

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1.1 The repetition and significance of the sun imagery in Qohelet

In the book of Qohelet, the word **שמש(ה)** appears no less than *thirty five* times. These references to the sun - i.e. the "sun imagery" - occur mostly in the oft-repeated phrase "תחת השמש" (i.e. "under the sun"). This phrase is the most recurrent of all Qohelet's phrases and is repeated almost *thirty* times in the book's twelve chapters. Since the book only contains 222 verses, this implies an average occurrence of once for every seven verses written!

For some mysterious reason, Qohelet seems obsessed with reminding the reader that all his observations pertain to what happens in a domain he designates as "תחת השמש". A concordance of the texts with reference to the explicit sun imagery in Qohelet will demonstrate its pervasiveness and significance in the author's discourse:

מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש

"What profit does one have for all the toil with which one toils 'UNDER THE SUN'?" (1:3)¹

וזרח השמש ובא השמש ואל מקמו שואף זורח הוא שם

"THE SUN rises and THE SUN sets; to its place it pants, there to rise." (1:5)

מה שהיה הוא שיהיה ... ואין כל חדש תחת השמש

"What has been is what will be... there is nothing new 'UNDER THE SUN'." (1:9)

ונתתי את לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה כל אשר נעשה תחת השמים

"I gave my heart to seek out and probe in wisdom all that is done under the heavens / (SUN?)"² (1:13).

ראיתי את כל המעשים שנעשו תחת השמש והנה הכל הבל

"I saw all the deeds that were done 'UNDER THE SUN' and look: all is 'vapour'..." (1:14)

עוד אשר אראה אי זה טוב לבני האדם אשר יעשו תחת השמים

¹ Emphasis mine.

² All the textual witnesses (i.e. the Septuagint, the Peshitta, the Vulgate, etc.) contain the phrase "under the sun" as opposed to the MT's "under the heavens". That this is not merely an attempt at harmonisation can be seen with regard to translations of the text in 3:1 where, following the MT, all the other textual witnesses attest the variant phrase "under the heavens".

"...until I see what is good for the sons of man to do under the heavens / sun..." (2:3)

...ופניתי אני בכל מעשה שעשו ידי ובעמל שעמלתי לעשות...ואין יתרון תחת השמש

"Then I turned to all my handiwork...I had so actively toiled for...there is no profit 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (2:11)

...ושנאתי את חיים כי רע עלי המעשה שנעשה תחת השמש

"So I hated life, because whatever happens 'UNDER THE SUN' was evil for me." (2:17)

שנאתי אני את כל עמלי שאני עמל תחת השמש

"I hated the fruit of the toil for which I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN' because I have to leave it to the one who will come after me..." (2:18)

ומי יודע החכם או סכל וישלט בכל עמלי שעמלתי וחכמתי תחת השמש

"But who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will control all the fruit of the toil for which I toiled 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (2:19)

אני ליאש את לבי על כל העמל שעמלי תחת השמש

"I turned to heartfelt despair over all the toil with which I had toiled 'UNDER THE SUN'." (2:20)

כי מה הוא לאדם בכל עמלו וברעיון לבו שהוא עמל תחת השמש

"For what does one get for all the toil, and the striving of heart, with which one toils 'UNDER THE SUN'?" (2:22)

לכל זמן ועת לכל חפץ תחת השמים

"For everything there is a moment and there is a time for every affair under the heavens / SUN?" (3:1)

ועד ראיתי תחת השמש מקום משפת שמה הרשע ומקום צדק שמה הרשע

"I observed continually 'UNDER THE SUN':in the place of judgement, there was wrongdoing and in the place for justice, there was wrongdoing!" (3:16)

ושכתי אני וראיתי את כל העשקים אשר נעשם תחת השמש והנה דמעת העשקים ואין להם מגנחם ומיד עשקיהם כת ואין להם מגנחם

"Again I saw all the oppressions that were done 'UNDER THE SUN' and, oh, the tears of the oppressed, but there was no one to give them comfort. On the side of their oppressors there was power, but there was no one to give them comfort!" (4:1)

וטוב משניהם אשר עדן לא היה אשר לא ראה את המעשה הרע אשר נעשה תחת השמש

"Better than both: the one who has never lived, who has never seen the evil work that is done 'UNDER THE SUN'." (4:3)

ושבתי ואראה הבל תחת השמש

"Again I saw a vapour 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (4:7)

