

PART 1

SUMMARY

Before I turn my attention to the more specific examples of possible allusions to solar mythology in the book of Qohelet itself, it might be useful to summarise the most important insights and findings based on the discussion in chapters 1-6:

CHAPTER 1

Here I identified the “sun imagery” in the book of Qohelet as a problem of research that has not yet been accounted for satisfactorily. The sun imagery occurs in the phrase “under the sun” which is repeated 30 times in throughout the book. There are also 5 individual references to the sun beside those in the aforementioned phrase. Secondly, the two popular interpretations currently available, i.e. the restrictive and inclusive interpretations were demonstrated to be inadequate. The restrictive interpretation comes from conservative interpreters. This perspective is invalid as it reinterprets the solar imagery in order to harmonise the book’s theology with either Jewish or Christian dogma. The inclusive interpretation, favoured by more critical scholars, is also unsatisfactory in that it cannot account for the author’s need to use the particular phrase at all. In addition, what has hitherto been overlooked by both interpretative traditions was shown to be the ANE context of religio-cultural discourse about the sun. This includes solar mythology and solar symbolism. Because of the discovery of this negligence, as well as the inadequacy of the two popular interpretations of the sun imagery in Qohelet, a hypothesis was formulated. According to the hypothesis, the sun imagery in Qohelet can be interpreted as possibly containing ambiguous allusions to ANE solar mythology and / or symbolism. The reasons for this being five fold:

1. The constant repetition of the phrase under the sun (thirty times);
2. The combination of this phrase with themes such as justice, knowledge, royalty, time, death, etc.
3. The author claiming to have been a king in the ANE;
4. The peculiar theology of the book;
5. The parallels to the aforementioned 4 features in ANE religio – cultural discourse.

The methodology proposed was one that featured a comprehensive historical cultural approach. This involves intra-; inter-; and metatextual analyses of the relevant issues pertaining to the justification of the hypothesis. The purpose or aim of this study was expressly stated to involve a tentative experiment with new interpretative possibilities. It should therefore, under no circumstances, be seen as an absolute claim to final truth. An open minded albeit critical reception was suggested.

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, I introduced the basic problem issues of the book Qohelet that seem to have plagued interpreters for a long time. These issues involve the general questions regarding the book. These include the consideration of matters such as the date,

authorship, language, genre, message, etc. of the book Qohelet. It also pertains to the book's relation to the Ancient Near Eastern environment. It was argued that there appears to be no consensus regarding the answers to these fundamental questions. The possible reasons for the disagreement were also speculated about. It was argued to be due to hermeneutical variables of various sorts. These variables include the roles that theology, epistemology, psychology, textuality and other hermeneutical factors influencing the interpreters can play. Since the sun imagery in Qohelet is so pervasive and such an intricate and inextricable part of his discourse, a new theory on its function and significance may well have serious implications for what one considers to be the case regarding many of these basic interpretative issues.

CHAPTER 3

In the third chapter, I attempted to show first just how pervasive the "sun imagery" in Qohelet really is. The sun imagery was classified as being both explicit and implicit. From various points of view, I argued that both the explicit "sun imagery" and the implicit "sun imagery" permeate every chapter of the book. The specific contents of this language was foremost as exemplified in the phrase "under the sun" which occurs about 30 times and in the 5 references to the sun. Secondly, it was established that the sun imagery occurs in an inextricable combination with what can be demonstrated as certain central issues of concern to the author. It was argued that one way to classify these issues included formulating them to include the concepts of justice, knowledge, royalty, time, life, death, God, vapour, etc. The inextricable link between the sun imagery and the themes in the book were also described as being for the most part negative and complimentary. The sun imagery in general indicates the domain "where" Qohelet observed certain scenarios. The themes answer to the question "what" he was concerned with pertaining to this domain. The negativity is exemplified in various examples of "vapour" Qohelet identifies as manifested in the sub solar realm. Thus he finds injustice, ignorance, royal incompetence and dissatisfaction, unfair life, certain death, appointed times and lamentable characteristics of the cosmic and social orders in the domain under the sun. Finally, it was also suggested that in their various attempts at making sense of the sun imagery and its relation to both the contents of Qohelet and to supposed intertextual parallel types of discourse scholars have neglected to investigate the various associative meanings and connotations the sun had in the ANE 2-3 millennia ago. In doing so, they might have overlooked the very perspective that may indeed make sense of both the sun imagery and much of the rest of the contents in Qohelet. In short, an excursion to the possibility of mythological and symbolical references as part of the possibly ambiguous sun imagery was suggested. The motivation for this was not only the problems with traditional interpretations but also given the various overlooked alternative meanings the words translated as "under" and "the sun" had in biblical Hebrew.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter, a short excursion to basic hermeneutical theory was made when the necessity for a historical – cultural way of interpretation was demonstrated. It was argued that the alien culture of the Biblical times often makes it well nigh impossible for those who have no background knowledge to recognise subtle allusions in the text to Ancient Near Eastern mythology. The example used was that of the way the sea features mythologically in some OT texts. Issues addressed included the problem of

