David, king in Jerusalem:

The meaning of קהלה (qahal) is somewhat puzzling. The verb קהלה means “to assemble, summon” (HALOT 1078-79 s.v. קהלה), and is derived from the noun קהלה (qahal, “assembly”; HALOT 1070-80 s.v. קהלה). Thus קהלה might mean: (1) convener of the assembly, (2) leader, speaker, teacher, or preacher of the assembly, or (3) member of the assembly. Elsewhere in the book, קהל is used in collocation with statements about his position as king in Jerusalem (Eccl 1:12), his proclamations about life (Eccl 1:2; 7:27; 12:8), and his teaching of wisdom and writing wise sayings (Eccl 12:9-10). Thus, קהל probably means “the leader of the assembly” or “speaker of the assembly.” See also the following study note. Rabbinic literature treats קהל as a traditional surname for Solomon, that is, “Qoheleth,” relating it to the noun קהל. For example, this explanation is found in rabbinic literature (Qoheleth Rabbah 1:1): “Why was his name called Qoheleth [קהל]? Because his words were proclaimed in public meeting קהל, as it is written (1 Kgs 8:1).” The LXX rendered it ἐκκλησιαστὴς (ekklishias, “assembly, community” (Exod 12:6); “the assembly of the congregation” (Exod 12:6); “the assembly” (Num 8:12; 10:7); “your assembly” (Num 10:15; 15:3; 28:1), King Solomon (1 Kgs 8:1; 12:17; 2 Chr 5:2); and King Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:1). In almost every case, he who assembles the people is invested with authority; he makes a public proclamation or leads the nation in an important action. The Niphil stem is most often used to describe the action of the leader (usually a single individual who possesses/commands authority) summoning/assisting people for a religious occasion (Exod 35:1; Lev 8:3; Num 8:9; Deut 4:10; Josh 1:1; 2 Kgs 3:1-12; 1 Kgs 8:1; 2 Chr 5:2-3), a political occasion (2 Sam 20:14), a military occasion (Judg 20:11; 2 Chr 11:1), or a judicial occasion (Job 11:10). The Hiphil stem is used to describe the action of the leader (usually a single individual who possesses/commands authority) summoning/assisting people for a religious occasion (Exod 35:1; Lev 8:3; Num 8:9; Deut 4:10; Josh 1:1; 2 Kgs 3:1-12; 1 Kgs 8:1; 2 Chr 5:2-3), a political occasion (2 Sam 20:14), a military occasion (Judg 20:11; 2 Chr 11:1), or a judicial occasion (Job 11:10). The Niphil stem is most often used to describe the action of the leader (usually a single individual who possesses/commands authority) summoning/assisting people for a religious occasion (Exod 35:1; Lev 8:3; Num 8:9; Deut 4:10; Josh 1:1; 2 Kgs 3:1-12; 1 Kgs 8:1; 2 Chr 5:2-3), a political occasion (2 Sam 20:14), a military occasion (Judg 20:11; 2 Chr 11:1), or a judicial occasion (Job 11:10). The Hiphil stem is used to describe the action of the leader (usually a single individual who possesses/commands authority) summoning/assisting people for a religious occasion (Exod 35:1; Lev 8:3; Num 8:9; Deut 4:10; Josh 1:1; 2 Kgs 3:1-12; 1 Kgs 8:1; 2 Chr 5:2-3), a political occasion (2 Sam 20:14), a military occasion (Judg 20:11; 2 Chr 11:1), or a judicial occasion (Job 11:10).
Futility Illustrated from Nature

1:2 "Futile! Futile!" laments the Teacher. Absolutely futile! Everything is futile!\(^1\)

1:3 What benefit do people\(^2\) get from all the effort which they expend on earth?\(^3\)

\(^1\) See the note on “Teacher” in v. 1.

\(^2\) See R. J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax (154 §9.5.3).

\(^3\) In reference to enigmas in life (6:2; 8:10, 14) and to the future which is obscure (11:8). It is often used in antithesis to terms connoting value: בְּנֵי (lo, “good, benefit, advantage”) and בְּנֵי הָהֵל (yotÿron, “profit, advantage, gain”). Because the concrete picture of the “wind” lends itself to the figurative connotation “futile,” the motto “This is futile” (םִיוֹרֵל, zeh hevel) is often used with the metaphor, “like the string going after the wind” (יִרְעֶב, rû’ nuakk) – a graphic picture of an expenditure of effort in vain because no one can catch the wind by chasing it (e.g., 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17; 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). Although it is the key word in Ecclesiastes, it should not be translated the same way in every place.

In the OT, literally and figuratively. The literal, concrete sense is the key word in Ecclesiastes. The root is used in two ways in the eight words of this verse for emphasis. The noun itself to metaphysical senses: (1) breath/vapor/wind is nonexistent contextually to the topic at hand (BDB 482 s.v. 2b) – and enjoying life as a righteous person under the blessing of the supreme Lord” (Deut 10:17). See also R. J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax (154 §9.5.3).

\(^2\) "abies, “which” (Jastrow 130 s.v. ha’yot). While the use of the relative pronoun יִשְׂרָאֵל (Isa 65:17-23).

\(^3\) The term “profit” (םִיוֹרֵל, yotÿron) is used in Ecclesiastes to evaluate the ultimate benefit/effects of human activities, as well as in a metaphorical sense in connection with the “wind” (yotÿron) – a graphic picture of an expenditure of effort in vain because no one can catch the wind by chasing it (e.g., 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). At least it is not the word “man” which is obscure (11:8). It is often used in antithesis to terms connoting value: בְּנֵי (lo, “good, benefit, advantage”) and בְּנֵי הָהֵל (yotÿron, “profit, advantage, gain”). Because the concrete picture of the “wind” lends itself to the figurative connotation “futile,” the motto “This is futile” (םִיוֹרֵל, zeh hevel) is often used with the metaphor, “like the string going after the wind” (יִרְעֶב, rû’ nuakk) – a graphic picture of an expenditure of effort in vain because no one can catch the wind by chasing it (e.g., 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17; 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9). Although it is the key word in Ecclesiastes, it should not be translated the same way in every place.

See the note on “Teacher” in v. 1.
1:4 A generation comes and a generation goes, but the earth remains the same through the ages.

1:5 The sun rises and the sun sets; it hurries away to a place from which it cannot return; the streams flow and return to the place where the streams flow, but the earth remains.

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

1:6 The wind goes to the south and circles around to the north; round and round the wind goes and on its rounds it returns.

1:7 All the streams flow into the sea, but the sea is not full, and to the place where the streams flow, there they will flow again.

Therefore, all the key terms used in 1:4 to describe the futility of human endeavor (holökhim, "to walk, to go") are repeated in 1:6-7 to emphasize that the sun is locked into a never changing, ever repeating monotonous cycle: rising, setting, rising, setting.

The Hebrew root חשב (shav, "to think") creates a wordplay (paronomasia) with the repetition of חשב (shav, "to circle around"). The participle emphasizes the continual, durative, uninterrupted action (present universal use of participle).

The verb חשב (shav, "to return") is repeated in this verse to emphasize that the sun is locked into a never changing, ever repeating monotonous cycle: rising, setting, rising, setting.

The use of "a long time back," that is, the dark age of prehistory (1:9) is not as absolute as the Hebrew text would indicate. The term ונהב (vanah) is used in this sense in reference to things that cannot be hidden from us (BDB 983 s.v. "to return"). But the root חשב (shav) can include a value of "a long time back," that is, the dark age of prehistory (1:9).

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The Hebrew root חשב (shav, "to think") is repeated in this verse to emphasize that the sun is locked into a never changing, ever repeating monotonous cycle: rising, setting, rising, setting.
1:8 All this is tiresome; no one can bear it to describe it. The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear ever content with hearing.
1:9 What exists now is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing truly new on earth.
1:10 Is there anything about which someone can say, “Look at this! It is new!”? It was already done long ago, before our time.
1:11 No one remembers the former events, nor will anyone remember the events that are yet to happen; they will not be remembered by the future generations.

Futility of Secular Accomplishment
1:12 I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.
1:13 I decided to carefully and thoroughly examine all that has been accomplished on earth. I concluded: God has given people a burdensome task.

1:14 I reflected on everything that is occupied with by man on earth, and I concluded: Everything he has accomplished is futile—like chasing the wind.
and what is missing cannot be supplied. 

**Futility of Secular Wisdom**

1:16 I thought to myself, “I have become much wiser than any of my predecessors who ruled over Jerusalem; I have acquired much wisdom and knowledge.

1:17 So I decided to discern the benefit of wisdom and knowledge over foolish behavior and ideas; however, I concluded that even this endeavor is like trying to chase the wind!

1:18 For with great wisdom comes great frustration; whoever increases knowledge merely increases his heartache.

**Futility of Self-Indulgent Pleasure**

2:1 I thought to myself, “Come now, I will try self-indulgent pleasure to see if it is worthwhile.”
But I found that it also is futile. I said of partying, "It is folly," and of self-indulgent pleasure, "It accomplishes nothing." I thought deeply about the effects of indulging myself with wine (all the while my mind was guiding me with wisdom) and the effects of behaving foolishly, so that I might discover what is profitable for people to do on earth during the few days of their lives.

cause it attracts [i.e., persuades, offers inducements] (b. Avodah Zarah 27b) and "to be attracted, carried away, seduced," e.g., "he was drawn after them, he indulged in the luxuries of the palace" (b. Shabbat 147b). See Jastrow 853-54 s.v. נאה. Here it denotes "to stretch; to draw out [to full length]," that is, "to revive, to restore" the body and its faculties (b. Eruvin 61b) (sic 3). The statement is a metonymy of cause (i.e., indulging the flesh with wine) for effect (i.e., the effects of self-indulgence).

Heb "my flesh." The term נאה (b'sari, "my flesh") may function as a synecdoche of part (i.e., flesh) for the whole (i.e., whole person). See E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 642. One could translate, "I sought to cheer myself.

In the phrase "all the while" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

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

Or "until." The construction נאה הימים (ad 'asher, "until") introduces a temporal result clause (e.g., Gen 27:44; 28:15; Num 21:35; Isa 6:11; Job 17:9; 51:45; Eccl 2:3; 2:3); see BDB 787 s.v. III ל. B. With an imperfect verb (such as נאה, 'elah, "Qal imperfect first con- textual particle (or "except")' (HALOT 2:787 s.v. III ל. B. With an imperfect verb (such as נאה, 'elah, "Qal imperfect first con- textual particle (or "except")' (HALOT 2:787 s.v. III ל. B. With an imperfect verb (such as נאה, 'elah, "Qal imperfect first con-

Heb "my heart was leading along in wisdom." The word נאה ("me") does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

The phrase "of days of their lives" is an indirect question that literally means, "Where is the good?" that is, "what is there in..."

Heb "I might see where is the good?" The interrogative particle נאה ("where?") used with the demonstrative pronoun נא ("this") forms an idiom: "where [then]?" (HALOT 37 - 38 s.v. נא 2.a; see, e.g., 1 Sam 9:18; 1 Kgs 13:12; 2 Kgs 5:38; Isa 50:1; 66:1; Jer 6:18; Job 28:12; 20:17; 21:22; Hos 5:15), but it also rarely refers to past time (Jonah 4:5; Eccl 2:3; 2:3); see BDB 725 s.v. III ל. II.a. a. Joüon 2:370 §113.k notes that when the compound construction נאה 2b is occasionally used with an imperfect depicting past action to denote a virtual nuance of purpose: "until" = "so that," e.g., Jonah 4:5; Eccl 2:3.

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Futility of Materialism

2:4 I increased my possessions;\(^1\) I built houses for myself;\(^2\) I planted vineyards for myself;\(^3\) I designed royal gardens\(^4\) and parks\(^5\) for myself, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them;\(^6\) I constructed pools of water for myself;\(^7\) to irrigate my grove\(^8\) of flourishing trees.\(^9\)

2:7 I purchased male and female slaves, and I owned slaves who were born in my house;\(^10\)

I also possessed more livestock – both herds and flocks – than any of my predecessors in Jerusalem.\(^8\)

2:8 I also amassed silver and gold for myself, as well as valuable treasures\(^9\) taken from kingdoms and provinces.\(^10\)

I acquired male singers and female singers for myself, and what gives a man sensual delight\(^11\) – a harem of beautiful concubines!\(^12\)

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2. The phrase with the referent of the phrase in Gen 15:3, NJPS that is, “homeborn slaves” (NASB) or “other slaves who were born in the master’s possession, e.g., Eleazar of Da-
3. There is a need for clarification in the meaning of the superlative construction הַשְּׁדִידָה הַשִּׁדְּדוֹת (shiddah v’yshiddot) in Gen 15:3, NPS which refers to a person born into slavery from male and female
4. The noun פַּרְדֵּס (pardesu) “paradise” is related to the enclosed parks of the kings (HALOT פַּרְדֵּס הַבָּאוֹת, “enclosed park, pleasure-ground”), referring to the personal, private and valued possessions of kings, which do not pass into the hands of the state.
5. The noun פַּרְדֵּס הַבָּאוֹת (pardesu) “paradise” is related to the enclosed parks of the kings (HALOT פַּרְדֵּס הַבָּאוֹת, “enclosed park, pleasure-ground”), referring to the personal, private and valued possessions of kings, which do not pass into the hands of the state.
6. The term מַעֲשָׂי (ma’asay) “my works” has been handled in two basic ways: (1) great works or projects, and (2) possessions. The latter assumes a metonymy, one’s effort standing for the possession it produces. Both interpretations are reflected in the major English translations: “works” (KJV, NEB, NAB, ASV, RSV, NRSV), “a wife and concubines” (NASB, RSV, NRSV), “many concubines” (NASB, RSV, NRSV), “a wife and concubines” (NASB, RSV, NRSV).

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8. Map For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.
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10. The meaning of the superlative construction הַשְּׁדִידָה הַשִּׁדְּדוֹת (shiddah v’yshiddot) in Gen 15:3, NPS which refers to a person born into slavery from male and female

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12. The meaning of the superlative construction הַשְּׁדִידָה הַשִּׁדְּדוֹת (shiddah v’yshiddot) in Gen 15:3, NPS which refers to a person born into slavery from male and female

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11. The meaning of the superlative construction הַשְּׁדִידָה הַשִּׁדְּדוֹת (shiddah v’yshiddot) in Gen 15:3, NPS which refers to a person born into slavery from male and female

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10. The term מַעֲשָׂי (ma’asay) “my works” has been handled in two basic ways: (1) great works or projects, and (2) possessions. The latter assumes a metonymy, one’s effort standing for the possession it produces. Both interpretations are reflected in the major English translations: “works” (KJV, NEB, NAB, ASV, RSV, NRSV), “a wife and concubines” (NASB, RSV, NRSV), “many concubines” (NASB, RSV, NRSV), “a wife and concubines” (NASB, RSV, NRSV).
2:9 So I was far wealthier\(^4\) than all my predecessors in Jerusalem, yet I maintained my objectivity:\(^3\)

(Moffatt), and "a harem" (NIV). This is the approach suggested by the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project: "une femme et des femmes" = one or two women (e.g., Judg 5:30); see D. Barbéthélémy, ed., Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, 3:566. (2) The NPS connects it to the Mishnaic Hebrew noun יריחו which became יזדד ("a strong box, chest"); Jastrow 1558 s.v. יזדד, and renders the phrase "coffers and coffers of them" in apposition to the phrase "the luxuries of commoners" (Eccles 2:8; cf. מזדד). (3) KJV and ASV take the phrase in apposition to "male and female singers" and translate it as "musical instruments." However, there is no known Hebrew term that would justify this approach. (4) The LXX related the term to the Aramaic root ארי ("to pour [wine]") and rendered the phrase as οἶνοχόον καὶ οἶνοχοις (oinochoon kai oinochoas), "a male-butler and female cupbearers." Aquila took a similar approach: קָולִיקיוֹן וַעֲנֹיָה (kolikion va-anoeah), "wine cups and wine vessels." This is reflected in the Vulgate and Douay: "cups and vessels to serve to pour out wine." Although the semantic meaning of the term הַיֶּשֶׁר ("a breast of breasts") is uncertain, the grammatical/syntactical form of the phrase is straightforward: (1) It is in apposition to the preceding line, "the delights of the son of men"; (2) "my wisdom stood for me," meaning he reached a great wisdom (Ecc 1:18:1); (3) "I became great and I surpassed." Most translations miss the hendiadys and render the line in a woodenly literal sense (KJV, ASV, RSV, NEB, NRSV, NASB, MLB, Moffatt), while only a few recognize the presence of a hendiadys in "I became greater by far" (NIV) and "I gained more" (NPS).