...ראיתי את כל חיים המהלכם תחת השמש עם הילד השני אשר יעמד תחתיו

"...I saw all the living who move about 'UNDER THE SUN', on the side of the second youth who will succeed him..." (4:15)

יש רעה חולה ראיתי תחת השמש עשר שמור לבעליו לרעתו

"There is a grievous evil, which I have seen 'UNDER THE SUN': wealth kept by the owner to his own hurt..." (5:12)

הנה אשר ראיתי אני טוב אשר יפה לאכול ולשתות ולראות טובה בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש
משפר ימי חיו אשר נתן לו האלהים

"This is what I have seen as good, as beautiful: to eat and to drink and to prosper for all the toil that one must toil 'UNDER THE SUN' in the limited life that God gives..." (5:17)

יש רעה אשר ראיתי תחת השמש ורבה היא על האדם...

"There is an evil I have seen 'UNDER THE SUN' and it is grievous for humans..." (6:1)

...גם שמש לא ראה ולא ידע נחת לזה מזה...

"...though it sees not SUN nor knows anything, it has more rest than he..." (6:5)

...אשר מי יגיד לאדם מה יהיה אחריו תחת השמש

"...for who can tell them what will come after them 'UNDER THE SUN'?" (6:12)

...תובה חכמה עם נחלה ויותר לראי השמש

"...wisdom is as good with an inheritance and profitable for those who see THE SUN..." (7:11)

את כל זה ראיתי ונתון את לבי לכל מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש עת אשר שלט האדם באדם
לרע לו

"All this I have seen and I have given my heart to every deed that is done 'UNDER THE SUN' when one person has power over another so as to harm him..." (8:9).

יש הבל אשר נעשה על הערץ אשר יש צדקים אשר מגיע כמעשה הרשעם ויש רשעם שמגיע
אלהם כמעשה הצדקים

"There is a vapour that is done on the earth / 'UNDER THE SUN': there are just who are treated as

if they acted wickedly and wicked who are treated as if they acted justly..." (8:14)

...אשר אין טוב לאדם תחת השמש כי אם לאכל ולשתות ולשמוח...

"...there is nothing better for a human 'UNDER THE SUN' than to eat and drink and be happy..." (8:15)

...והוא ילוננו בעמלו ימי חייו אשר נתן לו האלהים תחת השמש

"This can be his portion for his toil during the days of his life that God gives him 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (8:15)

וראיתי את כל מעשה האלהים לא כי יוכל האדם למצוא את המעשה אשר נעשה תחת שמש
בשל אשר יעמל האדם לבקש ולא ימצא וגם אם יאמר החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא

"I looked at all the work of God: no one can find out what is done 'UNDER THE SUN'; therefore humans searched hard, but no one can find out; and even if the wise man says he knows, he cannot find out." (8:17)

זה רע בכל אשר נעשה תחת השמש כי מקרה אחד לכל...

"This is the evil in all that is done 'UNDER THE SUN': there is the same fate for all..." (9:3)

גם אהבתם גם שנאתם גם קנאתם כבר אבדה וחלק אין להם עוד לעולם בכל אשר נעשה תחת
השמש

"Their love, their hate, their jealousy are long gone, and they have no portion ever again in all that is done 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:6)

ראה חיים אם אשה אשר אהבת כל ימי חיי הבלך אשר נתן לך תחת השמש...

"Enjoy life with a wife whom you love all the days of the vain life that you are given 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:9)

...כי הוא חלקך בחיים ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל תחת השמש...

"... for that is your portion in life, and for the toil with which you toil 'UNDER THE SUN'..." (9:9)

שבתי וראה תחת השמש כי לא לקלים המרוץ ולא לגברים המלחמה וגם לא לחכמים לחם...

"Again I saw 'UNDER THE SUN' that the swift do not win the race, nor the strong the battle, nor do the wise have bread..." (9:11)

גם זה ראיתי חכמה תחת השמש וחדולה היא אלי...

"This I also observed 'UNDER THE SUN': (an example of) wisdom which seemed great to me:..." (9:13)

יש רע ראיתי תחת השמש כשגגה שיצא לפני השליט...

“There is an evil that I have seen ‘UNDER THE SUN’, the kind of error made by one who wields power:...” (10:5)

...ומתוק האור וטוב לעינים לראות את השמש...ויזכר את ימי החשך כי הרבה יהיו...

