much more prominent in the second epilogue, which suggests the proper perspective within which to understand Qohelet's unusual reflections. Here the speaker claims the authority of a teacher over students ("my son, be warned") and sums up the essence of reality as religious devotion to God and the commandments. Qohelet had insisted that God's works remain concealed in mystery, but this epilogist asserts that all human works will be brought into the open. Imperatives return once more, after a brief absence in the remarks of the first epilogist. A sense of urgency fills the air ("be warned, fear, keep," and possibly "let us all hear").

[9] This verse describes Qohelet's professional activity. Not only was he a sage, presumably responsible for educating youth; he also communicated his teachings with ordinary people (*hā'am*). The three verbs that characterize his work are not entirely clear. The first, *'izzēn* is the only instance of the verb *'zn* (to weigh), although *mō'z'nayim* (scales) occurs several times. On the basis of several versions that have a reference to the ear or hearing, Whitley proposes to translate "and he listened." The second verb, *hiqqēr*, refers to searching out the complexity of something, hence careful considering. The third verb, *tiqqēn*, rendered as a noun in the Septuagint, is used in 1:15 and 7:13 in the sense of setting something straight. This also appears to be its meaning in Sir. 47:9, although Gordis understands the verb to mean "he fashioned."

The punctuation on *w'yōtēr* suggests the meaning "furthermore," as if to introduce some additional comments. The *'ōd* can refer to continued activity. Although the expression *m'ešālīm harbēh* has been taken to mean the

entire book of Proverbs, that is less likely than a general statement about Qohelet's work as a sage. In its narrow sense of "proverb" *m'ešālīm* applies poorly to the book of Ecclesiastes, but the word can have much broader range.

[10] The emphasis falls on elegance and truth: Qohelet devoted time and energy both to the aesthetic of his composition and to the reliability of what he said. The construct relationship *dibrē-hēpeš* means words that bring delight to those who hear them, hence pleasing expressions. The verb *w'kātūb* (and was written) is usually corrected to a Qal imperfect or to an infinitive absolute. Five Hebrew manuscripts and some versions (Aquila, Symmachus, Peshitta, and Vulgate) understood the verb as active, although the Septuagint has passive (*kai gegrammenon euthytētos*, "and that which is written is of uprightness").

The adverbial accusative *yōšer* means "faithfully." The final word *'met* has the same force. A comparable use occurs in Ps. 132:11 (*nišba'-yhw h l'dāwid 'met lō'-yāšūb mimmennāh*, "Yahweh swore to David a reliable oath from which he will not turn away"). Many readers have not concurred in the statement that Qohelet's observations are both pleasing and trustworthy.

[11] The opening words remind us of superscriptions in Prov. 24:23; 30:1; 31:1; and probably 22:17. The parallel hapax expression *ba'le 'suppōt* is very difficult. In *Sanh.* 12a it means "masters of assemblies," but Qohelet seems to use it with reference to words rather than people. The chiasmic structure of the first half of the verse may not be the only rhetorical device here. It is possible that Qohelet's choice derives from the words' alliterative value (*dibrē* and *dār'bōnōt*; *n'qū'im* and *nitr'nū*).

The epilogist compares the wisdom tradition (not just Qohelet's sayings) to oxgoads, which prodded animals in a desired direction. The word occurs only here, but *drbn* in I Sam. 13:21 indicates a sharp instrument, and in Judg. 3:31 *b'malmaid habbāqār* refers to an implement for training cattle. The word for nails or pegs, spelled with *samek*, is found in Jer. 10:4 and II Chron. 3:9. In *Šabb.* 6:2 one finds the expression *bsndl hamm'ešūmār* ("with a nail-studded shoe"). The word *n'qū'im* has the meaning "fastened" in Dan. 11:45 (*w'yitta' 'oh'le 'appadnō*, "and he will pitch his state-tents").

The final clause may refer to Solomon or to God, since the image of a shepherd was used for royalty and for God, both in Israel and in Egypt (D. Müller). The claim of divine origin for wisdom literature goes beyond anything else in canonical wisdom. In the deuterocanonicals Ben Sira comes close to it.

[12] Does *mēhemmah* ("from these") apply to Qohelet's sayings or the entire wisdom tradition? The author probably intended the latter, warning against an open attitude toward the canon. Only here in the book does the standard expression for student (*b'ni*) appear. The author mentions the

process of writing books; the use of the infinitive "šôt is strange, for pects *ktb*.

word *lahag*, found only here, may result from haplography (for *h*) or relate to the word *hag* (meditation). The Septuagint (*meletē*) vulgate (*meditatio*) confirm the general sense of the text. The verb (to study) occurs frequently, and *hāgūt* in Ps. 49:4 [3E] means tation." Some interpreters think the *lamed* on *lahag* is emphatic.

This verse, along with the rest of the epilogue, sums up the contents book. But what does *sôp dābār* mean? Barton took the expression to ophon marking the end of the discourse, to which a pious glossator the rest of the verse and the last verse of the book. Such markers, e later Massoretic *sôp pāsûq*, are common in ancient Near Eastern ure. The Aramaizing word *sôp* occurs in Eccl. 3:11 and II Chron. as well as in the Mishnah. The absence of an article on *dābār* is e. The *sôp dābār* appears to be a sort of ascription.

form of *nīšmā'* is a Niphal imperfect or imperative. The Vulgate ates "let us all hear." The Greek and Coptic versions take *nīšmā'* as perative in the singular: "hear everything." A similar singular third- Niphal (*hakkōl nīškāh*, "everything is forgotten") occurs in 2:16. Its pointing suggests that 12:13 is also imperfect: "Everything has been "

summary is alien to anything Qohelet has said thus far. The combi- of fear toward God and observance of the divine commands would ter elsewhere, particularly in Sirach. In the final clause, one must y something like "duty." Similar pregnant expressions occur else-, for example, Ps. 110:3 (*'ammēkā nēdābōt*, "your people are freely g themselves"); 109:4 (*wa'ānī tēpillāh*, "and I am at prayer"); 120:7 *ālōm*, "I am seeking peace"). Whitley notes that even the Talmudic ers had difficulty understanding this phrase, for they asked what it e in *Ber.* 6b. He thinks the original was probably *kēlāl* (general rule, ple) and the final *lamed* was lost by haplography.

1 Sira seems to echo this verse, Sir. 43:27 (*'wd k'lh l' nwsq wqs dbr hw'* "Though we speak much we cannot reach the end, and the sum of our is: 'he is the all,'" RSV).

] Using the same expression for divine judgment which appeared in the epilogist insists that nothing will fall between the cracks. God will er the hidden villainies and the secret deeds of charity. This comfort- ord for good people and frightening word for sinners is, again, totally to Qohelet's thinking.

e Massorettes repeated v. 13 after 14 in order to make the book end ositive note. They did the same thing at the end of Isaiah, the Minor ets, and Lamentations. Few people can endure words of relentless . Or the conclusion that life is utterly futile!