2:10 I did not restrain myself from getting whatever I wanted.\(^4\) I did not deny myself anything that would bring me pleasure.\(^5\) So all my accomplishments gave me joy;\(^6\) this was my reward for all my effort.\(^7\)

2:11 Yet when I reflected on everything I had accomplished\(^8\) and on all the effort that I had expended to accomplish it,\(^9\) I concluded:\(^10\) "All these\(^11\) achievements and possessions\(^12\) are ultimately\(^13\) profitless\(^14\) — like chasing the wind! There is nothing gained\(^15\) from them\(^16\) on earth."\(^17\)

\(^4\) tn Heb "all which my eyes asked for, I did not withhold from them."

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

\(^6\) tn Heb "So my heart was joyful from all my toil."

\(^7\) tn Heb "and this was my portion from all my toil."

\(^8\) tn Heb "all my works that my hands had done."

\(^9\) tn Heb "and all the toil with which I had toiled in doing it."

\(^10\) tn Heb "Behold!"

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

\(^12\) tn The phrase "achievements and possessions" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in translation for clarity.

\(^13\) tn The term "ultimately" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

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

\(^15\) tn The noun יִתְרָן (yitran), "profit") has a two-fold range of meanings: (1) "what comes of [something]; result" (Ecc 1:3; 2:11: 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10) and (2) "profit; advantage" (Ecc 2:13; 10:11); see HALOT 452 -53 s.v. יִתְרָן. It is derived from the noun יָתַר (yaṭar) which denotes "to be left over; to survive" (Niphil) and "to have left over" (Hiphil); see HALOT 451 - 52 s.v. יָתַר. When used literally, יָתַר refers to what is left over after expenses (gain or profit); when used figuratively, it refers to what is advantageous or of benefit. Though some things have relative advantage over others (e.g., light over darkness, and wisdom over folly in 2:13), there is no ultimate profit in man's labor due to death.

\(^16\) tn The phrase "from them" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

\(^17\) tn Heb "under the sun."
Wisdom is Better than Folly

2:12 Next, I decided to consider wisdom, as well as foolish behavior and ideas.

For what more can the king’s successor do than what the king has already done?

2:13 I realized that wisdom is preferable to folly,

just as light is preferable to darkness;

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

Yet I also realized that the same fate happens to them both.

2:15 So I thought to myself, “The fate of the fool will happen even to me.”

Then what did I gain by becoming so excessively wise?

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1 tn Heb “and I turned to see.”
2 sn See 1:17 for the same expression. Throughout 2:1-11, Qoheleth evaluated the merits of merrymaking (2:1-3), accomplishing grand things (2:4-6), amassing great wealth (2:7-8), and secular acquisitions and accomplishments (2:9-10). Now, he reflects on the benefit in life in living wisely and not giving oneself over to frivolous self-indulgence.
3 tc The Hebrew text reads ḫĕṣāh (‘asahu), “they have done it”; Qal perfect 3rd person masculine plural suffix from the root ḫĕṣāh (‘asah). The preposition lām (‘al) may occasionally function as a causal particle (‘alām, “they have done it”); see HALOT 839 s.v. 2). When used to describe a common lot, it connotes “together with” (Gen 18:23, 25; 1 Chr 24:5; Job 3:14, 15; 30:1; Pss 26:9; 28:3; 69:29; Is 38:11), hence “like” (Pss 73:5; 106:6; Ecc 2:16; see BDB 767–68 s.v. 1e).
4 tn Heb “and I saw that there is profit for wisdom more than folly.”
5 sn The term ḫĕṣāh (‘asahu) here means “has his eyes in his head.” The term “eye” is a metonymy of cause (eye) for effect (sight and perception).
6 tn The common prefix to which Qoheleth refers is death. The 3rd person masculine singular referent of the verb isah (‘asah) is usually seen as the referent of the Qal perfect 3rd person masculine plural form of the root yôtër (yoter) at the end of 2:12 and beginning of 2:13. The preposition lām (‘al) in 2:12 with the impersonal suffix on the root yôtër (yoter) appears to emphasize the 1st person common singular perspective of the future: “they will have been forgotten.” The emphasis of the past perfect is not simply that the future generation will forget, but that he will have been forgotten long ago in the past by the time of those future generations. This past perfect situation is brought out by the emphatic use of the temporal adverb bÿshekkÿvar (kÿvar, “already”) + relative pronoun yim (she) + preposition lām. The emphasis of the past perfect is not simply that the future generations will begin to forget him, but that he will already have been forgotten long ago in the past by the time of those future generations. This past perfect situation is brought out by the emphatic use of the temporal adverb bÿshekkÿvar (kÿvar, “already”) + relative pronoun yim (she) + preposition lām (kÿvar, “already”) is probably best classified as causal: “Because…already.”
7 tn The verb ḫĕṣāh (‘asahu) is a future perfect – it describes an event that is portrayed as a past event from the perspective of the future: “the wise man dies – just like the fool.” The emphasis of the past perfect is not simply that the future generations will begin to forget him, but that he will already have been forgotten long ago in the past by the time of those future generations. This past perfect situation is brought out by the emphatic use of the temporal adverb bÿshekkÿvar (kÿvar, “already”) + relative pronoun yim (she) + preposition lām (kÿvar, “already”) is probably best classified as causal: “Because…already.”
8 tn The term ḫĕṣāh (‘asahu) is a future perfect – it describes an event that is portrayed as a past event from the perspective of the future: “the wise man dies – just like the fool.” The emphasis of the past perfect is not simply that the future generations will begin to forget him, but that he will already have been forgotten long ago in the past by the time of those future generations. This past perfect situation is brought out by the emphatic use of the temporal adverb bÿshekkÿvar (kÿvar, “already”) + relative pronoun yim (she) + preposition lām (kÿvar, “already”) is probably best classified as causal: “Because…already.”
9 tn The term ḫĕṣāh (‘asahu) is a future perfect – it describes an event that is portrayed as a past event from the perspective of the future: “the wise man dies – just like the fool.” The emphasis of the past perfect is not simply that the future generations will begin to forget him, but that he will already have been forgotten long ago in the past by the time of those future generations. This past perfect situation is brought out by the emphatic use of the temporal adverb bÿshekkÿvar (kÿvar, “already”) + relative pronoun yim (she) + preposition lām (kÿvar, “already”) is probably best classified as causal: “Because…already.”
10 tn Heb “And why was I wise (to) excess?” The rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “I gained nothing!” (E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 949).
11 tn Heb “So I said in my heart.”
12 tn Heb “and also this,” referring to the relative advantage of wisdom over folly.
13 tn The word “ultimately” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.
14 tn The preposition lām (‘al), “with” may occasionally function in a comparative sense, meaning “together with; even as; like” (e.g., Ecc 1:11; 2:16; 7:11; Job 9:26; 1 Chr 14:10; 20:6; 25:8; see HALOT 839 s.v. 2). When used to describe a common lot, it connotes “together with” (Gen 18:23, 25; 1 Chr 24:5; Job 3:14, 15; 30:1; Pss 26:9; 28:3; 69:29; Is 38:11), hence “like” (Pss 73:5; 106:6; Ecc 2:16; see BDB 767–68 s.v. 1e).
15 tn As HALOT 798–99 s.v. yôm and BDB 762-64 s.v. yôm has a wide range of meanings: (1) indefinite time; “long time; duration;” (2) unlimited time; “eternal; eternity;” (3) future time: “things to come,” and (4) past time: “a long time back,” that is, the dark age of prehistory. The context here suggests the nuance “a long time.”
16 tn The preposition lā (‘im, “with”) may occasionally function in a comparative sense, meaning “together with; even as; like” (e.g., Ecc 1:11; 2:16; 7:11; Job 9:26; 1 Chr 14:10; 20:6; 25:8; see HALOT 839 s.v. 2). When used to describe a common lot, it connotes “together with” (Gen 18:23, 25; 1 Chr 24:5; Job 3:14, 15; 30:1; Pss 26:9; 28:3; 69:29; Is 38:11), hence “like” (Pss 73:5; 106:6; Ecc 2:16; see BDB 767–68 s.v. 1e).
17 tn Or “I hated.”
18 tn The term ḫĕṣāh (‘asahu) functions as a metonymy of association, that is, which is associated with life, that is, the profitlessness and futility of human secular achievement.
Futility of Being a Workaholic

2:18 So I loathed all the fruit of my effort, for which I worked so hard on earth, because I must leave it behind in the hands of my successor. 2:19 Who knows if he will be a wise man or a fool?

Yet he will be master over all the fruit of his labor for which I worked so wisely on earth! This also is futile! 2:20 So I began to despair about all the fruit of my labor on earth. 2:21 For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; however, he must hand over the fruit of his labor as an inheritance.

1 tn Heb “the deed that is done.” The root יָסָח (’asah, “to do”) is repeated in יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “the deed that is done”) for emphasis. Here, the term “deed” does not refer to human accomplishment, as in 2:1-11, but to the fact of death that destroys any relative advantage of wisdom after folly (2:14a-15). Qoheleth metaphorically describes death as a “deed” that is “done” to man.

2 tn Heb “under the sun.”

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

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

5 tn Heb “I hated all my toil for which I had toiled.” The term יָסָח (’amali, “my toil”) is repeated throughout 2:18-21. In each case, it functions as a metonymy of cause (i.e., toil), for effect (i.e., fruit of labor). See, e.g., Ps 105:44; BDB 765 s.v. הָעָמָל 3. The metonymy is indicated by several factors: (1) The 3rd person masculine singular suffix on יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “to leave”), is often used in association to communicate one idea): “for I had labored so hard on earth.”

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

7 tn Heb “I turned aside to allow my heart despair.” The term יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “to give”) is a metonymy of cause (i.e., my labor) for effect (i.e., the fruit of my labor). The metonymy is recognized by several English translations: “so I hedged all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored” (NAB); “I hated all the fruits of my labor” (NIV); and “So I detested all the wealth that I had gained” (NIVP).

8 tn Heb “inheritance”). Functions as an adjective, the fruit of his labor. Inheritance (an-nikhennu) is indicated by several factors: (1) Here the author uses an internal cognate accusative construction (accusative noun and verb from same root) for emphasis: יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “to leave”), “the toil for which I had toiled.”

9 tn Heb “he must give.” The 3rd person masculine singular suffix on יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “to give”) refers back to יָסָח (’amali, “his labor”) which is treated in this line as a metonymy of cause for effect, that is, “he must give it” = “he must give his labor” = “he must give the fruit of his labor.”

10 tn The relative pronoun שֶׁ (she) on יִתְּנֶנּו (she annikhennu), related pronoun שֶׁ (she) on יָסָח (she’asah), relative pronoun שֶׁ (she’asah) + Hiphil imperfect 1st person common singular from רָשַׁק (rashaq, “to leave” + 3rd person masculine singular suffix) is causal: “Because I must leave it behind.”

11 tn Heb “I turned aside to allow my heart despair.” The term יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “to leave”) is repeated throughout 2:18-21. In each case, it functions as a metonymy of cause (i.e., toil), for effect (i.e., fruit of labor). See, e.g., Ps 105:44; BDB 765 s.v. הָעָמָל 3. The metonymy is indicated by several factors: (1) The 3rd person masculine singular suffix on יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “to leave”), is often used in association to communicate one idea): “for I had labored so hard on earth.”

12 tn Heb “under the sun.”

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

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

15 tn An internal cognate accusative construction (accusative and verb from same root) is used for emphasis: יָסָח (’amali, “my labor”) is a metonymy of cause (i.e., my labor) for effect (i.e., the fruit of my labor). The metonymy is recognized by several English translations: “all the fruits of my labor” (NIV); “all the fruits of my labor” (NAB); “all the gains I had made” (NJP).

16 tn Heb “under the sun.”

17 tn Heb “I turned aside to allow my heart despair.”

18 tn Heb “all my toil.” As in 2:18-19, the term יָסָח (’amali, “my labor”) is a metonymy of cause (i.e., my labor) for effect (i.e., the fruit of my labor). The metonymy is recognized by several English translations: “all the fruits of my labor” (NAB); “all the fruits of my labor” (NIV); “all the fruits of my labor” (NJP).

19 tn Heb “all my toil.” As in 2:18-19, the term יָסָח (’amali, “my labor”) is a metonymy of cause (i.e., my labor) for effect (i.e., the fruit of my labor). The metonymy is recognized by several English translations: “all the fruits of my labor” (NAB); “all the fruits of my labor” (NIV); “all the fruits of my labor” (NJP).

20 tn Heb “under the sun.”

21 tn Heb “he must give.” The 3rd person masculine singular suffix on יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “to give”) refers back to יָסָח (’amali, “his labor”) which is treated in this line as a metonymy of cause for effect, that is, “he must give it” = “he must give his labor” = “he must give the fruit of his labor.”

22 tn Heb “under the sun.”

23 tn Heb “it”; the referent (“the fruit of his labor”) has been specified in the translation for clarity (see the following note on the word “labor”).

24 tn Heb “or he must turn over an inheritance”; or “he must turn it over, namely, an inheritance.” There are two approaches to the syntax of יִתְּנֶנּו (yitennu, “his inheritance”): (1) the 3rd person masculine singular suffix on יִתְּנֶנּו (Yitennu, “his inheritance”) functions as an adverbial accusative of state (GKC 372 §118.a) or a predicate accusative (R. J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax, 12-13, §57): “He must give it
Enjoy Work and its Benefits

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

2:25 For no one 11 can eat and drink 12 and be satisfied. 13

6 tn The preposition ב (ba) on הבואין (ba’aduvin) has been taken in two ways: (1) locative with הבואין (ba’aduvin, “good”) in reference to man’s moral nature: “There is nothing [inherently] good in man.” (2) advantage with הבואין (ba’aduvin) in reference to the enjoyment theme of 2:24-26: “There is nothing better for a man than...” (this assumes a comparative ס, min, on הבואין, misheyyo’khal; see text critical note on the word “than” below). The latter is preferred for two reasons: (1) The preposition ב is used with a similar idiom in 3:12 in colloca-
tion with the particle phrase מי (mi...im, “except”); “There is nothing better...advantage to rejoice in” or “to find satisfaction or pleasure in” something. Here, it is used in collocation with הבואין (ba’aduvin, “good”). (2) The theme of 2:2-16 focuses on the futility of human toil, concluding that the only real reward that man has in his labor is to find enjoyment in it (e.g., 2:10, 24-26). The section says nothing about man’s inherent sinful nature.

7 tn Heb “man.”

8 tc The MT reads המשלימה (mešaliyim), “that should he eat”; Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular feminine from הבואין (ba’aduvin), “to eat,” with relative pronoun זה, “that.” However, the variant textual tradition of המשלים (misheyyo’khal), “than he should eat” (comparative preposition ס, min, “than” + Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular feminine from הבואין (ba’aduvin) “to eat”) is reflected in the LXX, Coptic, Syriac, Aramaic Targum, Old Latin, and Jerome. The textual error, an example of haplography, arose from a single writing of ס (mem) from הבואין (ba’aduvin) to הבואין (ba’aduvin). The same idiom appears in the expanded form מי הבואין... מי הבואין (“then there is nothing better for man than...”) in Eccl 3:12; 8:15.