Sweet is the light and pleasant it is for the eyes to see THE SUN...but remember that the days of darkness will be many... (11:7)

...עד אשר לא תחשך השמש...

“...before the darkening of THE SUN...” (12:2)

All these texts are, furthermore, only examples of the *explicit* occurrence of sun imagery (S.I.) in Qohelet. There appear to be many other instances where the imagery appears to feature *implicitly*. For instance, in 2:1 – 10, king Qohelet describes all his efforts to attain wisdom via pleasure and he does not once employ the phrase “תחת השמש”. However, closer scrutiny reveals that the sun imagery was *implicit* all along. Afterwards, in a summary of this section in 2:11, Qohelet refers to all these endeavours as his “עמל תחת השמש”. To be sure, virtually the entire book consists of a reflection or discussion of what Qohelet observes “תחת השמש”.

The phrase “תחת השמש”, as traditionally interpreted, provides an answer to the question: “WHERE?”. Qohelet seems to feel the need to constantly remind his readers of *where* he observed certain phenomena and scenarios. If we asked *what* it was that concerned Qohelet in the sub solar domain, certain specific issues seem to feature on his agenda: justice, knowledge, wisdom, toil, times, the king, evil, life, death, God, order, etc. In addition, the domain designated as “תחת השמש” is littered with scenarios that promote negativity with regard to these issues. This negativity can be expressed in the following manner:

WHAT?.....	WHERE?
• Injustice.....	Under the sun
• Ignorance.....	Under the sun
• Impotent wisdom.....	Under the sun
• Miserable toil.....	Under the sun
• Unpredictable appointed times.....	Under the sun
• Unsatisfied, pitiful kings.....	Under the sun
• Lamentable evil.....	Under the sun
• Ephemeral and unfair life.....	Under the sun
• Certainty and finality of death.....	Under the sun
• A distant, inscrutable and judging God.....	Under the sun
• A mysterious lamentable and unchangeable order.....	Under the sun

In addition, the following question may be asked:

What, from the broad perspective of all Ancient Near Eastern religious discourse, is the significance of the combined answers to the aforementioned “WHAT?” and “WHERE?” questions?

1.1.2 The problem of ambiguity

Prima facie, the phrase “תחת השמש” appears straightforward and clear in terms of its supposed meaning. “תחת” means “under” and “השמש” means “the sun”. “Under” + “the sun” = “under the sun.” How simple can it be? Unfortunately, matters are not quite *that* simple. According to all the Hebrew dictionaries of the OT, the word “תחת” is *polysemous* and can exhibit any of the following meanings depending on the context in which it occurs:

- 1) **Instead of** (cf. Gen. 4:25; 22:13; Lev. 14:42)
- 2) **Under** [spatially] (cf. Gen. 1:7; 6:17; 7:19; Deut. 4:18)
- 3) **Under** [rank, status, authority, rule] (cf. 1 Chron. 29:24)
- 4) **In the possession of** (cf. Ezek. 23:5)
- 5) **In exchange for** (cf. Gen. 30:15)
- 6) **In the place of** [as substitute for] (cf. Lev. 14:42)
- 7) **As / like** (cf. Job 34:26)
- 8) **In the place of** [location] (cf. 2 Sam. 2:23; 19:13)

Traditionally, it has always been assumed that the word “תחת” means “under” in the sense of having no more than spatial reference (cf. no. 2 above). But is this correct? With regard to the context in which the word occurs in Qohelet, are any of the other meanings applicable? Have anyone ever bothered with this basic preliminary exegetical question?

While the word “השמש” usually denotes the physical sun, it is also *ambiguous* in the sense that, in ANE religious discourse, it exhibits multiple **associative references**. In other words, the word “השמש” can theoretically refer to one or more of the following:

- 1) **The sun as star** (*natural* associative reference)
- 2) **The sun as icon or representation of a solar deity** (*mythological* associative reference)
- 3) **The sun as symbol** (*symbolical* associative reference)

Hitherto, only the first of the three possible associative references exhibited by the word “השמש” have been considered as *ipso facto* applicable to Qohelet’s solar imagery. To be sure, *prima facie*, this interpretation of the sun imagery does seem to be correct. However, has anyone ever wondered whether it is possible that Qohelet could have been using the word “השמש” *ambiguously*? Is it possible that the *mythological* or *symbolical associative reference(s)* exhibited by “השמש” might be alluded to in some of Qohelet’s numerous references to the sun? Could experimentation with the hitherto unconsidered associative referential possibilities of the word “השמש” perhaps account for Qohelet’s obsession with the sun imagery – sun imagery that is used in combination with certain particular themes and a rather peculiar theology?