common knowledge, the importance of background; recognising allusions, polemics, irony, ambiguity and being aware of referential possibilities. The motive for this hermeneutical excursion was the desire to provide an analogy indicating that it was hermeneutically justifiable to at least explore and experiment with other possible references and connotative possibilities for the “sun imagery” in Qohelet.

CHAPTER 5

Here I provided an overview of various Ancient Near Eastern cultures that have been identified by scholars as having possible influence on the author of the book Qohelet. I have in each instance provided an overview of the solar mythology of those cultures that appears relevant for this study in that it seems to have undeniable bearing on the “sun imagery” of Qohelet. In describing the solar mythology of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Canaanite, Greek and other cultures which might have been familiar to Qohelet I have indicated that the solar deities were associated with the concepts / functions / attributes such as justice, retribution, divination, secret knowledge, appointed times, royalty, the cosmic and social orders, life and death, etc. The result of this discovery was a belief that the combination of

- 1) The universal popularity of solar mythology
- 2) The concepts associated with solar deities;

may have some bearing to

- 1) Qohelet’s pervasive sun imagery;
- 2) The specific issues of interest with which Q.S.I. is combined in the book (including the theology)

Furthermore, I also argued that there appears to be a hitherto unrecognised link between solar mythology and the wisdom traditions. I also asked about the possibility of symbolic associative reference and indicated that the same issues of interest in solar mythology can be found in various forms of ANE solar symbolism. Finally, the question regarding intentionality was addressed and the relation between this issue and the rhetorical devices of allusion and deconstruction were probed.

CHAPTER 6

In the last chapter of part 1 of this study I demonstrated that the authors and audiences of the Old Testament were definitely familiar with solar mythology and in many instances apparently too familiar from the viewpoint of later orthodoxy. This acquaintance resulted in a host of examples of:

- 1) allusions to solar mythology;
- 2) polemics against solarism;
- 3) adoption of solar symbolism,
- 4) syncretism with solar theology;
- 5) apostasy to sun worshipping, etc.

By citing archaeological and Biblical evidence for the Old Testament’s familiarity with solar mythology and sun worship, I intended to demonstrate that discovering allusions

to solar mythological motifs in the book Qohelet need hardly be as surprising as it might at first appear

PART 2

SUMMARY

In **Part 2** of this study I have provided, on the one hand, intratextual substantiation of my theory of the possible presence of allusions to ANE solar mythology in the book of Qohelet. On the other hand, I have *synthesized my findings; speculated on what the theory might entail with regard to basic interpretative issues; and finally, I have anticipated expected objections pertaining to the claims and arguments of this study on the significance and function of the sun imagery in Qohelet.*

Chapter 7

In this chapter, I performed an intratextual analysis on the significance and function of the sun imagery in Qohelet as it possibly relates to the tenets of solar mythology. The way this was done was by first looking at the references to the sun in Qohelet that are not part of the phrase “under the sun”. It was argued that these references might indeed exhibit deconstructive polemical irony in as much as they could be interpreted as containing ambiguous allusions to ANE solar mythology. Following this, I discussed those themes in Qohelet that are combined with the book’s sun imagery and which are also paralleled in solar mythology. This discussion included creative suggestion regarding the possible polemical deconstruction involved when Qohelet refers to issues such as justice, knowledge, time, vapour, evil, God, toil, etc. Possible traces of syncretism were also noted. Several additional miscellaneous possible allusions were also discussed. In the end, the possible functions of the supposed allusions to solar mythology were indicated. These include not only ambiguous allusion but also irony, polemics, deconstruction and syncretism.