9 tn Heb “to cause his soul to see good.” The idiom הבואין (ba’aduvin, “to see good”) is a metonymy of association, meaning “to find enjoyment” (e.g., 3:13; 5:17; 6:6). In 3:12-13 and 5:17-18 it is in collocation and/or parallelism with ג (gaf), “to eat,” with relative pronoun זה, “that.” However, the variant textual tradition of המשלים (misheyyo’khal), “than he should eat” (comparative preposition ס, min, “than” + Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular feminine from הבואין (ba’aduvin) “to eat”) is reflected in the LXX, Coptic, Syriac, Aramaic Targum, Old Latin, and Jerome. The textual error, an example of haplography, arose from a single writing of ס (mem) from הבואין (ba’aduvin) to הבואין (ba’aduvin). The same idiom appears in the expanded form מי הבואין... מי הבואין (“then there is nothing better for man than...”) in Eccl 3:12; 8:15.

10 tn Heb “his.”

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

12 tn Heb “is from the hand of God.”

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

14 tn Heb “For who can...?” The rhetorical question is an example of negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “No one can!” (see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 949-50).

15 sn The phrase “and drink” is not in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for stylistic harmonization with v. 24.
This task of the wicked is futile — like chasing the wind!

**A Time for All Events in Life**

3:1 For everything there is an appointed time,10

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1 tn The verb II הָשָׁב (khush, “to enjoy”) is a hapax legomenon which BDB defines as “to feel; to enjoy [with the senses]” on the basis of the context, and the cognates: Arabic “to feel; to perceive [by senses]”; Aramaic יָשָׁב (“to feel pain,” and New Hebrew רָשָׁב “to feel pain” (BDB 301 s.v. II עַסָּב). HALOT relates the Hebrew root to Akkadian علاا “to be delighted with” (HALOT 300 s.v. עַסָּב 1). The Vulgate renders this term as “to enjoy.” The Greek versions (LXX, Theodotion) and the Syriac Peshitta, however, or experience enjoyment in life “apart from him,” that is, apart from God. See the fruit of his labor given away to someone else. The righteous man’s enjoyment of his work and the fruit of his labor under the blessing of God (2:24-26a) is not included in this.

2 tn Verse 1 is arranged in an ABB′A′ form: (A) “for everything”; (B) “a season”; (B′) “a time”; (A′) “for every matter.” The terms “season” (גֵּן, z‘man) and “time” (עֵת, et) are parallel. In the light of its parallelism with “every matter” (עֵת, et) the term “everything” (םֵית, khol) must refer to events and situations in general.

3 tn The noun הָשָׁב (z‘man) denotes “appointed time” or “appointed hour” (HALOT 273 s.v.; see Ecc 3:1; Est 9:27, 31; Neh 2:6; Sir 43:7), e.g., the appointed or designated time for the Jewish feasts (Est 9:27, 31), the length of time that Nehemiah set for his absence from Susa (Neh 2:6), and the appointed times in the Jewish law for the months to begin (Sir 43:7). It is used in parallelism with every matter (עֵת, et; “appointed time of the moon”) and “appointed time of the law” (Sir 43:7). The related verb, a Pual of הָשַׁב (z‘man), means “to be appointed” (HALOT 273 s.v.; see Ezra 10:14; Neh 10:35; 13:13). These terms may be related to the noun הָשַׁב (z‘manah, “purpose; plan; project”), e.g., the purposes of God (Job 42:2; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 51:11) and man’s plan (Isa 5:12); see HALOT 566 s.v.; BDB 273 s.v. הָשַׁב.

4 tn Verses 1-8 refer to God’s appointed time-table for human activities or actions whose most appropriate time is determined by men. Verses 9-15 state that God is ultimately responsible for the time in which events in human history occur. This seems to provide a striking balance between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Man does what God has willed, but man also does what he “pleases” (see note on the word “matter” in 3:1).
and an appropriate time\(^1\) for every activity\(^2\) on earth;\(^3\)
3:2 A time to be born,\(^4\) and a time to die;\(^5\)
a time to plant, and a time to uproot what
was planted;
3:3 A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build
up;
3:4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
3:5 A time to throw away stones, and a
time to gather stones;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain
from embracing;
3:6 A time to search, and a time to give
something up as lost;\(^6\)
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
3:7 A time to rip, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silent, and a time to speak.
3:8 A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

**Man is Ignorant of God's Timing**
3:9 What benefit can a worker\(^7\) gain from
his toil?\(^8\)
3:10 I have observed the burden
that God has given to people\(^9\) to keep
them occupied.
3:11 God has made everything fit beautifully\(^10\) in its appropriate time,
but he has also placed ignorance in the human heart so that people cannot discover what God has ordained, from the beginning to the end of their lives.

Enjoy Life in the Present

3:12 I have concluded that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to enjoy

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

2 tn Heb “darkness”; perhaps “eternity” or “the future.” The meaning of the noun עולם (olam) is debated. It may mean: (1) “ignorance”; (2) time reference: (a) “eternity” or (b) “the future”; or (3) “knowledge” (less likely). The arguments for these options may be summarized: (1) Most suggest that עולם is the defectively written form of אַלָּם “duration; eternity” (e.g., Eccl 1:4; 2:16; 3:14; 9:9; 12:5); see BDB 762 s.v. III עולם 2.k. Within this school of interpretation, there are several varieties: (a) BDB 762 s.v. III עולם 2.k suggests that here it denotes “age [i.e., duration] of the world,” which is attested in postbiblical Hebrew. The term III עולם “eternity” = “world” (Jastrow 1084 s.v. עולם III) is used in this sense in postbiblical Hebrew, mostly in reference to the Messianic age, or the world to come (e.g., Tg. Genesis 9:16; Tg. Onq. Exodus 21:6; Tg. Psalms 61:7). For example, “the world (עולם) shall last six thousand years, and after one thousand years it shall be laid waste” (b. Rash Ha-Shanah 31a) and “the world (עולם) to come” (b. Sotah 10b).

The LXX and the Vulgate took the term in this sense. This approach was also adopted by several English translations: “the world” (KJV, Douay, ASV margin). (b) HALOT 799 s.v. עולם 5 and THAT 2:242 suggest that the term refers to an indefinite, unending future: “eternity future” or “enduring state referring to past and future” (see also BDB 762 s.v. עולם 2.i). In this sense, the noun עולם functions as a metonymy of association: “a sense of eternity,” but not in a philosophical sense (see J. Barr, Biblical Words for Time [SBT], 117, n. 4). This approach is supported by three factors: (i) the recurrence of עולם ("eternity") in 3:14, (ii) the temporal qualification of the statement in the parallel clause (“from beginning to end”), and (iii) by the ordinary meaning of the noun as “eternity” (HALOT 799-799). The point would be that God has endowed man with an awareness of the extra-temporal significance of himself and his accomplishments (D. R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” BKCOT, 984). This is the most frequent approach among English versions: “the timeless” (NAB), “eternity” (RSV, MLA, ASV, NASB, NIV, NUPS), “a sense of time past and time future” (NEB), and “a sense of time past and future” (NRSV). (3) Other scholars suggest that עולם simply refers to the indefinite future: “the future,” that is, things to come (e.g., HALOT 799 s.v. עולם 2; BDB 762 s.v. עולם 2.a; THAT 2:241). The plural עולם (olamim, “things to come”) was used in this sense in Ecle 1:10 (e.g., 1 Kings 8:13 = 2 Chr 6:2; Ps 61:5; 77:8; 145:13; Dan 9:24; cf. HALOT 799 s.v. עולם 2). The point would simply be that God has ordained all the events that will take place in man’s life (3:1-8), but also preoccupies man with the desire to discover what will happen in the future in terms of the orchestra tion or timing of these events in his life (3:9-11). This fits well with the description of God’s orchestration of human events in their most appropriate time (3:1-10) and the ignorance of man concerning his future (3:11b). Elsewhere, Qoheleth emphasizes that man cannot learn what the future holds in store for him (e.g., 8:7, 17). This approach is only rarely adopted: “the future” (NUPS margin). (2) The second view is that עולם is not defectively written עולם ("eternity") but the segholate noun עולם (elem) that means “dark” (literal) or “ignorance; obscurity; secrecy” (figurative). The related noun עולם (’alulam) means “hidden thing; secret; dark”; the verb עלמי (’alymi) means “to hide; to conceal” (BDB 761 s.v. עלם). HALOT 834–35 s.v. עלם. This is related to the Ugaritic noun “dark” and the Akkadian verb “to be black; to be dark” (see HALOT 834-35 s.v. עלם). In postbiblical Hebrew the root עלם means (i) “secret” and (ii) “forgetfulness” (Jastrow 1084 s.v. עלם). Thus the verse would mean that God has “obscured” man’s knowledge so that he cannot discover certain features of God’s program. This approach is adopted by Moffatt which uses the word “mystery.” Similarly, the term may mean “forgetfulness,” that is, God has plagued man with “forgetfulness” so that he cannot understand what God has done from the beginning to the end (e.g., Eccl 1:11, (3) The third view (Delitzsch) is to relate עולם to a cognate Arabic root meaning “knowledge.” The point would be that God has endowed man with “knowledge,” but not enough for man to discover God’s eternal plan. This approach is only rarely adopted: “knowledge” (YLT).

3 tn Heb “in their heart.” The Hebrew term translated heart functions as a metonymy of association for man’s intellect, emotions, and will (e.g., Job 4:11, 20; 6:6; 24:7-8; 31:19). Here, it probably refers to man’s intellectual capacities, as v. 11 suggests.

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

5 tn Heb “man.”

6 tn Heb “the work that God has done.” The phrase הָעַמִּית (ha-ammit, “IGNORANCE” or “BAD THING”) is an internal cognate adjective (direct object and verb are from the same root), used for emphasis (see BH 167 §10.21g). The repetition of the verb עולם ("to do") in 3:11 and 3:14 suggests that this phrase refers to God’s foreordination of all the events and timing of human affairs: God has made (מַעֲרֹד; יָכִית) everything appropriate in his sovereign timing (3:11a), and all that God has done (מַעֲרֹד; פֹלַע) is preordained (‘זֹכִית; לֹא). Thus, the verb עולם functions as a metonymy of effect (i.e., God’s actions) for cause (i.e., God’s sovereign foreordination). The temporal clause “from beginning to end” (3:11) supports this nuance.

7 tn Traditionally, “what God has done from the beginning to the end.” The temporal clause הבַּעֲמִית (ba-ammit, “FROM IGNORANCE”) is a phrase “from beginning to the end.” Temporal clauses are common in Qoheleth, and “from beginning to the end” occurs 22 times (3:1, 3, 6, 9). Here, it probably refers to “eternity” (the traditional understanding of עולם [ba-olam] earlier in the verse; see the note on “ignorance”), e.g., KJV, NEB, NAB, ASV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV. However, if עולם simply denotes “the future” (e.g., HALOT 799 s.v. עולם 2; BDB 762 s.v. עולם 2.a; THAT 2:241), this temporal clause would refer to the events God has ordained to transpire in an individual’s life, from beginning to end. This approach is adopted by one English version: “but without man ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass” (NUPS). This would fit well in the context begun in 3:1 with the fourteen merisms encompassing man’s life, starting with “a time to be born” (i.e., from the beginning in 3:11) and concluding with “a time to die” (i.e., to the end in 3:11). This approach is also supported by the admission of 3:12-13, namely, since no one knows what will happen to him in the future days of his life, Qoheleth recommends that man enjoy each day as a gift from God.

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

9 tn Heb “I know.”

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

11 tn Qoheleth uses the exceptional particle כִּי (ki, “except”) to identify the only exception to the futurity within man’s life (BDB 474 s.v. כִּי 2).
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themselves4 as long as they live, 3:13 and also that everyone should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all his toil, for these things5 are a gift from God.

God's Sovereignty

3:14 I also know that whatever God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away from it. God has made it this way, so that men will fear him.

3:15 Whatever exists now has already been, and whatever will be has already been; for God will seek to do again6 what has occurred7 in the past.8

The Problem of Injustice and Oppression

3:16 I saw something else on earth:9

In the place of justice, there was wickedness, and in the place of fairness,7 there was wickedness.

3:17 I thought to myself, “God will judge both the righteous and the wicked; for there is an appropriate time for every activity, and there is a time of judgment10 for every deed.

3:18 I also thought to myself, “It is9 for the sake of the people,10 so God can clearly11 show12 them that they are like animals.

3:19 For the fate of humans13 and the fate of animals are the same: As one dies, so dies the other; both have the same breath. There is no advantage for humans over animals, for both are fleeting.

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

3:21 Who really knows if the human spirit14 ascends upward,

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1 tn Heb “to do good.” The phrase יְבַקֵּשׁ (yÿvaqqesh) functions idiomatically for “to experience [or see] happiness [or joy].” The verb וַיָּבַקֵּשׁ (wáyvákēsh) probably denotes “to acquire” (to obtain) (BDB 795 s.v. יָבַקֵּשׁ 11.7), and וַיָּבִא (wáyvá’) means “good; pleasing; happiness,” etc., Ecc 2:24; 3:13; 5:17 (BDB 375 s.v. בָּי).

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

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

4 tn Heb “God will seek that which is driven away.” The meaning of יָבַקֵּשׁ (yÿvaqqesh) is difficult to determine: יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) is a Niphal participle 3rd person masculine singular from יָבִא (yvá’; “to drive away”). There are several options: (1) God watches over the persecuted: יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) functions as a metonymy of cause for effect (i.e., to protect), and יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) (what is driven away) refers to “those who are persecuted.” But this does not fit the context. (2) God will call the past to account: יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) functions as a metonymy of cause for effect (i.e., to hold accountable), and יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) is a metonymy of attribute (i.e., the past). This approach is adopted by several English translations: “God requires that which is past” (KJV), “God will call the past to account” (NIV) and “God summons each event back in its turn” (NEB). (3) God finds what has already been lost יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) functions as a metonymy of cause for effect (i.e., to find), and יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) is a metonymy of effect (i.e., to repeat), and יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) is a metonymy (i.e., that which has occurred). This fits the context and provides a tight parallel with the preceding line: “That which is has already been, and that which will be has already been” (3:15a). But it parallels “God seeks [to repeat] that which has occurred [in the past].” This is the most popular approach among English versions: God restores that which has past (Douay), “God seeks again that which is passed away” (ASV), “God seeks what has passed by” (NASB), “God seeks what has been driven away” (RSV), “God seeks out what has passed by” (MLB), “God seeks out what has gone by” (NRSV), and “God is ever bringing back what disappears” (NAB).

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

6 tn Heb “under the sun.”

7 Or “righteousness.”

8 The phrase “a time of judgment” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

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

10 tn Heb “the sons of man.” The phrase יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) is difficult to determine: יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh) is a Niphal participle 3rd person masculine plural suffix is debated because the root has a broad range of meanings: (1) “to test; to prove; to sift; to sort out” (e.g., Deut 13:13; 19:9; 20:38; Zeph 3:9; Job 33:3); and (4) “to cleanse; to purify” (Isa 49:2; 52:11). See HALOT 141.1 s.v. יָבַקֵּשׁ 8b: barar, + 3rd person masculine plural suffix) is well attested in postbiblical Mishnaic Hebrew (Jastrow 197-98 s.v. יבאר). For example, “there make the fact as clear (bright) as a new garment” (b. Ketubbot 46a) and “the claimant must offer clear evidence” (b. Sanhedrin 32b). The point would be that God allows human injustice to exist in the world in order to make it clear to mankind that they are essentially no better than the beasts. On the other hand, the LXX adopts the nuance “to judge,” while Targum and Vulgate take the nuance “to purify,” while BDB 141.1 s.v. יבאר 4 suggests “to test, prove,” while HALOT 163 s.v. יבאר 2 prefers “to select, choose.”

11 tn The second infinitive יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh, “to make it clear to them”) and יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh, “and to show”) function as a verbal hendiadys (the two verbs are associated with one another to communicate a single idea). The first verb functions adverbially, and the second retains its full verbal force: “to clearly show them.”

12 tn The two infinitives יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh, “to make it clear to them”) and יָבַקֵּשׁ (yvákēsh, “and to show”) function as a verbal hendiadys (the two verbs are associated with one another to communicate a single idea). The first verb functions adverbially, and the second retains its full verbal force: “to clearly show them.”

13 tn Heb “of the sons of man.”

14 tn Heb “the spirit of the sons of man.”
and the animal’s spirit descends into the earth? 

3:22 So I perceived there is nothing better than for people to enjoy their work, because that is their reward; for who can show them what the future holds? 