1.2 TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUNCTION OF THE PHRASE "תחת השמש" IN QOHELET

1.2.1 Introduction

From the earliest known history of exegesis - which unfortunately only dates back to the beginning of the Christian era - the peculiarity and possible significance of the phrase "תחת השמש" were certainly recognised by many interpreters (cf. Murphy 1992:liv). In both Jewish and Christian interpretations, the phrase "תחת השמש" came to be seen as a means of justifying a *geographical-apologetical* interpretation of the sun imagery in the book. It seems to have been popular amongst the early Rabbis and Church Fathers to claim that the function of the phrase "תחת השמש" was to communicate the idea that, "under the sun" everything is הבל, but elsewhere - in heaven / in the spiritual realm / in the afterlife / in the new creation - all is not הבל³ (cf. Holm-Nielsen 1974:168-177).

For example, consider the following statements:

Rab. Judah, son of R. Sameul b. Shilath said in Rab's name: "The sages wish to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes, because its words are self contradictory, yet why did they not hide it? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching, as it is written, *What profit hath man for all his labour wherein he laboreth 'UNDER THE SUN'?* And the School of R. Jannai commented: *'UNDER THE SUN' he has none, but he has it (sc. profit) "before" the sun.*

and:

R. Huna and R. Aha said in the name of R. Hifai: A man's labour is 'UNDER THE SUN' but his reward is above the sun.⁴ R. Judah said: 'UNDER THE SUN' he has no profit but he has it above the sun.⁵

Any student of the history of interpretation will know that there has always been a need to recreate Qohelet's message in the image of contemporary orthodox theology. This has been the case throughout the history of interpretation (cf. Murphy 1992:xlviii-iv). However, a paradigm shift in the interpretation of the OT - and also Qohelet - was initiated as a result of several developments:

- The rise of the historical criticism in the eighteenth century;⁶
- The enormous amount of new data becoming available, following the discovery of Ancient Near Eastern texts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries;

From these developments two mutually exclusive views emerged as far as the

³ "Vapour" is the root meaning of the word "הבל" which Qohelet employs 38 times in the book (cf. Fox 1999:27). While this word is notorious for its elusive semantic qualities and has been rendered in a variety of ways by scholars, my choice for the retention of the root meaning shall be justified later on in this study. In the meantime I shall continue to translate הבל as "vapour" except in those cases where I shall be quoting other interpreters who chose a different rendering.

⁴ I.e. his reward is in heaven, in the afterlife.

⁵ I.e. "under the sun" - i.e. for worldly striving - he has no profit vs. "above the sun" - i.e. for religious striving - he has profit.

⁶ Though the history of research traces the roots of historical criticism back to the Reformation and sometimes even to earlier interpreters, it was only after the Enlightenment that it really started to gain momentum (cf. Teeple 1992:passim).

interpretation of the meaning and function of the “sun imagery” in Qohelet was concerned (cf. Fox 1999:165).

1.2.2 The conservative interpretation: restrictive and apologetical

The **conservative interpretation** falls back on Qohelet’s repetitive use of the phrase “תחת השמש” to argue that the book’s message is not unorthodox at all. Rather, it is actually *apologetical* in essence. It was purportedly written by Solomon himself in order to show how life *without* God (i.e. “under the sun”) is meaningless. This reading is motivated by the conservative presumption that, as part of inspired scripture, Qohelet’s message must be consistent with evangelical Christian theology or orthodox Jewish teaching. The “sun imagery” in the book is believed to be indicative of a spiritual / geographical⁷ dualism. Its function is seen as designative of a deliberate restriction of perspective by the author to show the vanity of a *secular* worldview. The phrase “תחת השמש” is thus interpreted as having a **restrictive** function: “*under the sun*” all is **הבל** - but *above the sun*, with God, it is not such (cf. Archer 1968:22; Ogden 1987:17).