Chapter 8

In the final chapter of this study, several remaining issues were under consideration. First, speculation ensued with regard to the possible implications my theory might have for certain basic interpretative questions on which, as was indicated in chapter 2, there is little consensus. Included here were suggestions with regard to the profile of the implied and the real authors, possible historical contexts in which the book might have originated, the ANE background of Qohelet, and finally, remarks pertaining to the message of the book. Thereafter, the heuristic value of the theory was discussed as its ability to account for many peculiar features of the book was indicated. Lastly, I reconstructed several hypothetical anticipated critiques this study might evoke from the academic community. It was indicated why most of the possible objections are invalid as they are mostly based on fallacious arguments or on a misunderstanding of what this study’s claims and purpose involved.

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SUMMARY

Possible allusions to Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology in Qohelet – a comprehensive enquiry

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DEPARTMENT: Ancient languages

DEGREE: D Litt

The book of Ecclesiastes is infamous as a piece of controversial literature. Commentators differ with regard to their views on matters such as the book's historical context, translation, structure, Ancient Near Eastern background, message, etc. One of the many apparent oddities in the book are the numerous references to the sun. There are approximately thirty-five of these references! Thirty of these can be found in the constantly recurring phrase "under the sun - an expression which echoes mysteriously like a refrain through the book. Many questions, still unanswered, are prompted by the incessant repetition of this phrase.

Contemporary popular interpretations of the function of the phrase "under the sun" can broadly be classified as belonging to one of two categories. Firstly, there is the conservative interpretation. According to this view, the function of the phrase is restrictive. It is indicative of a supposed cosmic dualism implying the presence of an alternative realm as opposed to the earthly domain and its secular atheism. The second view is that adopted by more critical scholars. In their view, the phrase functions simply an inclusive spatial designator. However, a closer look at the instances in which the phrase occurs in the intratextual context show that, while both of these interpretations have some merit, they are ultimately unsatisfactory. They fail to explain the need for the sun imagery's constant recurrence throughout the book.

What no one seems to have noticed is the possible significance of the repetition of the sun imagery in the book in the way in it was combined with certain themes, a peculiar theology and a strange self - presentation by the author. To be sure, when the sun imagery is assessed in the context of ANE solar discourse, its combination with certain themes in Qohelet becomes quite significant. Consider this data reformulated as four basic questions and answers:

- Who is speaking?..... A king.
- Where did he look?Under the sun.
- What does he observe there.....Injustice, ignorance, death, etc.
- How is God depicted?.....Judge, Creator, etc.

When these aspects of Qohelet's message are viewed from the intertextual context of Ancient Near Eastern solar mythology – a legitimate hermeneutical experiment given the repeated references to the sun – the answers that can be given in response to the questions of "who?", "where?", "what?" and "God?" appears to be very significant. In solar mythology, the sun gods were the deities particularly concerned with the issues of

justice, divination, times, kings, life, royalty, the cosmic and social orders, etc. - the same issues that Qohelet is concerned with in relation to what happens "under the sun". Moreover, according to the Old Testament witness, Israel was thoroughly familiar with these ideas. Qohelet's sun imagery seems to be filled with allusions to the beliefs of solar theology in ways that are simultaneously ambiguous, ironical, polemical, deconstructive and syncretistic. This is a new perspective on the book and seems able to account for the author's need to refer repeatedly to the domain "under the sun". It also explains why Qohelet combined these references with a certain peculiar theology and why he was interested in specific issues such as justice, knowledge, life, time, death, the king, etc.

GRANDS D'UN

Die ... is ...

Die ... is ...

Die ... is ...

- ...
- ...
- ...
- ...

Die ... is ...