Evil Oppression on Earth 

4:1 So I again considered all the oppression that continually occurs on earth.

This is what I saw. The oppressed were in tears, but no one was comforting them; no one delivers them from the power of their oppressors.
4:2 So I considered⁴ those who are dead and gone⁵ more fortunate than those who are still alive.⁶
4:3 But better than both is the one who has not been born⁷ and has not seen the evil things that are done on earth.⁸

Labor Motivated by Envy
4:4 Then I considered⁹ all the skillful work⁰ that is done: Surely it is nothing more thanⁱ competition² between one person and another. This also is profitless – like¹² chasing the wind.
4:5 The fool folds his hands and does no work,¹³ so he has nothing to eat but his own flesh;¹⁴
4:6 Better is one handful with some rest than two hands full of toil¹⁵ and chasing the wind.

Labor Motivated by Greed
4:7 So¹⁶ I again considered¹⁷ another¹⁸ futile thing on earth:¹⁹
4:8 A man who is all alone with no companion,²⁰ he has no children nor siblings;²¹ yet there is no end to all his toil, and he²² is never satisfied with riches. He laments,²³ “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself²⁴ of pleasure?”
4:9 Two people are better than one, because they can reap more benefit from their labor.  
4:10 For if they fall, one will help his companion up, but pity the person who falls down and has no one to help him up.  
4:11 Furthermore, if two lie down together, they can keep each other warm, but how can one person keep warm by himself?  
4:12 Although an assailant may overpower one person, two can withstand him. Moreover, a three-stranded cord is not quickly broken.

Labor Motivated by Prestige-Seeking

4:13 A poor but wise youth is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive advice.  
4:14 For he came out of prison to become king, even though he had been born poor in what would become his kingdom.

4:15 I considered all the living who walk on earth, as well as the successor who would arise in his place.  
4:16 There is no end to all the people nor to the past generations, yet future generations will not rejoice in him. This also is profitless and like chasing the wind.

Rash Vows

5:1 (4:17) Be careful what you do when you go to the temple of God;

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2 The adjective לָעָה (la’ah, “evil”) here means “misfortune” (HALOT 1263 s.v. ḫa‘l 4) or “injustice, wrong” (HALOT 1262 s.v. ḫ. h.). They are derived from the root ḫay (“to be troubled; to strive with” (worry; to be a matter of concern,” and the Old South Arabic render the phrase as “unhappy business; rotten business; grievous task”).

3 ḫay means “to be occupied; to be busy with (time, it refers to future generations (e.g., Deut 29:21; Pss 48:14; 78:4, 6; 102:19; Job 18:20; Ecc 1:11; 4:16); cf. HALOT 36 s.v. ḫa‘l B.3; BDB 30 s.v. ḫa‘l 2.b).

9 ḫay means “business; affair; task; figure: “foot” is a metonymy for “step,” and “step” is a metaphor: “every evil way” (Ps 119:101); see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 648.

16 ḫay means “business; affair; task; figure: “foot” is a metonymy for “step,” and “step” is a metaphor: “every evil way” (Ps 119:101); see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 648.
draw near to listen\(^2\) rather than to offer a sacrifice\(^3\) like fools,\(^4\) for they do not realize that they are doing wrong.

5:2 (5:1) Do not be rash with your mouth or hasty in your heart to bring up a matter before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth! Therefore, let your words be few.

5:3 Just as dreams come when there are many cares,\(^5\)

so\(^6\) the rash vow\(^6\) of a fool occurs\(^7\) when there are many words.

5:4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay in paying it.\(^9\) For God\(^9\) takes no pleasure in fools: Pay what you vow!

5:5 It is better for you not to vow than to vow and not pay it.\(^11\)

5:6 Do not let your mouth cause you\(^12\) to sin, and do not tell the priest,\(^13\) "It was a mistake!"\(^14\)

Why make God angry at you\(^15\) so that he would destroy the work of your hands?"

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

\(^2\) tn The term "sacrifice" (יִתֵּת הַכְּסִילִים זָבַח mittet hakkÿsilim zavakh) is an adverbial accusative of comparison (e.g., GKC 375 §118.r); "rather than giving a sacrifice like fools" (יִתֵּת הַכְּסִילִים זָבַח mittet hakkÿsilim zavakh). Contextually, the "sacrifice" is a rash vow made to God that is not fulfilled. The rash vow is referred to in 5:2 as the "voice of a fool." Qoheleth admonishes the fool against making a rash vow that is not paid. "When you make a vow to God, do not delay in paying it; for God takes no pleasure in fools: Pay what you vow! It is better for you not to vow than to vow and not pay it" (vv. 4-5 [3-4 HT]).

\(^3\) tn The term לִשְׁמֹע (lishmoa"); preposition + Qal infinitive construct from בָּשָׂר, shama, "to hear," may be taken in one of two ways: (1) literal: "to listen" in contrast to speak or (2) figurative (metonymy of cause for effect) "to obey" in contrast to sacrifice (HALOT 1572 s.v. בָּשָׂר; BDB 1033–34 s.v. בָּשָׂר). The LXX took the term in the literal sense: τοῦ ἀκούειν (του akouein, "to listen"). The English versions reflect both literal and figurative options: "obedience" (NIPPS, Douay, NAB, NEB) versus "to hear [or listen]" (KJV, ASV, YLT, Douay, NAB, RSV, NASB, NIV, NRSV). The section warns against rash vows therefore, the nuance "to listen" is more appropriate: the wise man will be slow to speak and quick to listen in the presence of God; however, the fool is unrestrained and speaks rashly.

\(^4\) tn The term "voice." The Hebrew term קוֹל (kol); preposition + Qal infinitive construct from בָּשָׂר, shama, "to hear," is used as a metonymy of cause (i.e., your voice) of association (i.e., you). The MT reads "your voice" in contrast to speak or (2) figurative (metonymy of cause for effect) "to listen" in contrast to sacrifice (HALOT 1572 s.v. בָּשָׂר; BDB 1033–34 s.v. בָּשָׂר). The LXX took the term in the literal sense: τοῦ ἀκούειν (του akouein, "to listen"). The English versions reflect both literal and figurative options: "obedience" (NIPPS, Douay, NAB, NEB) versus "to hear [or listen]" (KJV, ASV, YLT, Douay, NAB, RSV, NASB, NIV, NRSV). The section warns against rash vows therefore, the nuance "to listen" is more appropriate: the wise man will be slow to speak and quick to listen in the presence of God; however, the fool is unrestrained and speaks rashly.

\(^5\) tn The term "business; affair; task; release" (HALOT 67 4–75 s.v. שָׁלַם shalam); preposition + Piel infinitive construct from בָּשָׂר, basar, "flesh") is a general term that refers to the thank offering and free will offering (Lev 6:21; 6:40; 6:42). The textual problem was caused by orthographic confusion between similarly spelled words. The LXX might have confused an alternate textual tradition of the text which is used in a general sense of paying a debt (2 Kgs 4:7; Ps 37:21; Prov 22:27; Job 41:3), and more specifically of fulfilling a vow to the Lioo (Deut 23:22; 2 Sam 15:7; Ps 22:26 HT [22:25 ET]; 50:14; 61:9 HT [61:8 ET]; 66:13; 76:12 HT [76:11 ET]; 116:14, 18; Prov 7:14; Job 22:27; Isa 21:21; Jonah 2:10; Nah 1:2; see HALOT 1535 s.v. שָׁלַם shal.; BDB 382 s.v. שָׁלַם shal.; Douay 1022 s.v. shal.; NEB 4. An Israelite was never required to make a vow, but once made, it had to be paid (Ps 22:18-25; 27:1-13; Num 15:2-10; Nah 1:15, 2:15). The MT reads "the fool" here; the referent ("God") has been specified in the translation for clarity.

\(^6\) tn The word "it" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

\(^7\) tn Heb "your flesh." The term בָּשָׂר (basar, "flesh") is a synecdoche of part (i.e., flesh) for the whole (i.e., whole person), e.g., Gen 2:21; 6:12; Ps 56:4(5); 65:23; 145:23; LXX 40:5, 6; see HALOT 164 s.v. בָּשָׂר shabarah. E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 642.

\(^8\) tc The MT reads מְבָנָאצֵק (mabnåakåh, "messenger"), while the LXX reads τοῦ θεοῦ (tou theou, "God") which reflects an alternate textual tradition of יִמְבָנָאצֵק (ymbnaqåk, "God"). The textual problem was caused by orthographic confusion between similarly spelled words. The LXX might have been trying to make sense of a difficult expression. The MT is preferred as the original. All the major translations follow the MT except for Moffatt ("God").

\(^9\) tn Heb "the messenger." The term מַלְאָכָה (malåkah, "messenger") refers to a temple priest (e.g., Mal 2:7; cf. HALOT 585 s.v. מַלְאָכָה malåkah 2.b; BDB 521 s.v. מַלְאָכָה malåkah 1.c). The priests record the sacrifices brought by the Israelites. The Levites (Lev 2:15) when the Israelite delayed in fulfilling a vow, a priest would remind him to pay what he had vowed. Although the traditional rabbinic view is that Qoheleth refers to an angelic superintendent over the temple, Rashi suggested that it is a temple-official. Translations reflect both views: "his representative" (NAB), "the temple messenger" (NIV), "the messenger" (RSV, NRSV, NASB, MLB, NRSV), "the angel" (KJV, ASV, Douay) and "the angel of God" (NEB).

\(^10\) tn The Hebrew noun שְׁגָגָה (shッグaga; shッグaga) denotes "error; mistake" and refers to a sin of inadvertence or unintentional sin (e.g., Lev 4:2, 22, 27; 5:18; 22:14; Num 15:24-29; 35:11, 15; Josh 20:3; Eccl 5:5; 10:5); see HALOT 1412 s.v. שְׁגָגָה shッグaga; BDB 993 s.v. שְׁגָגָה shッグaga. In this case, it refers to a rash vow thoughtlessly committed, which the foolish worshipper claims was a mistake (e.g., Prov 20:25).

\(^11\) tn Heb "at your voice." This is an example of metonymy (i.e., your voice) of association (i.e., you).
Government Corruption

5:8 If you see the extortion of the poor, or the perversion of justice and fairness in the government, do not be astonished by the matter. For the high official is watched by a higher official, and there are higher ones over them!

5:9 The produce of the land is seized by all of them,

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1 tn The syntax of this verse is difficult. Perhaps the best approach is to classify the vav or háleq (vulgarism, futurities) as introducing the predicate (e.g., Gen 40:9; 2 Sam 23:3; Prov 10:25; Isa 34:12; Job 4:6; 36:26; BDB 255 s.v. 1 c.c.y; “There is futility...”). The phrase háleq yárêq (vrob halomot) is an adverbial modifier (“in many dreams”), as is yárêq háleq (d’varin harbeh, “many words”). The vav prefixed to háleq (ud’varum) and the juxtaposition of the two lines suggests a comparison: “just as...so also...” (BDB 255 s.v. 1). The English versions reflect a variety of approaches: “In the multitude of dreams and many words there are also diverse vanities” (KJV); “In the multitude of dreams there are vanities, and in many words” (ASV); “When dreams increase, empty words grow many” (RSV); “In many dreams and follies and many words” (MLB); “In the abundance of dreams both vanities and words abound” (NLT); “When there are many dreams, there are many vanities, and words without number” (Douay); “Many dreams and words mean a many vain folly” (Moffatt); “Much dreaming leads to futility and to superfluous talk” (NRSV); “In the abundance of dreams both vanities and words abound” (NAB); and “Many dreams and many words are endless.” (NIV); “In many dreams and in many words there is emptiness” (NASB); “Much dreaming and many words are meaninglessness” (NIV); “With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words” (NASV).

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

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

4 tn Heb “in the province.”

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

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

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

8:7 Just as there is futility in many dreams, so also in many words. Therefore, fear God!

Covetousness

5:10 The one who loves money will never be satisfied with money, he who loves wealth will never be
satisfied with his income. This also is futile.

5:11 When someone's prosperity increases, those who consume it also increase; so what does its owner gain, except that he gets to see it with his eyes? 10

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

Materialism Thwarts Enjoyment of Life

5:13 Here is a misfortune on earth that I have seen:

Wealth hoarded by its owner to his own misery.

5:14 Then that wealth was lost through bad luck:

abundant wealth (related to “pomp”); cf. HALOT 250 s.v. יָדָי, however, HALOT 250 s.v. יָדָי suggests that the phrase “resulted term יָדָי” (BDB 775 s.v. יָדָי) connotes “prosperity” as well (Prov 11:10; Job 20:21; 21:16); cf. HALOT 250 s.v. יָדָי. Here, it refers to the possessions and wealth a person acquires as the fruit of his labors. This nuance is well reflected in several English versions: “The more a man gains, the more there are to spend it” (Moffatt); “When riches multiply, so do those who live off them” (NEB); “As his substance increases, so do those who consume it” (ASV). The form is plural in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

The noun יָדָי (yadhay, “good”) connotes “prosperity” (Deut 23:7; Job 9:25; 21:25; Ps 106:5; Lam 3:17; Eccl 4:8; 5:10; 6:17; 6:3; 6:7; 14:9; 18; Neh 2:16; Sir 6:11, 41:13); cf. HALOT 323 s.v. II יָדָי (yadhay, “good”) connotes “prosperity” as well (Prov 11:10; Job 20:21; 21:16); cf. HALOT 323 s.v. II יָדָי 1b. Here, it refers to the possessions and wealth a person acquires as the fruit of his labors. This nuance is well reflected in several English versions: “The more a man gains, the more there are to spend it” (Moffatt); “When riches multiply, so do those who live off them” (NEB); “As his substance increases, so do those who consume it” (ASV); and “Where there are great riches, there are also many to devour them” (NASB). The line does not describe the economic law of “supply and demand,” as some versions seem to imply, but the wealth of the rich will not allow him to sleep.

5:15 Just as he came forth from his mother’s womb, naked will he return as he came, and he will take nothing in his hand that he may carry away from his toil.

5:16 This is another misfortune:

Just as he came, so will he go. What did he gain from toiling for the wind?

5:17 Surely, he ate in darkness every day of his life, and he suffered greatly with sickness and anger.

5:18 I have seen personally what is the only beneficial and appropriate course of action for people:

to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all their hard work during the few days of their life which God has given them, for this is their reward.

5:19 To every man whom God has given wealth, and possessions, he has also given him the ability...
to eat from them, to receive his reward and to find enjoyment in his toil; these things are the gift of God.

5:20 For he does not think much about the fleeting days of his life because God keeps him occupied with the joy he derives from his activity.

Not Everyone Enjoys Life

6:1 Here is another misfortune that I have seen on earth, and it weighs heavily on people.

6:2 God gives a man riches, property, and wealth so that he lacks nothing that his heart desires; yet God does not enable him to enjoy the fruit of his labor — instead, someone else enjoys it! This is fruitless and a grave misfortune.

6:3 Even if a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years — even if he lives a long, long time, but cannot enjoy his prosperity — even if he were to live forever, I would say, “A stillborn child is better off than he is!”