1.2.3 The critical interpretation: inclusive and geographical / existential

In general, **critical interpretations** refrain from trying to harmonise Qohelet’s unorthodox claims with popular Christian theology. Here one finds attempts to read the author’s words against the background of its supposed original historical context. In this regard, the phrase “תחת השמש” is usually interpreted as being little more than a geographical locative.⁸ The phrase is not interpreted as having any *polemical* function. It certainly does not imply a spiritual-existential dichotomy between the extremes of theistic faith and atheistic secularism. Rather, in critical readings, “תחת השמש” is perceived to be a typical spatio-temporal designator depicting a universal state of affairs. Its function is thus **inclusive**: “under the sun” - i.e. everywhere on earth - all is **הבל** (cf. Fox 1989:177, 1999; Gordis 1968:27; Scott 1965:88).

1.3 PROBLEMS RELATED TO CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PHRASE “תחת השמש” IN QOHELET

1.3.1 The conservative interpretation

This reading is untenable for several reasons. In viewing Qohelet as an unsung hero of evangelical theology, it completely misses the point of author’s dilemma. The idea that Qohelet plays the role of a hypothetical atheist seems to be a distortion of the author’s message to the point of saying the exact opposite that he intended to say. To be sure, Qohelet’s problem is not that life *without* God is **הבל**. His whole consternation results from the fact that everything seems to be **הבל** *in spite of* - or *because of* - God’s sovereignty and inscrutability. The conservative interpretation is marked by a great deal

⁷ By the term “geographical” (in terms of reference) I mean to indicate that these interpretations take the word “sun” in Qohelet as having reference only to the “sun” as a heavenly body / astrophysical phenomenon. The phrase “under the sun” is thus understood to be little more than a spatio - temporal designator.

⁸ Some critical interpreters do consider the reference of “under the sun” to include an existential element (cf. Scott 1965; Murphy 1992; and cf. Chapter 3 in this study for a more elaborated discussion of contemporary interpretations of the phrase “under the sun”).

of dogmatic eisegesis and forced reinterpretation. This exegetical fallacy ensues as a result of an underlying assumption about what the book, as part of the canon of Holy Scripture, is supposed to say. The phrase “תחת השמש”, if it does have a polemical function, certainly cannot be said to have the evangelistic apologetical function that these interpreters anachronistically read back into it. This form of distinction between the sacred and the secular which guides the conservative reading is a modern phenomenon which is worlds apart from the religio-cultural realities of Qohelet’s time when no such distinctions were operative.

1.3.2 The critical interpretation

While this line of interpretation has the merit that it does not intentionally attempt to force a dogmatic theology on the text, it nonetheless exhibits several characteristics that can be criticised. Firstly, it fails to recognise the significance of the “sun imagery” in the book. The repetition of the sun imagery is seen as involving a rather unnecessary reiteration of a supposedly marginal and trivial thought - that what happens is located “תחת השמש”. Secondly, it fails to explain why the author should feel the need to mention *thirty* times that what he saw was “תחת השמש”. If the phrase “תחת השמש” is *merely* an indicator of a spatio-temporal location - and thus simply has a geographical reference completely synonymous with the phrase “in this world” - its occurrence in the book does seem rather excessive. In fact, on this account the same message could have been communicated even without the phrase “תחת השמש”. There would have been no need whatsoever for Qohelet to mention “*where*” he saw all the “הבל”.

1.3.3 Summary of the research problem

In the book of Qohelet the reader encounters a mysterious and incessant repetition of the phrase “תחת השמש”. To be sure, solar imagery pervades the book. The word “השמש” sun” occurs *thirty five* times in the book’s twelve chapters. The phrase “תחת השמש” is implicitly omnipresent. In addition, the significance from an ANE perspective of the combination sun imagery + issues of concern + theology in the book seems to be a neglected and often distorted issue in scholarship. To be sure, most interpreters sever what is an inextricable unity of rhetorical elements in the book – i.e. the unity between *what* Qohelet saw and *where* he saw it. Moreover, little recognition exists of the possible ambiguity exhibited by the words “תחת” and “השמש”. With regard to the solar reference in particular, the possibility of mythological or symbolical associative references has, as of yet, not received any attention whatsoever from scholars. This despite the important implications such considerations might have for our understanding of the meaning and significance of Qohelet’s sun imagery in general.

In evaluation, critical metacommentary has indicated that the various popular explanations of the sun imagery have failed to account for Qohelet’s repeated use of the phrase “תחת השמש”. The conservative interpretation misinterprets the sun imagery by assigning it with an apologetical restrictive function implying a cosmic dualism and an anachronistic polemical rhetorical strategy. The critical reading is also inadequate. By interpreting the sun imagery as inclusive, and equating the solar reference with apparently parallel locative references devoid of solar imagery, it fails to explain why the author needed to refer to the domain “under the sun” at all.