OPSOMMING

Moontlike sinspeling op Ou Nabye Oosterse son mitologie in Prediker – n komprehensiewe ondersoek

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Die boek Prediker is algemeen bekend as omstrede literatuur. Kommentatore verskil oor baie aangeleenthede bv. die boek se historiese konteks, vertaling, struktuur, Ou - Nabye-Oosterse agtergrond, boodskap, ens. Een van die baie ooglopende eienaardighede van die boek is die talle verwysings na die son. Hierdie verwysings vind ons ongeveer vyf en dertig keer in die boek. Dertig van hierdie verwysings is vervat in die frase "onder die son" wat op 'n vreemde wyse soos n refrein deur die boek weergalm. Daar is steeds 'n magdom onbeantwoorde vrae wat na aanleiding van hierdie spesifieke herhaling gevra kan word.

Huidiglik populêre verklarings van die *funksie* van die frase "onder die son" in Prediker kan breedweg in twee kategorieë geplaas word. Eerstens is daar 'n konserwatiewe interpretasie wat die frase se funksie verstaan as synde beperkend en duidend op n kosmiese dualisme wat die bestaan van 'n alternatiewe werklikheid teenoor dit wat die wêreld se sekulêre ateïstiese perspektief kan raaksien. Tweedens is daar die kritiese interpretasie. Volgens hierdie siening is die frase bloot 'n inklusiewe ruimtelike aanduider. 'n Nadere beskouing van die tekste waarin die frase figureer, dui egter aan dat beide hierdie perspektiewe, hoewel albei iets van die waarheid beet het, steeds nie bevedigend kan verklaar hoekom die skrywer juis hierdie frase so dikwels herhaal nie.

Wat niemand blykbaar raakgesien het nie, is die moontlike belang van die herhaling van verwysings na die son soos dit in die boek gekombineer word met die outeur se self - identifikasie, 'n vreemde teologie en n belangstelling in sekere spesifieke onderwerpe. Hierdie kombinasie kan soos volg gerekonstrueer word:

- Wie is aan die woord?..... 'n Koning.
- Waar kyk Prediker?..... Onder die son.
- Wat sien hy daar?..... Ongeregtigheid, onkunde, dood, ens.
- Hoe tipeer hy God?..... Regter, Skepper, ens.

Wanneer hierdie aspekte egter vanuit die perspektief van Ou-Nabye-Oosterse sonmitologie en simboliek beskou word – 'n moontlikheid wat gesuggereer word deur die herhaalde verwysings na die "son" – blyk die antwoorde op Prediker se "wie?", "waar?", "wat?" en "God?" vrae uiters betekenisvol te wees. Dit wil voorkom asof Prediker deur die kombinasie van hierdie vier aspekte subtiel sinspeel op die populêre idees van Ou-Nabye-Oosterse sonmitologie. In Ou-Nabye-Oosterse sonmitologie was die songode diegene wat spesifiek besorgd was oor konings, geregtigheid, regverdigheid, lewe, die bepaling van tye, divinasie, ens. – presies dit wat Prediker

geïnteresseer het i.v.m. scenarios in die domein “onder die son”. Boonop impliseer die Ou Testament dat Israel met hierdie idees goed bekend was.

Gevolglik lyk dit of ons inderdaad in die boek Prediker met 'n duidelike geval het van sinspeling op die dogmas van sonmitologie te make het. Die sinspelings blyk verder elemente van dubbelsinnigheid, ironie, polemie, dekonstruksie en sinkretisme te vertoon. Hierdie nuwe teorie verklaar hoekom Prediker so herhalend na die domein “onder die son” wil verwys. Dit verklaar ook hoekom hy dit kombineer met 'n sekere teologie en 'n intense belangstelling in spesifieke temas soos geregtigheid, kennis, die koning, tyd, die dood, ens.

KEYWORDS

Qohelet
Sun
Mythology
Hermeneutics
Wisdom literature
Ancient Near East
Deconstruction
Allusion
Justice
Ignorance

SLEUTELWOORDE

Prediker
Son
Mitologie
Hermeneutiek
Wysheids literatuur
Ou Nabye Ooste
Dekonstruksie
Sinspeling
Geregtigheid
Onkunde