1 Heb “his appetite.”
2 Heb “There is no lack in respect to his appetite”; or “his desire lacks nothing.”
3 The verb שָׁלַט (shalat), the Qal stem means “to dominate; to dominate; to lord it over; to be master of” and in the Hiphil stem “to give power to” (BDB 1020 s.v. שָׁלַט and “to grant” (HALOT 1522 s.v. שָׁלַט). God must grant a person the ability to enjoy the fruit of his labor, otherwise a person will not be able to enjoy his possessions and wealth. The ability to partake of the fruit of one’s labor and to find satisfaction and joy in it is a gift from God (e.g., Eccl 2:24-26; 3:13; 5:18-19; 9:7).
4 Heb “to eat of it.” The verb אָכַל (‘akhal), “to eat” functions as a metonymy of association, that is, the action of eating is associated with the enjoyment of the fruit of one’s labor (e.g., Eccl 2:24-26; 3:13-12, 22; 5:17-19; 8:15-9:9).
5 The phrase “the fruit of his labor” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.
6 Heb “a stranger.” The Hebrew expression אִישׁ נָכְרִי (‘ish nokhri, “stranger”) sometimes refers not to a foreigner or someone that the person does not know, but simply to someone else other than the subject (e.g., Prov 27:12). In the light of 6:3-6, it might even refer to the man’s own heirs. The term is used as a synecdoche of species (foreigner for stranger) in the sense of someone else other than the subject; “someone else” (BDB 649 s.v. נָכְרִי).
7 Therefore, no matter how long a man lives, even if he fathered a hundred children, he will be unable to enjoy his possessions and wealth. The ability to enjoy the fruit of one’s labor is often thwarted by the obstacles described in 6:1-2 and 6:3-9.
8 Heb “to eat.”
9 Instead, someone else enjoys it. A person may be unable to enjoy the fruit of his/her labor due to an unfortunate series of events that robs a person of his possessions (5:13-14) or a merely, lifelong hoarding of one’s wealth that robs him the ability to enjoy what he has worked so hard to acquire (5:15-17). Qoheleth recommends the enjoyment of life and the fruit of one’s labor, as God enables (5:18-20). Unfortunately, the ability to enjoy the fruits of one’s labor is often thwarted by the obstacles described in 6:1-2 and 6:3-9.
10 Heb “the days of his years are many.”
11 Heb “he has no burial.” The phrase הַיָּמִים הַגַּם לֹא־הָיָם (‘yaman-gam lah hav ’ayyam, “he even has no burial”) is traditionally treated as part of a description of the man’s sorry final state, that is, he is deprived of even a proper burial (KJV, NEB, RSV, NRSV, ASV, NASB, NIV, NJPS, MLP, Moffatt). However, the preceding parallel lines suggest that this a hyperbolic prositasis: “if he were to live one hundred years...even if he were never buried [i.e., were to live forever]...” A similar idea occurs elsewhere (e.g., Ps 49:9; 89:48). See D. R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” BKCOT, 990.
12 The noun וּבְעָל (‘avel), “miser” denotes “miser” and by metonymy, of effect, “stillborn child” (e.g., Ps 58:9; Job 3:16; Eccl 6:3); cf. HALOT 711. The noun is related to the verb וָעַל (‘alal), “to fall,” but occasionally “to be born”; see Isa 26:18); cf. HALOT 710 s.v. וָעַל.
13 The point of 6:3-6 is that the futility of unenjoyed wealth is worse than the tragedy of being stillborn.
Though the stillborn child came into the world for no reason and departed into darkness, though its name is shrouded in darkness, yet it has more rest than that man – if he should live a thousand years twice, yet does not enjoy his prosperity. For both of them die – all of man’s labor is for nothing more than to fill his stomach – yet his appetite is never satisfied! So what advantage does a wise man have over a fool? And what advantage does a pauper gain by knowing how to survive? It is better to be content with what the eyes can see than for one’s heart always to crave more. This continual longing is futile – like chasing the wind.

The Futile Way Life Works

6:10 Whatever has happened was foreordained, and what happens to a person was also foreknown. It is useless for him to argue with God about his fate because God is more powerful than he is.

6:11 The more one argues with words, the less he accomplishes. How does that benefit him? 6:12 For no one knows what is best for a person during his lifetime – during the few days of his fleeting life – for they pass away like a shadow. Nor can anyone tell him what the future will hold for him on earth.

6:13 For the more words there are, the more the futility.

6:14 Or “what a person (Heb. “man”) is was foreknown.”

6:15 “For he cannot contend with the one who is more powerful than he is” (God) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

6:16 The phrase “continual longing” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.

6:17 The term “though its name is shrouded in darkness” is a metonymy of cause (i.e., seeing an object) for effect (i.e., being content with what the eyes can see); see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 552-54.

6:18 Or “and what a person (Heb. “man”) is was foreknown.”

6:19 The referent of the “the one who is more powerful than he is” (God) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

6:20 Or “what a person (Heb. “man”) is was foreknown.”

6:21 The referent of the “the one who is more powerful than he is” (God) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

6:22 The rhetorical question (“For who knows…?”) is a negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer, e.g., Ps 56:13 [14] (see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 947). It affirms the fact that both the miserly rich man who lives two thousand years, as well as the stillborn child who never lived one day, both go to the same place – the grave. And if the miserly rich man never enjoyed the fruit of his labor during his life, his fate was no better than that of the stillborn child who never had opportunity to enjoy any of the blessings of life. In a sense, it would have been better for the miserly rich man to have never lived than to have experienced the toil, anxiety, and misery of accumulating his wealth, but never enjoying any of the fruits of his labor.

6:23 The phrase “for no one can tell him…!” (see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 949-51). The translation renders this rhetorical device as a positive affirmation.

6:24 The term “like” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

6:25 “Or “what a person (Heb. “man”) is was foreknown.”

6:26 “For who knows what is good for a man in life?” The rhetorical question (“For who knows…?”) is a negative affirmation, expecting a negative answer: “For no one knows…!” (see E. W. Bullinger, Figures of Speech, 949-51). The translation renders this rhetorical device as a positive affirmation.

6:27 The phrase prefixed to the Hebrew root מִסְפַּר יְמֵי־חַיֵּי (mispər yəmei hayyē) (Heb. “the few days of his fleeting life”) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
Life is Brief and Death is Certain!

7:1 A good reputation is better than precious perfume. Likewise, the day of one’s death is better than the day of one’s birth. 8 7:2 It is better to go to a funeral than to feast.

For death is the destiny of every person, and the living should take this to heart. 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, because sober reflection is good for the heart. 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of merrymaking.

Frivolous Living Versus Wisdom

7:5 It is better for a person to receive a rebuke from those who are wise than to listen to the song of fools. 7:6 For like the cracking of quick-burning thorns under a cooking pot, so is the laughter of fools.

This kind of folly is also useless. Moral benefit from frivolous levity.

The Hebrew term mishemen (šem mishemen, “name … ointment”) creates a paronomastic wordplay (see the note on the two internal terms)

The combination of these two sets of literary devices creates an AB:B’A’ chiasm: šem mishemen // šem mishemen tov // mishemen hammavet // mishemen tov (šem mishemen tov, “good name”).

The term mishemen tov (mishemen tov, “name … ointment”) refers to a person’s reputation (e.g., Prov 22:1; 23:18; 3:22; 1 Chr 5:24; 2 Chr 26:15; Neh 9:10; Isa 63:12; 14; Jer 32:20; Ezek 16:14; Dan 9:15; cf. HALOT 1549 s.v. theōn; BDB 1028 s.v. theōn 2.b.

The comparative term mishemen (šem mishemen, “better”) is repeated throughout 7:1-12. It introduces a series of “better-than sayings,” particularly in 7:1-6 in which every poetic unit is introduced by "It is better...

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wisdom preserves the life of its owner.
Wisdom Acknowledges God's Orchestration of Life

7:13 Consider the work of God:
For who can make straight what he has bent?
7:14 In times of prosperity4 be joyful, but in times of adversity consider this: God has made one as well as the other,3 so that no one can discover what the future holds.

Exceptions to the Law of Retribution

7:15 During the days of my fleeting life I have seen both of these things:
Sometimes a righteous person dies prematurely in spite of his righteousness, and sometimes a wicked person lives long in spite of his evil deeds.

7:16 So do not be excessively righteous or excessively wise, otherwise you might be disappointed.
7:17 Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool; otherwise you might die before your time.

1 The adjective דָּבָר (dabar) means "many words; much" (HALOT 1034 s.v. II 2; BDB 452 s.v. דבורה). It is derived from the root נב (nab, what is left over); cf. HALOT 452 s.v. I דבורה and related to the verb דָּבָר (dabar, Niphal "to be left over" and Hiphil "to have left over"; cf. HALOT 451-52). In 2:15 the adjective דָּבָר (dabar) is used with the noun נב (nab, "advantage; profit") in a wordplay or pun. The English versions take a similar approach: "Why not destroy your life?"

2 The imperfect of נָשָׂא (nasah) means "to bear" (HALOT 1566 s.v. נָשָׂא). It is used in aphorisms to assert the existence of a particular situation that occurs sometimes. It may indicate that the situation is supplied in the translation for smoothness and clarity. The word "life" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but may be understood as: (1) benefactive reflexive use which refers to an action done for one's own behalf (e.g., Gen 20:7; Josh 9:12; 1 Kgs 8:33; Job 13:27); because the law of retribution is sometimes violated, it is not wise for a person to be overly dependent upon wisdom or righteousness for his own benefit; (2) estimative-declarative reflexive which denotes esteeming or presenting oneself in a certain state, with regard to the question of truthfulness (e.g., 2 Sam 13:5; Prov 13:6; Esth 8:17): it is useless to overly esteem oneself as wise or to falsely present oneself as wiser than he really is because the law of retribution sometimes fails to reward the wise. The enigma of this line – "overly righteous and overly wise" – may be resolved by proper classification of the Hitpael stem of this verb.

3 Or "his righteousness." The preposition הַ (hakkol) should be nuanced "both" rather than "all.

4 This is the case throughout Ecclesiastes, the term חָכַם (hakkol) is used in a locative sense: "in his righteousness" and "in his wickedness." (KJV, NASB, NIV).

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

6 Or "Why should you ruin yourself?"; or "Why should you destroy yourself?" The verb שָׁמֵם (shamem) is traditionally taken as "to destroy; to ruin oneself." For its use here HALOT 1566 s.v. שָׁמֵם 2 has "to cause oneself ruin." But 1031 s.v. שָׁמֵם נַפֶּל has "to cause oneself desolation, ruin." Most English versions take a similar approach: "Why destroy yourself?" (KJV, ASV, NEB, NRSV, MB; NIV, "Why ruin yourself?"

7 The imperfect of נָשָׂא (nasah) functions in a modal sense, denoting possibility: "you might be..." (see IBHS 508 §31.4.e).
7:18 It is best to take hold of one warning\(^1\) without letting go of the other warning;\(^2\) for the one who fears God will follow\(^3\) both warnings.\(^4\)

Wisdom Needed Because No One is Truly Righteous

7:19 Wisdom gives a wise person more protection\(^5\) than ten rulers in a city.

7:20 For\(^6\) there is not one truly\(^7\) righteous person on the earth who continually does good and never sins.

7:21 Also, do not pay attention to everything that people\(^8\) say; otherwise,\(^9\) you might even hear\(^10\) your servant cursing you.

7:22 For you know in your own heart\(^11\) that you also have cursed others many times.

Human Wisdom is Limited

7:23 I have examined all this by wisdom; I said, “I am determined\(^12\) to comprehend this\(^13\) — but it was beyond my grasp.\(^14\)

7:24 Whatever has happened is beyond human\(^15\) understanding;\(^16\) it is far deeper than anyone can fathom.\(^17\)

True Righteousness and Wisdom Are Virtually Nonexistent

7:25 I tried\(^18\) to understand, examine, and comprehend\(^19\) the role of\(^20\) wisdom in the scheme of things,\(^21\) and to understand the stupidity of wickedness\(^22\) and the insanity of folly.\(^23\)

deny the existence of some people who are relatively righteous.

\(^1\) tn The word “warning” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation two times in this line for clarity.

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

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

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

\(^5\) tn Heb “gives strength.”

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

\(^7\) tn The term “truly” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. Qoheleth does not deny the existence of some people who are relatively righteous.

\(^8\) tn Heb “they”; the referent (people) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

\(^9\) tn Heb “so that you do not hear…”; or “lest you hear….”

\(^10\) tn The imperfect tense verb חָשְׁמָה (‘hashmā, “to hear”) functions in a modal sense, denoting possibility: “you might hear” (see IBHS 508 §31.4e).

\(^11\) tn Heb “your heart knows.”

\(^12\) tn The correlative כִּי (‘ken, “to be wise”) emphasizes the resolve (determination) of Qoheleth to become wise enough to understand the perplexities of life.

\(^13\) tn Or “I am determined to become wise”

\(^14\) tn Or “but it eluded me”; Heb “but it was far from me.”

\(^15\) tn The word “human” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for stylistic reasons.

\(^16\) tn Heb “is far away.”

\(^17\) tn Heb “it is deep, deep — who can find it?” The repetition of the word “deep” emphasizes the degree of incomprehensibility. See IBHS 233-34 §12.5a.

\(^18\) tn Heb “I turned, I, even my heart.”

\(^19\) tn Heb “to seek.”

\(^20\) tn The phrase “the role of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

\(^21\) tn The phrase כְּהָקֹדֶשׁ וְכְחוֹזֶה (“holiness and the scheme of things”) is a hendiadys (a figure of speech in which two nouns connote one idea): “holiness in the scheme of things.” This is similar to the hendiadys כְּחוֹזֶה וְכְהָקֹדֶשׁ (‘horenehk, “pain and childbearing”) which connotes “pain in childbearing” (Gen 3:16).

\(^22\) tn Or “the evil of folly.” The genitive construct phrase כְּחָרָה וְכְשָׁדָה (resha‘ kexel) may be taken as a genitive of attribution (“the wickedness of folly”) or as a genitive of attribute (“the folly of wickedness”). The English versions treat it in various ways: “wickedness of folly” (KJV); “wrong of folly” (YLT); “evil of folly” (NASB); “stupidity of wickedness” (NIV); “wickedness, stupidity” (NJP); “wickedness is folly [or foolish]” (ASV, NAB, NRSV, MLB, Moffatt), and “it is folly to be wicked” (NEB).

\(^23\) tn Or “the folly of madness.” The genitive construct phrase כְּחָרָה וְכְשָׁדָה (resha‘ kexel) may be taken as a genitive of attribution (“the wickedness of folly”) or as a genitive of attribute (“the folly of wickedness”).
7:26 I discovered this:4 More bitter than death is the kind ofwoman who is like a hunter’s snare;4 her heart is like a hunter’s net and her hands are like prison chains. The man who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is captured by her.

7:27 The Teacher says: I discovered this while trying to discover the scheme of things, item by item.

7:28 What I have continually sought, I have not found; I have found only5 one upright6 man among a thousand, but I have not found one upright woman among all of them.

7:29 This alone have I discovered: God made humankind upright, but they have sought many evil schemes.

Human Government Demonstrates Limitations of Wisdom

8:1 Who is7 a8 wise person? Who knows the solution9 to a problem?10

A person’s wisdom brightens his appearance,11 and softens12 his harsh countenance.13

8:2 Obey the king’s command,14 because you took15 an oath before God16 to be loyal to him.17

8:3 Do not rush out of the king’s presence in haste – do not delay when the matter is unpleasant,18 for he can do whatever he pleases.

8:4 Surely the king’s authority19 is absolute;20 no one can say24 to him, “What are you doing?”

8:5 Whoever obeys his22 command will not experience harm, and a wise person23 knows the proper time24 and procedure.