1.4 THE HYPOTHESIS

The peculiarities of the sun imagery in Qohelet may be accounted for once the interpreter considers the possibility that the sun imagery in the book might contain implicit allusions to ANE solar mythology. This hitherto unheard of suggestion is motivated by observing the way in which Qohelet combines his excessively repeated references to the domain “under the sun” with an intense interest in particular issues such as justice, knowledge, life, death, time, God, the king, etc. These allusions, if real, seem to be characterised by ambiguity, polemic, irony, deconstruction and syncretism.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The heuristic format of this study is manifested via a **comprehensive approach** that can be labelled as being **historical – cultural** in terms of its methodological scope. In **Part 1** of this study, the textual perspectives from which the hypothesis emerged will be explored in detail. This justification of its assumptions and claims will be presented in the form of **metatextual, intertextual and intratextual** arguments:

- In **Chapter 2**, a short **metatextual introduction** to the larger context within which the research problem features will be given. This will consist of demonstrating the disagreement on - and the problematic nature of – many of the basic exegetical questions regarding the book of Qohelet. A short list of hermeneutical explanations accounting for this phenomenon will also be included in this chapter.
- In **Chapter 3**, an **intratextual description** of the “sun imagery” in the book of Qohelet will follow. Included here will be further in depth analysis of the nature, significance, meaning and purpose of the “sun imagery” in Qohelet.
- In **Chapter 4**, **metatextual issues** pertaining to the justification of my novel interpretation of Qohelet’s “sun imagery” will be discussed. It concerns mainly the recognition of the distance between the world behind the text and the world of the modern reader that often makes the interpretation of an ancient religious discourse a complex and difficult endeavour.
- In **Chapter 5**, provision will be made for the consideration of important **intertextual data** that could be utilised as part of the comprehensive justification of the hypothesis. This will involve an overview of relevant aspects of the solar mythology and symbolism of a variety of Ancient Near Eastern cultural contexts.
- In **Chapter 6**, further **intertextual justification** for the new perspective on Qohelet’s “sun imagery” will be given. Some examples of solar elements in the Old Testament itself will be considered witnessing to the biblical authors’ familiarity with solar mythology.

Thereafter a short **summary** will be provided of what was discussed in **Part 1** of this study.

Then, in **Part 2**, further substantiation and synthesis will follow. Attention will also be

paid to the possible implications of the theory for the understanding of basic interpretative issues.

- In **Chapter 7**, a selective thematic commentary on Qohelet's "sun imagery" will be provided. What this involves is basically an attempt to give further and more detailed substantiation to the hypothesis on the **intratextual** level. The possible functions of the alleged allusions in the "sun imagery" will also be considered.
- In **Chapter 8**, speculation will follow regarding some of the possible implications of these findings as they pertain to the general interpretative questions identified in Chapter 2. In addition, the heuristic merits of the hypothesis will be considered and criticism of it will be anticipated.

Finally, a **summary** of what has been discussed in **Part 2** will conclude this study.

1.6 OBJECTIVES

Throughout the evaluation, it is vital that readers should remember the following preliminary remarks with regard to the purpose of this study:

- Negatively, the aim of this study is neither to claim that the hypothesis of this dissertation is completely irrefutable nor that it is to be seen as the only possible solution to the research problem. It is neither an attempt to solve all the problems related to every detail of the book nor a call for the abandonment of insights as expressed in many popular commentaries.
- Positively, this study asks whether ANE solar mythology could provide a hitherto unrecognised - albeit legitimate - possible perspective on the recurring sun imagery in Qohelet. It is an admittedly tentative *experiment* aimed at reconstructing a hypothetical albeit heuristically functional hermeneutical frame of reference in order to account for the existence and function of sun imagery in the book.

1.7 SOME FINAL INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The hypothesis, as well as much of the contents of this study, is completely novel. *Ergo*, much of what follows may be correctly considered as being rather controversial. To be sure, when a novice researcher proposes a reading of a complex piece of ancient literature that flies in the face of two millennia of known interpretative history, it might even seem a bit presumptuous. Therefore, it would be preferred that the reader approaches this study with an open mind. This does not mean to imply one should believe everything written here. What is required is not uncritical acceptance but critical (and self – critical) evaluation. Such evaluation must justify its critique of the arguments presented in this study on other grounds than the fact that it is novel or that it might discredit some cherished readings by venerated scholars of the past.