1tn Heb “makes his face shine.”
2tn The MT vocalizes the consonantal form אָשֵׁר אֲנִי אֲנִי (ʾəšĕr ʾāni ʾāni, “your face shining, Piel imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from ʾšāna, shana, “to change”). However, the LXX μήτῃσέται (mithēsetai) reflects an alternate vocalization tradition of אֲנִי (ʾāni, Niphal imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from ʾšānē, shanah, “to hate”), while the Vulgate’s commutabit reflects ʾšānē (ʾšānnēh, Piel imperfect 3rd person masculine singular from ʾšānē, shanah, “to repeat”).
3tn Heb “the strength of his face is changed.” The expression 영면 (ʾən-paʾay, “strength of his face”) is an idiom for “baldness; impudence” (BDB 739 s.v. ʾən-paʾay).
4tn The Leningrad Codex (the basis of BHS) reads יָא (yāʾ, 1st person common singular independent personal pronoun); “I obey the king’s command.” Other medieval Hebrew MSS and all the versions (LXX, Vulgate, Targum, Syriac Peshitta) preserve an alternate textual tradition of the definite accusative marker יָא (yāʾ) introducing the direct object: יָא יָשִׁנֵה (yāʾ yəṣēnē, “Obey the command of the king”). External evidence supports the alternate textual tradition. The MT is guilty of simple orthographic confusion between similar looking letters. The BHS editors and the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project adopt יָא as the original reading. See D. Barthélemy, ed., Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, 3:582–83.
5tn The phrase “you took” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.
6tn Heb “wise person” functions as a genitive of attribute (“the evil of folly”). The phrase is rendered variously: “foolishness and madness” (KJV); “foolishness of madness” (NASB); “madness of folly” (NIV); “madness which is folly” (NEB); and “foolishness or folly is madness” (ASV, NAB, NRSV, MLB, Moffatt).
7tn The word “this” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.
8tn The phrase “kind of” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity (see the following note on the word “woman”).
9tn The article on הַבִּישׁ (ha-bish) functions in a particularizing sense (“the kind of woman”) rather than in a generic sense (i.e., “women”).
10tn Heb “is snares.” The plural form מֶזוֹדִים (mÿtsodim, from the noun מֶזוֹד, mÿtsod, “snare”) is used to connote either identity, e.g., Gen 1:26; Num 11:1; 1 Sam 20:3; 2 Sam 19:9; Neh 7:2; Job 10:9; Nah 3:6 (see R. J. Williams, Hebrew Syntax, 47, §261; BHS 202.4 §11.2.9b).
11tn Heb “to be loyal to him.” The words “to be loyal to him” do not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.
12tn The phrase “upright” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation twice, here and in the following line, for clarity.
13tn The proposition אֶת (et) prefixed to הבִּישׁ (beyish) functions as a genitive of location (“an oath before God”) or an adjectival genitive of attribute (“a supreme oath”).
14tn Heb “obey the king’s command.” Other medieval Hebrew MSS read יָשִׁנֵה (yəṣēnē, “an oath of God”) functions as a genitive of location (“an oath before God”) or an adjectival genitive of attribute (“a supreme oath”).
15tn The words “to be loyal to him” do not appear in the Hebrew text, but are supplied in the translation for clarification.
16tn Heb “word.”
17tn Heb “supreme.”
18tn Heb “Who knows...?”
19tn The word “his” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness and clarity.
20tn Heb “the heart of a wise man.”
21tn The term 영 (et, “time”) connotes “a proper, suitable time for an event; the right moment” (HALOT 982–83 s.v. יָמִי; BDB 833 s.v. יָמִי). The Hebrew term is an Aramaic loanword from יָמִי (yamaʿi, “diagnosis; meaning; solution”). The Aramaic noun יָמִי (yamʿi, “interpretation of a dream or prophecy”) and verb יָמַה (yamʿa, “to interpret a dream or prophecy”) reflect a later meaning not present in Ecclesiastes, but current at the time of Daniel (Dan 2:5–7; 4:4; 5: 16, 15, 16; 5:12, 15, 16; 7:16) and Qumran (e.g., 1QpHab).
22tn The word “his” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness and clarity.
23tn Heb “the heart of a wise man.”
24tn The term 영 (et, “time”) connotes “a proper, suitable time for an event; the right moment” (HALOT 980 s.v. יָמִי; BDB 773 s.v. יָמִי 2b; e.g., “it was the time for rain” [Ezra 10:13]; “a time of judgment for the nations” [Ezek 30:3]; “there is an appropriate time for every occasion” [Eccl 3:1]; “the time when mountain goats are born” [Job 39:1]; “the rain in its season” [Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24]; “the time for the harvest” [Hos 2:11; Ps 1:3]; “food in its season” [Ps 104:27].
8:6 For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, for the oppression1 of the king2 is severe upon his victim.3

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

8:8 Just as no one has power over the wind to restrain it,6 so no one has power over the day of his death. Just as no one can be discharged during the battle,7 so wickedness cannot rescue the wicked.8

8:9 While applying my mind9 to everything10 that happens in this world,11 I have seen all this:

Sometimes one person14 dominates15 other people16 to their harm.17

Contradictions to the Law of Retribution

8:10 Not only that,18 but I have seen the wicked approaching19 and entering the temple,20 and as they left the holy temple,21 they
boasted in the city that they had done so. This also is an enigma.

8:11 When a sentence is not executed at once against a crime, the human heart is encouraged to do evil.

8:12 Even though a sinner might commit a hundred crimes and still live a long time, yet I know that it will go well with God-fearing people— for they stand in fear before him.

8:13 But it will not go well with the wicked, nor will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.

8:14 Here is another enigma that occurs on earth: Sometimes there are righteous people who get what the wicked deserve, and sometimes there are wicked people who get what the righteous deserve.

I said, “This also is an enigma.”

1 tc The MT reads מְד֖וּבֶּנָּ֣ה (medobnah, “they were forgotten”: Hitpael imperfect 3rd person masculine plural from מִשָּׁ֑בַח, “to forget”). Apart from the MT reading here, the verb הִשָּׁבַח (to forget) never occurs elsewhere in the Hitpael (HALOT 1490 s.v. הִשָּׁבַח; BDB 1013 s.v. הִשָּׁבַח). Many medieval Hebrew mss read הבוּךְּחָה (buccach, “praise, boast”). This alternate textual tradition is reflected in the Greek versions, e.g., Old Greek: καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ὠμος (kai epitheosan, “and they were praised”). Aquila and Theodotion: καὶ ἐξουσιοδότα · καὶ καθαρισθανόντα (kai ekekrhisantos, “and they boasted”), and Symmachus: καὶ ἐπαινοῦσαν (kai epainoumenoi, “and they were praised”). This is also reflected in the Vulgate. The English versions are divided; several follow the MT and translate “they were forgotten” (KJV, ASV, NASB, NRSV, on), but a good number adopt the alternate textual tradition and translate either “they were praised” or “they boasted” (NEB, RSV, NAB, NIV, MLB). The context of 8:10-17, which focuses on the enigmatic contradictions in divine retribution (sometimes the wicked are not punished), favors the alternate tradition. The wicked boast that they can come and go as they please in the temple, flaunting their irrelevance without fear of divine retribution (8:10). This thought is continued in v. 11: failure to execute a sentence against a crime is not executed executively: “emboldened” (ASV, NJPS) and “boldly” (NEB). Moffatt renders the line, “Because sentence on a crime is not executed at once, the mind of man is prone to evil practices.”

8 tc The particle יָשֶׂה (yashé) is used as a conjunction in a conditional/temporal clause to introduce the protasis (“when” or “if”), and הָלַֽךְ (halakh) introduces the apodosis (“then”); cf. BDB 83 s.v. ḥalakh 8.d.

4 tn The noun יָשֶׂה (yashé, “decision; announcement; edict; decree”) is a loanword from Persian patijmata (HALOT 984 s.v. yashit; BDB 834 s.v. בִּנְמַת). The Hebrew noun occurs twice in the Greek Eccl 8:11; Esth 1:20, twice in the Apocrypha (Sir 5:11; 8:15), five times in Qumran (110qen 9; 29:4; 30:1; 34:3; 1QapGen 22:27). The English versions consistently nuance this as a judicial sentence against a crime: “sentence” (KJV, NEB, NAB, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, MLB, YLT), “sentence for a crime” (NIV), “sentence imposed” (NJPS), “sentence on a crime” (Moffatt).

5 tn ḥalakh is “not done.” The verb נָשָׁה (nashah, “to do”) refers to a judicial sentence (halakh) here meant “enigmatic,” that is, difficult to grasp mentally. This sense is derived from the literal concept of breath, vapor or wind that cannot be seen; thus, the idea of “obscure, dark, difficult to understand, enigmatic” (HALOT 236–37 s.v. 1.lash; BDB 210–11 s.v. לָשׁוֹ). It is used in this sense in reference to enigmas in life (6:2; 8:10, 14) and the future which is obscure (11:8, 10).

6 tn The particle דָּוָּה (dowah) is used as a conjunction in a conditional/temporal clause to introduce the protasis (“when” or “if”), and הָלַֽךְ (halakh) introduces the apodosis (“then”); cf. BDB 83 s.v. ḥalakh 8.d.

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

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

9 tn Heb “and prolongs his life.”

10 tn Heb “those who fear God.”

11 tn Heb “they fear.”

12 tn Heb “he.”

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

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

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16 tn Heb “he does not fear.”

17 tn Heb “they do not fear.”

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

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

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

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

22 tn Heb “to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous”; or “who are rewarded for the deeds of the righteous.”
Enjoy Life In Spite of Its Injustices

8:15 So I recommend the enjoyment of life, for there is nothing better on earth for a person to do except to eat, drink, and enjoy life. So joy will accompany him in his toil during the days of his life which God gives him on earth.

Limitations of Human Wisdom

8:16 When I tried to gain wisdom and to observe the activity on earth – even though it prevents anyone from sleeping day or night – I discerned all that God has done. No one really comprehends what happens, or ever can grasp it.

1214

Even if a wise person claimed that he understood, he would not really comprehend it.

Everyone Will Die

9:1 So I reflected on all this, attempting to clear it all up. I concluded that the righteous and the wise, as well as their works, are in the hand of God; whether a person will be loved or hated – no one knows what lies ahead.

9:2 Everyone shares the same fate – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad.

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

2  tn Heb “under the sun.”

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

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

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

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

7  tn The vav introduces a logical conclusion.

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

9  tn Heb “under the sun.”

10  tn Heb “I applied my heart.”

11  tn Heb “to know.”

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

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

14  tn Heb “all the work of God.”

15  tn Heb “the work that is done.”

16  tn Heb “under the sun.”

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

18  tn Heb “find.”

19  tn The term “it” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness.
the ceremonially clean and unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. What happens to the good person, also happens to the sinner;4 what happens to those who make vows, also happens to those who are afraid to make vows.

Better to Be Poor but Alive than Rich but Dead

9:4 But whoever is among7 the living8 has hope; a live dog is better than a dead lion.
9:5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything; they have no further reward – and even the memory of them disappears.9
9:6 What they loved,10 as well as what they hated11 and envied,12 perished long ago, and they no longer have a part in anything that happens on earth.13

Life is Brief, so Cherish its Joys

9:7 Go, eat your food14 with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, because God has already approved your works.
9:8 Let your clothes always be white, and do not spare precious ointment on your head.
9:9 Enjoy15 life with your beloved wife16 during all the days of your fleeting17 life that God18 has given you on earth19 during all your fleeting days;20 for that is your reward in life and in your burdensome work21 on earth.22
9:10 Whatever you find to do with your hands,23 do it with all your might, because there is neither work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the grave,24 the place where you will eventually go.25

Wisdom Cannot Protect against Seemingly Chance Events

9:11 Again,26 I observed this on the earth:27 the race is not always28 won by the swiftest,
the battle is not always won by the strongest; 
prosperity does not always belong to those who are the wisest, 
wealth does not always belong to those who are the most discerning, 
or does success always come to those with the most knowledge – 
for time and chance may overcome them all.

9:12 Surely, no one knows his appointed time!
Like fish that are caught in a deadly net, 
and like birds that are caught in a snare – 
just like them, all people are ensnared
at an unfortunate time that falls upon them suddenly.

Most People Are Not Receptive to Wise Counsel

9:13 This is what I also observed about wisdom on earth, 
and it is a great burden to me:
9:14 There was once a small city with a few men in it, 
and a mighty king attacked it, besieging it and building strong siege works against it.
9:15 However, a poor but wise man lived in the city, 
and he could have delivered the city by his wisdom, 
but no one listened to that poor man.
9:16 So I concluded that wisdom is better than might, 
but a poor man’s wisdom is despised; no one ever listens to his advice.

Wisdom versus Fools, Sin, and Folly

9:17 The words of the wise are heard in quiet, 
more than the shouting of a ruler is heard among fools.
9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, 
but one sinner can destroy much that is good.

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1 tn Heb “bread.”
2 tn Heb “favor.”
3 tn Heb “happen to.”
4 tn Heb “man.” The term is used here in a generic sense and translated “no one.”
5 tn Heb “time.” BDB 773 s.v. יָצִיר 2.d suggests that יָצִיר (‘et, “time”) means “uncertain time.” On the other hand, HALOT 901 s.v. יָצִיר 6 nuances it as “destined time,” that is, “no one knows his destined time [i.e., hour of destiny].” It is used in parallelism with מַעַן (‘man, “appointed time; appointed hour”) in 3:1 (HALOT 273 s.v. מזון; BDB 273 s.v. מזון). Eccl 3:9-15 teaches God’s sovereignty over the appointed time of human events. Similarly, Qoheleth here notes that no one knows what God has appointed in any situation or time. This highlights the limitations of human wisdom and human ability, as 9:11 stresses.
6 tn Heb “bad, evil.” The moral connotation hardly fits here. The adjective would seem to indicate that the net is the instrument whereby the fish come to ruin.
7 tn “the sons of man.”
8 tn The Masoretes pointed the consonantal form יַעֲשֵׂהַת (yuqashah, Pual participle mpl from יָשֶׁה, “to be ensnared”). This is an unusual form for a Pual participle: (1) The characteristic doubling of the middle consonant was omitted due to the lengthening of the preceding short vowel from יָשֶׁה to יַשְּהֵה (GKC 74 §20.n and 143 §52.s); and (2) The characteristic prefix מ (mem) is absent, as in a few other Pual participles, e.g., Exod 3:2; Judg 13:8; 2 Kgs 2:10; Ezech 2:1; 30:24; 54:11 (GKC 143 §52.s). On the other hand, the consonant form יָשֶׁה might actually be an example of the old Qal passive participle which dropped out of Hebrew at an early stage, and was frequently misinterpreted by the Masoretes as a Pual form (e.g., Jer 13:10; 23:32) (GKC 143 §52.s). Similarly, the Masoretes pointed יָשֵׂה as יָשָּה (yashah, Pual perfect 3rd person masculine singular “he was eaten”); however, it probably should be pointed יָשָּה (yashah, old Qal passive perfect 3rd person masculine singular “he was eaten”) because יָשָּה (yashah) only occurs in the Qal (see IBHS 373-74 §22.6a).
9 tn Heb “evil.” The term רָעָה (ra’ah, “evil; unfortunate”) is repeated in v. 12 in the two parts of the comparison: “fish are caught in an evil net” and “men are ensnared at an unfortunate time.”
10 tn Heb “under the sun.”
11 tn The term “burden” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity.
12 tn The verbs in this section function either as past definitive actions (describing a past situation) or as hypothetical past actions (describing an imaginary hypothetical situation for the sake of illustration). The LXX uses subjunctives throughout v. 13 to depict the scenario as a hypothetical situation: “Suppose there was a little city, and a few men [lived] in it; and there should come against it a great king, and surround it, and build great siege-works against it; and should find in it a poor wise man, and he should save the city through his wisdom; yet no man would remember that poor man.”
13 tn The two perfect tense verbs בַּעֲשֵׂה (b’ashah, “he besieged”) and יָשֵׂה (yashah, “he built”) may be taken in a complementary sense, qualifying the action of the main perfect tense verb מָלַט (malat, “he attacked it”).
14 tn The root מַעַן (“might, strong, large”) is repeated in 9:13b for emphasis: “a mighty king…building strong siege works.” This repetition highlights the contrast between the vast power and resources of the attacking king, and the meager resources of the “little city…”
15 tn Heb “was found in it”; the referent (the city) has been specified in the translation for clarity.
16 tn Or “he delivered.” The verb יָשֵׂה (yashah, “to deliver”) is functioning either in an indicative sense (past definite action: “he delivered”) or in a modal sense (past potential: “he could have delivered”). The literal meaning of יָשֵׂה (yashah, “to remember”) in the following line harmonizes with the indicative: “but no one remembered that poor man [afterward].” However, the modal is supported by v. 16: “A poor man’s wisdom is despised; no one ever listens to his advice.” This approach must nuance יָשֵׂה (yashah, “to remember”) as “no one” (afterward) to [that poor man]. Most translations favor the indicative approach: “he delivered” or “he saved” (KJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, ASV, NAB, MLA, NVI; however, some adopt the modal nuance: “he might have saved” (NEB, NJPS, NASB margin).
17 tn Heb “remembered.”
18 tn Or “power.”
19 tn The participle form נִשְׁמָעִים (nishma’im, Niphal participle mpl from נשים, “to listen”) is used verbally to emphasize a continual, durative, gnomic action.
20 tn Heb “his words are never listened to.”
21 tn The phrase “is heard” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness. Note its appearance in the previous line.
10:1 One dead fly makes the perfume's 1
ointment 2
give off a rancid 3
scents, 4
so a little folly can outweigh 5
much wisdom. 6
Wisdom Can Be Nullified By the Caprice of Rulers
10:2 A wise person's good sense protects him, 5
but a fool's lack of sense leaves him vulnerable. 6
10:3 Even when a fool walks along the road he lacks sense, 7
and shows 8
everyone what a fool he is. 9
10:4 If the anger10 of the ruler flares up11 against you, do not resign 12
from your position, 13
for a calm14 response 15
can undo 16
great offenses.
10:5 I have seen another 17 misfortune 18
on the earth: 19
It is an error a ruler makes. 20
10:6 Fools 21 are placed in many positions of authority, 22
while wealthy men sit in lowly positions. 23
10:7 I have seen slaves 24
on horseback and princes walking on foot24 like slaves.
Wisdom is Needed to Avert Dangers in Everyday Life

10:8 One who digs a pit may fall into it, and one who breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.5
10:9 One who quaries stones may be injured by them; one who splits logs may be endangered by them.
10:10 If an iron axhead7 is blunt and a workman4 does not sharpen8 its edge,9 he must exert a great deal of effort;7 so wisdom has the advantage of giving success.
10:11 If the snake should bite before it is charmed,8 the snake charmer9 is in trouble.10

Words and Works of Wise Men and Fools

10:12 The words of a wise person11 win him12 favor.13

\[\text{Heb "lit."} \]
\[\text{Heb "consume him";} \text{or "engulf him." The verb I הֵלֹה ("to swallow") creates a striking wordplay on the homonymic root לֹה הֵל ("to speak eloquently"; HALOT 134-35 s.v לֹה). Rather than speaking eloquently (I הֵל: "to speak eloquently"), the fool utters words that are self-destructive (I הֵל, "to swallow, engulf").} \]
\[\text{Heb "the words of his mouth."} \]
\[\text{Heb "and the fool multiplies words." This line is best taken as the third line of a tricolon encompassing 10:13-14a (NASB, NRSV, NAB, NJPS, Moffatt) rather than the first line of a tricola encompassing 10:14 (KJV, NAB, RSV, NASB, ASV, NJV). Several versions capture the sense of this line well: "a fool prates on and on" (Moffatt) and "Yet the fool talks and talks!" (NIV).} \]
\[\text{Heb "after him";} \text{or "after he [dies]."} \]
\[\text{The plural form of נַעַר ("after him"; or "after he [dies].")} \]
\[\text{Heb "his mouth."} \]
\[\text{Heb "madness of evil."} \]
\[\text{Heb "and the fool multiplies words." This line is best taken as the third line of a tricolon encompassing 10:13-14a (NASB, NRSV, NAB, NJPS, Moffatt) rather than the first line of a tricolon encompassing 10:14 (KJV, NAB, RSV, NASB, ASV, NJV). Several versions capture the sense of this line well: "a fool prates on and on" (Moffatt) and "Yet the fool talks and talks!" (NIV).} \]
\[\text{Heb "after him";} \text{or "after he [dies]."} \]

\[\text{The plural form of פָּרָצָן ("after him"; or "after he [dies].")} \]
\[\text{Heb "his mouth."} \]
\[\text{Heb "madness of evil."} \]

The Problem with Foolish Rulers

10:16 Woe to you, O land, when your king is childish.25

\[\text{The four imperfect verbs in v. 8-9 may be nuanced as indicative s ("will...") or in a modal sense denoting possibility ("may..."). The LXX rendered them with indicatives, as do many English translations (KJV, RSV, NRSV, ASV, MLT, YLT, NJPS). However, it is better to take them in a modal sense (NEB, NAB, NASB, NIV, NCV, CEV, NLT). One who digs a pit does not necessarily fall into it, but he may under the right conditions.} \]
\[\text{Heb "a serpent will bite him." The clause "he who breaks through a wall" (רָפְסָא, uforets puder) is a nominative absolute – the casus pendens is picked up by the elliptical pronoun in the following clause "a serpent will bite him" (חֵן נָחָשׁ, yish/qhennu nakhash). This construction is used for rhetorical emphasis (see IBHS 76-77 §4.7c).} \]
\[\text{The term "ax head" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. The preceding noun "iron" functions as a metonymy of material (i.e., iron) for the object with which it is associated (i.e., ax head).} \]
\[\text{Heb "he";} \text{the referent (the workman) is implied, and has been specified in the translation for clarity.} \]
\[\text{Heb "to sharpen; to make a ring to bronze; Ezek 1:7; Dan 10:6; 1105 s.v.). Sharp edges do not necessarily fall into it, but he may under the right conditions.} \]
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The four imperfect verbs in v. 8-9 may be nuanced as indicative s ("will...") or in a modal sense denoting possibility ("may..."). The LXX rendered them with indicatives, as do many English translations (KJV, RSV, NRSV, ASV, MLT, YLT, NJPS). However, it is better to take them in a modal sense (NEB, NAB, NASB, NIV, NCV, CEV, NLT). One who digs a pit does not necessarily fall into it, but he may under the right conditions.

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and your princes feast in the morning! 10:17 Blessed are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobility, 4 and your princes feast at the proper time 2 – with self-control and not in drunkenness. 3

10:18 Because of laziness the roof 6 caves in, and because of idle hands 6 the house leaks. 10:19 Feasts 4 are made 4 for laughter, and wine makes life merry, 8 but money is the answer 4 for everything. 10:20 Do not curse a king even in your thinking, and do not curse the rich 10 while in your bedroom. 11

11:1 Send your grain 19 overseas, 19 for after many days you will get a return. 20

passive sense: “Bread [feasts] are made….” 8

Or “and [they think that] money is the answer for everything.” 4

Perhaps the referent is people who are in authority because of their wealth. 26

Heb “in chambers of your bedroom.” 24

Heb “a bird of the air.” 26

Heb “may carry the voice.” The article is used here with the force of a possessive pronoun. 25

The Hebrew phrase בָּעַל הַכְּנָפַיִם (ba’al hak’venture) is traditionally rendered “master; possessor” (e.g., Prov 1:17; see HALOT 134 s.v. בָּעַל, “owner”). However, some render it “master” (NIV, NRSV, NEB). LXX uses ἀπόστειλαν (apostelē, “send”). 25

The term “your” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for smoothness. 25

Heb “tell the matter.” 27

The verb נַשָׁלָק (nasakk, “to send; to cast”) refers to the action of sending something to someone (e.g., Neh 8:12; HALOT 900 s.v. נַשָׁלָק). The term is traditionally rendered here as “cast” (KJV, NASB, ASV, NASB, NIV); however, some render it “send” (NPS, NRSV, NEB). LXX uses ἀπόστειλαν (apostelē, “send”). 25

Heb “your bread.” The term כְּלֶכֶם (klekhem) is tradition- 25 ally rendered “bread” (KJV, NASB, RSV, ASV, NASB, NIV, NJPS). However, 11:1-2 seems to deal with exporting goods overseas (D. R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” BKCOT, 1002-3). It is better to take כְּלֶכֶם (klekhem) as a metonymy of product, standing for the grain and wheat from which bread is produced (e.g., Gen 4:15-45; 47:13, 15, 17, 19, 49:20; Num 15:19; 2 Kgs 18:32; Isa 28:28; 30:23; 36:17; 55:10; Jer 5:17; Ezek 46:18; Job 23:1-2; Ps 104:14-17; see HALOT 528 s.v. 1; BDB 537 s.v. 1b). It is taken this way by several translations: “grain” (NEB) and “goods” (Moffatt). Qohelet encouraged the export of grain products overseas in international trade. 25

Heb “upon the surface of the waters.” This is tradition- 25 ally viewed as extolling generosity from which a reward will be reaped. On the other hand, some scholars suggest that the imagery deals with commercial business through maritime trade. M. Jastrow took this verse as advice to take risks in business by trusting one’s goods or ships that will after many days return with a profit (A. Cohen, The Five Megillot [SoBB], 181). Sea trade was risky in the ancient Near East, but it brought big returns to its investors (e.g., 1 Kgs 9:26-28; 10:22; Ps 107:23; see D. R. Glenn, “Ecclesiastes,” BKCOT, 1002-3). The verse is rendered thus: “Send your grain across the seas, and in time you will get a return” (NEB) or “Trust your goods far and wide at sea, till you get a good return after a while” (Moffatt). 20

Heb “find it.”
11:2 Divide your merchandise among seven or even eight investments, for you do not know what calamity may happen on earth.

11:3 If the clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves on the earth, and whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, the tree will lie wherever it falls.

11:4 He who watches the wind will not sow, and he who observes the clouds will not reap.

11:5 Just as you do not know the path of the wind,

or how the bones form in the womb of a pregnant woman,

so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

11:6 Sow your seed in the morning, and do not stop working until the evening;

for you do not know which activity will succeed—whether this one or that one, or whether both will prosper equally.

Life Should Be Enjoyed Because Death is Inevitable

11:7 Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for a person to see the sun.

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1 sn The phrase “seven or eight” is a graded numerical saying depicting an indefinite plurality: “The collocation of a numeral with the next above it is a rhetorical device employed in numerical sayings to express a number, which need not, or cannot, be more exactly specified. It must be gathered from the context whether such formulae are intended to denote only an insignificant number (e.g., Is 17:6 “two” or at the most “three”) or a considerable number (e.g., Mi 5:4). Sometimes, however, this juxtaposition serves to express merely an indefinite total, without the collateral idea of intensifying the lower by means of the higher number” (GKC 437 §134.5).

Examples: “one” or “two” (Deut 32:30; Jer 3:14; Job 33:14; 40:5; Ps 78:30; Prov 19:23; 30:25; Isa 17:6; Hos 6:2; Amos 4:8; Sir 23:16; 26:28; 50:25); “three” or “four” (Jer 36:23; Amos 1:3-11; Prov 21:19; 30:15, 18; Sir 26:25); “four” or “five” (Isa 17:6); “six” or “seven” (Job 5:19; Prov 6:16); “seven” or “eight” (Mic 5:4; Eccl 11:2).

2 sn The word “investments” is not in the Hebrew text; it is added here for clarity. This line is traditionally understood as an exhortation to be generous to a multitude of people (KJV, NASB, ASV, RSV, NRSV, NJPS); however, it is better taken as shrewd advice to not commit all one’s possessions to a single venture (A. Cohen, The Five Megilloth [SoBB], 181). D. R. Glenn (“Ecclesiastes,” BKCOT, 1003) writes: “In view of the possibility of disaster, a person should make prudent investments in numerous ventures rather than put all his ‘eggs in one basket’ (e.g., Gen 32:9-8 for a practical example of this advice).” See further: “Divide your merchandise among seven ventures, eight maybe” (NEB); “Take shares in several ventures” (Moffatt).

3 sn The phrase you do not know is repeated throughout this section (11:2, 5-6). Human beings are ignorant of the future. This should motivate a person to invest their financial resources wisely (11:1-3) and to work diligently (11:4-6).

4 sn The term מִלָּה (lit. “evil”) refers to calamity (e.g., Eccl 5:13; 7:14; 9:12).

5 sn This proverb criticizes those who are overly cautious. The farmer who waits for the most opportune moment to plant when there is no wind to blow away the seed, and to reap when there is no rain to ruin a ripe harvest, will never do anything but sit around waiting for the right moment.

6 sn Heb “what is the way of the wind.” Some take these words with the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman.” There is debate whether המ‐דרך hanakah (mah‐derek hanakah) refers to the wind (“the path of the wind”) or the human spirit of a child in the mother’s womb (“how the spirit comes”). The LXX understood it as the wind: “the way of the wind” (ἡ ὁδὸς τοῦ πνεύματος, ἡ ὁδὸς τοῦ πνεύματος), however, the Targum and Vulgate take it as the human spirit. The English versions are divided:

(1) spirit: “the way of the spirit” (KJV, YLT, Douay); “the breath of life” (NAB); “how a pregnant woman comes to have...a living spirit in her womb” (NEB); “how the lifebreath passes into the limbs within the womb of the pregnant woman” (NJPSS); “how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child” (RSV); “how the breath comes to the bones in the mother’s womb” (NRSV); and (2) wind: “the way of the wind” (ASV, RSV margin); “the path of the wind” (NASB, NIV); and “how the wind blows” (MLB, Moffatt).

7 sn The term “form” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

8 tn Heb “the one who is full.” The feminine adjective נְכַלָּה (nikele, from נָכַל, male, “full”) is used as a substantive referring to a pregnant woman whose womb is filled with her infant (HALOT 584 s.v. נכת; BDB 571 s.v. נכת). This term is used in reference to a pregnant woman in later Hebrew (HALOT 584 s.v. נכת). The LXX understood the term in this sense: κυρώθκουμάς (kyrouthkoumas, “pregnant woman”).

9 sn Heb “do not let your hand rest.” The Hebrew phrase do not let your hand rest is an idiom that means “do not stop working” or “do not be idle” (e.g., Eccl 7:18); cf. BDB 628 s.v. מִשְׁרַפָּה, Mishpah, 628. Several English versions capture the sense of the idiom well: “do not stop working” (NEB); “do not be idle” (MLB); “let not your hand be idle” (NAB); “let not your hands be idle” (NIV); “stay not your hand” (Moffatt). The term “hand” is a synecdoche of part (i.e., do not let your hand rest) for the whole person (i.e., do not allow yourself to stop working).

10 sn The terms “morning” (רעה, boger) and “evening” (רעה עָרִים, ‘even) form a merism (a figure of speech using two polar extremes to include everything in between) that connotes “from morning until evening.” The point is not that the farmer should plant at two times in the day (morning and evening), but that he should plant all day long (from morning until evening). This merism is reflected in several translations: “in the morning...until evening” (NEB, Moffatt).

11 sn The term “activity” does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity and smoothness.

12 sn The verb רקח (kasher, “to prosper”) is used mononymically to denote will succeed. In 11:10, it means “skill in work.”

13 sn Or “together.”

14 sn The term “light” (םָשָׂך, ‘or) is used figuratively (metonymy of association) in reference to “life” (e.g., Job 3:20; 33:30; Ps 56:14 HT [56:13 ET]). By contrast, death is described as darkness (e.g., Eccl 11:8; 12:6-7).

15 sn The Hebrew term מִזִּיז (ma’oz, “sweet”) is often used elsewhere in reference to honey. The point is that life is sweet and should be savored like honey.

16 sn Heb “to the eyes.” The term “eyes” is a synecdoche of part (i.e., eyes) for the whole person. Used with the idiom “to see the sun” (i.e., to be alive), Qoheleth is simply saying that the experience of a life is a pleasant thing that should be savored.

17 sn The expression “to see the sun” (both מְיֹּסֵךְ, ra’ah hashamayim, and מְיֹּסֵךְ, ra’ah hashamayim) is an idiom meaning “to be alive” (e.g., Ps 58:8; Eccl 6:5; 7:11; 11:7); cf. BDB 1039 s.v. מִזִּיז 4b. The opposite idiom is the sun is darkened, refers to the onset of old age and death (Eccl 12:2).
11:8 So, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all, but let him remember that the days of darkness 5 will be many — all that is about to come is obscure. 2

Enjoy Life to the Fullest under the Fear of God

11:9 Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the impulses 4 of your heart and the desires 5 of your eyes, but know that God will judge your motives and actions.

11:10 Banish 7 emotional stress 8 from your mind and put away pain 10 from your body; 11

for youth 12 and the prime of life 13 are fleeting. 14

Fear God Now Because Old Age and Death Come Quickly

12:1 So remember 15 your Creator in the days of your youth — before 16 the difficult 17 days come, and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”; 18 before the sun and the light 19 of the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds disappear 21 after the rain;

1 tn The phrase “the days of darkness” refers to the onset of old age (Ecc 12:1-5) and the inevitable experience of death (Ecc 13:1-7; 12:6-7). Elsewhere, “darkness” is a figure of speech (metonymy of association) for death (Job 10:21-22; 17:13-18:18).

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

3 tn Heb “in your youth”; or “in your childhood.”

4 tn Heb “walk in the ways of your heart.”

5 tn Heb “the sight.”

6 tn Heb “and know that concerning all these God will bring you into judgment.” The point is not that following one’s impulses and desires is inherently bad and will bring condemnation from God. Rather the point seems to be: As you follow your impulses and desires, realize that all you think and do will eventually be evaluated by God. So one must seek joy within the boundaries of God’s moral standards.

7 tn The verb רָעָה (ra, “to remove”) normally depicts a concrete action of removing a physical object from someone’s presence (HALOT 748 s.v. רָעָה 1). Here, it is used figuratively (hypocatastasis) of the emotional/psychological action of banishing unnecessary emotional stress from one’s mind. The Hiphil usage means “to remove; to abolish; to keep away; to turn away; to push aside” (HALOT 748 s.v. 1). The English versions render this term in a variety of ways, none of which is very poetic: “remove” (KJV, RSV, ASV, NASB); “turn aside” (YLT); “ward off” (NAB); and “banish” (NEB, MLB, NIV, NRSV, NUP, Moffatt).

8 tn The root וָקָעַת (qaw, “to remove”) has a broad range of meanings: “anger” (Deut 4:25; 9:18); “irritation” (Deut 32:21); “offend” (2 Kgs 23:26; Neh 3:37 HT [4:5 ET]); “ vexation” or “frustration” (Ezek 20:28); “grief” (1 Sam 1:6), and “worry” (Ps 112:10; Eccl 7:9); cf. HALOT 491 s.v. וָקָעַת. Here, it refers in general to unnecessary emotional stress and anxiety that can deprive a person of the legitimate enjoyment of life and its temporal benefits.

9 tn Heb “your heart.”

10 tn In light of the parallelism, רָעָה (ra’ah) does not refer to ethical evil, but to physical injury, pain, deprivation or suffering (e.g., Deut 31:17; 21; 32:23; 1 Sam 10:19; Neh 1:3; 2:17; Pss 34:20; 40:13; 88:4; 107:26; Eccl 12:1; Jer 2:27; Lam 3:38); see HALOT 1263 s.v. רָעָה 4.b; BDB 949 s.v. רָעָה 2. This sense of רָעָה (ra’ah) as “the troubles of your body” (NAB, NIV, rather than “evil” (KV, ASV, YLT, Douay) or “sorrow” (NUP), is supported by the phrase “suffering (e.g., Deut 31:17, 21; 32:23; 1 Sam 10:19; Neh 1:3; 2:17; Pss 34:20; 40:13; 88:4; 107:26; Eccl 12:1; Jer 2:27; Lam 3:38); see HALOT 1263 s.v. רָעָה 4.b; BDB 949 s.v. רָעָה 2.

11 tn Heb “your flesh.”
ECCLESIASTES 12:3

12:3 when those who keep watch over the house begin to tremble, and the virile men begin to stoop over, and the grinders begin to cease because they grow few, and those who look through the windows grow dim.

12:4 and the doors along the street are shut; when the sound of the grinding mill grows low, and one is awakened by the sound of a bird, and all their songs grow faint.

12:5 and they are afraid of heights and the dangers in the street; the almond blossoms grow white, because every little sound awakens him in the middle of the night; the elderly person is unable to get a full night’s sleep in the morning (e.g., Gen 24:54; Judg 16:3; Ruth 3:14; Neh 5:17); see HALOT 687 s.v. דבש (or דבש); or הזרת; or "bitterness") which is followed by the Syriac. On the other hand, Aquila’s and were “enjoyed,” of fruits) reflects its meaning: the noun מָלָא (HALOT 374 s.v. טחנת) means “a grinding mill” or “a millstone” (HALOT 374 s.v. טחנת).

12:7 ἐν σταθμῷ πόλεως that refers to the musical songs sung during the onset of old age because every little sound awakens him in the middle of the night; the elderly person is unable to get a full night’s sleep in the morning (e.g., Gen 24:54; Judg 16:3; Ruth 3:14; Neh 5:17); see HALOT 687 s.v. דבש (or דבש); or הזרת; or "bitterness") which is followed by the Syriac. On the other hand, Aquila’s and were “enjoyed,” of fruits) reflects its meaning: the noun מָלָא (HALOT 374 s.v. טחנת) means “a grinding mill” or “a millstone” (HALOT 374 s.v. טחנת).

12:8 Hebrew noun מַעַלָּה (HALOT 368 s.v. הקטנה). The reduplication of the noun stem intensifies its meaning; the noun מַעַלָּה (Mishnaic, "terror") means "terror," so the intensified reduplicated form מַעַלָּה (khatkhatim) connotes something like "greatest terror" (see S. Moscati, Comparative Grammar, 78-79, §12.9-13). The plural form מַעַלָּה ("great terrors") denotes plural of number (more than one) or plural of intensity (which would further intensify the experience of fear); see IBHS 74.3.3a.

12:9 The noun מַעַלָּה (shaqu) is used in the OT in reference to the “almighty nut” (e.g., Gen 43:11; Num 15:23 HT [17:8] and metaphorically (as a thing producing for it) for the “almighty tree” (e.g., Job 1:11); cf. HALOT 1638 s.v. דבש; BDB 1052 s.v. טחנת.

12:10 The verb מַעַלָּה (shaqu) means "to blossom") is a gerundive (II = III) that, in this case, is written with a matres lectionis (pne spelling) rather than the normal spelling of מַעַלָּה (GKC 204 §73.g). The Hiphil verb מַעַלָּה (šanahu) is from the root מַעַלָּה ("to be broken down") which is followed by the Syriac. On the other hand, Aquila’s and were “enjoyed,” of fruits) reflects its meaning: the noun מָלָא (HALOT 374 s.v. טחנת) means “a grinding mill” or “a millstone” (HALOT 374 s.v. טחנת).

12:11 Hebrew noun מַעַלָּה (HALOT 368 s.v. הקטנה). The reduplication of the noun stem intensifies its meaning; the noun מַעַלָּה (Mishnaic, "terror") means "terror," so the intensified reduplicated form מַעַלָּה (khatkhatim) connotes something like "greatest terror" (see S. Moscati, Comparative Grammar, 78-79, §12.9-13). The plural form מַעַלָּה ("great terrors") denotes plural of number (more than one) or plural of intensity (which would further intensify the experience of fear); see IBHS 74.3.3a.

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12:16 The noun מַעַלָּה (shaqu) is used in the OT in reference to the “almighty nut” (e.g., Gen 43:11; Num 15:23 HT [17:8] and metaphorically (as a thing producing for it) for the “almighty tree” (e.g., Job 1:11); cf. HALOT 1638 s.v. דבש; BDB 1052 s.v. טחנת.

12:17 The MT vocalizes consonantal מַעַלָּה as רְפָא ("rufa, conjunction + Hiphil imperfect 3rd person feminine singular from רָפָא, parar, "to burst"). However, an alternate vocalization tradition of מַעַלָּה ("rufa, conjunction + Hiphil imperfect 3rd person feminine singular "to be broken down") is reflected in the LXX which reads καὶ ἐμφασίζει (kai diaske, "is broken up") and Syriac, "is broken up") which is followed by the Syriac. On the other hand, Aquila’s and were “enjoyed,” of fruits) reflects its meaning: the noun מָלָא (HALOT 374 s.v. טחנת) means “a grinding mill” or “a millstone” (HALOT 374 s.v. טחנת).

12:18 In the construct phrase מַעַלָּה (bet olam, “house of his eternity”), the genitive מַעַיְשָׁה ("eternity") functions as an attributive adjective: “his eternal home.” This is an idiom for the grave as the resting place of the body (e.g., Ps 49:12 [11]; Job 7:9; 14:10-12; Ecc 12:5) or Sheol as the residence of the departed (e.g., Job 17:9; 30:23); see HALOT 124 s.v. בֵּית; BDB 799 s.v. בֵּית; BDB 830 s.v. בֵּית.

12:19 The same idiom appears in postbiblical Hebrew: “the house of eternity” (תִּשְׁדַּח תִּשְׁדַּח, bet olam) is an euphemism for a
and the mourners go about in the streets—
12:6 before the silver cord is removed,
or the golden bowl is broken,
or the pitcher is shattered at the well,1
or the water wheel2 is broken at the cistern—
12:7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was,
and the life’s breath3 returns to God who gave it.

Concluding Refrain: Qoheleth Restates His Thesis

12:8 “Absolutely futile!” laments the Teacher.

“All of these things4 are futile!”7

burial ground or cemetery (e.g., Lamentations Rabbah 1:5); see Jastrow 1084-85 s.v. תָּכֻב III. This idiom is also found in a Moabite text in reference to the grave (Deir Alla Inscription 2:6). A similar idiom is found in Phoenician and Palaic in reference to the grave (DBOS 35). That idiom appears to have originated in Egyptian literature (H. A. Hoffner, TDOT 2:2113). See F. Cumont, Afterlife in Roman Paganism, 48-50.

1 tn Heb “water-spring.”

2 tn The term גַּלְגַּל (galgal, “wheel”) refers to the “water wheel” or “paddle wheel” for drawing water from a well (HALOT 190 s.v. גַּלְגַּל; 2: BDB 165 s.v. גַּלִּי 1.b). This Hebrew noun is related to the Akkadian term gugallu (“pot”), as well as Phoenician (בַּלבָּל) for drawing water.” The Latin term girgillus (“lever for the bucket”) is a late derivation from this term. See G. Dalman, Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina, 190 s.v. I.

3 tn Or “spirit.” The likely referent is the life’s breath that originates with God. See Eccl 3:19, as well as Gen 2:7; 6:17; 7:2; 8:17; 9:2; 11:10; 12:1; 50:23.

4 tn Heb “futility of futilities.” The phrase “absolutely futile” (קֹהֶלֶת הֲבֶל הֲבָלִים, havel havelam) is a superlative genitive construction (GKC 431 §133.i). See note on “futile” at 1:2.

5 tn Elsewhere in the book, the author is identified with the anarthrous term קֹהֶלֶת (Qoheleth, Eccl 1:1; 2, 12; 7:27; 12:9, 10); however, in 12:8 it is used with the article, indicating that it is a professional title rather than a personal surname:

6 tn The Five Megilloth

7 tn The term הֶבֶל (hevel, “futile”) is repeated three times within the six words of this verse for emphasis. See footnote on “futile” at 1:2.

8 sn Absolutely futile!...All of these things are futile! This motif is the theme of the book. Its occurs at the beginning (1:2) and ends of the book (12:8), forming a die-thesis (closus). Everything described in 1.2—12.8 is the supporting proof of the thesis of 1:2. With few exceptions (e.g., 2:24-26; 3:14-15; 11:9–12:1, 9), everything described in 1.2—12:8 is characterized as “futile” (רָע, hevel).

9 tn Heb “he weighed and studied.” The verbs רָע (‘rss, hevqiqah, “he weighed and he explored”) form a heavy-diads (a figurative expression in which two separate terms used in combination to convey a single idea): “he studiously weighed” or “carefully evaluated.” The verb רָע (conjunction + Piel perfect 3rd person masculine singular from לְגָנָה [laganna], “to weigh; to balance”) is related to the noun רָע (masc. acc. singular perfect passive participle): “balances; scales” used for weighing money or commercial items (e.g., Jer 32:10; Ezek 5:1). This is the only use of the verb in the OT. In this context, it means “to weigh” = “to test; to prove” (BDB 244 s.v. רָע) or “to balance” (HALOT 27 II b). Cohen suggests, “He made an examination of the large number of proverbial sayings which had been composed, testing their truth and weighing their value so as to select those deserving of circulation” (A. Cohen, The Five Megillot [SoBB], 189).

10 tn The verb רָע (laganna, “to make straight”) connotes “to put straight” or “to arrange in order” (HALOT 1784 s.v. רָע; BDB 1075 s.v. רָע). This may refer to Qoheleth’s activity in compiling a collection of wisdom sayings in an orderly manner, or writing the wisdom sayings in a straightforward, direct manner.

11 tn In the construct phrase מַאֲזַנְנָה (maaznah, “words of delight”) the noun מַאֲזַנְנָה (maaznah, “delight”) functions as an attributive genitive (“delightful words”) or a genitive of estimation or worth, or “words viewed as delightful by Qoheleth” or “words that he took delight in.” For another example of a genitive of estimation of worth, see בָּרוּךְ רֵאָּמְנָה (bora’amnah, “sacri- fices viewed as good, well” [Ps 51:19]). In other words, Qoheleth wrote his proverbs so effectively that he was able to take moral and aesthetic delight in his words.

12 tc The consonantal form בִּרְכָּת has been revalorized in three ways: (1) The Masoretes read בְּרֵכָת (‘brkat, conjunction + Qal passive participles ms from בָּכָת, baktav, “to write”): “Qoheleth sought to find pleasant words, what was written up- rightly, namely, words of truth.” This is supported by the LXX’s καὶ γεγραμμένον (kai gegrammenon, conjunction + masculine accusative singular passive perfect participle from γραφέω, graphé, “to write”). (2) The BHS editors suggest the vocalization בְּרֵכָת (‘brkat, conjunction + Qal infinitive absolute, the infinitive perfect בָּרָכָה (“and to write” in the B-line would parallel the infinitive of purpose בְּרָכָה, “to bless”), to find”) in the A-line. "Qoheleth sought to find pleasant words, that which was written was upright, even words of truth." (3) Several medieval Hebrew mss preserve an alternate textual tradition of בִּרְכָּת (‘brkat, conjunction + Qal perfect 3rd person masculine singular), This is reflected in the Greek versions (Aquila and Symmachus), Syriac Peshitta and Vulgate. The major English versions are divided among these three textual options: (1) בָּרָכָה (Qal passive participle) and that which was written was upright, even words of truth (KJV); “and which was written uprightly, even words of truth” (ASV); “and, written by the upright, words
12:11 The words of the sages are like prods, and the collected sayings are like firmly fixed nails; they are given by one shepherd.

12:12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

There is no end to the making of many books, and much study is exhausting to the body.

12:13 Having heard everything, I have reached this conclusion:

Fear and keep his commandments, because this is the whole duty of man.

12:14 For God will evaluate every deed, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

sn The exhortation may be understood in two ways: (1) to avoid any so-called wisdom sayings beyond those mentioned in vv. 10–11: “The words of the wise...are given from one shepherd. And of anything beyond these, my son, be warned!” (see RSV, NRSV, NAB, Douay, NIV). This is paraphrased well by Moffatt: “My son, avoid anything beyond the scriptures of wisdom” (Moffatt). (2) The exhortation refers to the concerns of v. 12b, namely, diligent study is wearisome, i.e., “Furthermore, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of books, and much study is wearisome to the body” (see NEB, ASV, NASB, MLB).

The verb וְכָתַב (Qal perfect 3rd person masculine singular): “to write” (YLT); “and to write down words of truth” (NASB); “and to write correctly the reliable words of truth” (MLB); “and he recorded genuinely truthful sayings” (NJPS). The editors of the Jerusalem Hebrew Bible project favor וְכָתוֹב (Qal perfect 3rd person masculine singular): “and uprightly he wrote words of truth” (RSV); “and he wrote words of truth plainly” (NRSV); “even as he put down plainly what was true” (Moffatt); “and he wrote words most right, and full of truth” (Douay); and “and he recorded genuinely truthful sayings” (NJPS). The editors of the Jerusalem Hebrew Bible project favor וְכָתַב (Qal perfect 3rd person masculine singular): “and to write” (option 2): see D. Barthélemy, ed., Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, 3:596–97.

tn The construct phrase מֵאֵשׁ אֱמֶת (‘aysh ’emet, “words of truth”) is a genitive of content (“words containing truth”) or an attributive genitive (“truthful words”). Depending upon the vocalization of אֱמֶת, the phrase functions in one of two ways: (1) as direct object of מָדוֹן (‘adon) “and he accurately wrote truthful words”; or (2) in apposition to מָדוֹן (‘adon) “and what is written uprightly, namely, truthful words.”

Or “goads”; NCV “sharp sticks used to guide animals.” For further information see M. A. Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 29–32.