

The Images of God in Ecclesiastes

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and research interest

1.1 Introduction

Different viewpoints have developed over the centuries regarding the answer to the question of what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates pertaining the images of God. The focus of this study is twofold: to explore the understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes concerning the images of God and, through the understanding of God's images, to discern the different kinds of possible relationships between God and human beings.

Old Testament scholars have conducted numerous studies¹ on the Book of Ecclesiastes, which provide essential information for understanding the images of God in the book. The studies that have been conducted, especially pertaining to the understanding of the book, reveal complications that one is faced with as one approaches the Book of Ecclesiastes. One of the difficulties concerns the canonicity of the book; does the book deserve its place in the Old Testament canon?

Another problem is with regard to the understanding of what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates concerning the images of God. These problems give rise to the question of the book's reliability. A further question pertains to the relationship(s) between God and human beings; as portrayed in the book through the images of God.

This study is an attempt to find possible answers to the following questions:

- Is the Book of Ecclesiastes canonical?
- What does the Book of Ecclesiastes communicate regarding the images of God?
- What does the Book of Ecclesiastes communicate concerning the relationship(s) between God and human beings?

¹ See inter alia: Anderson (1997), Barrick (2011), Crenshaw (1987), Leupold (1983), Loader (1986), Murphy (2002).

The study utilises an exegetical and a hermeneutical approach to the Book of Ecclesiastes. This study will attempt to discover all the possible images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes; however, the discussion on the exegetical process in Chapter 4 will be narrowed down to selected possible images, as well as selected passages.

1.2 Relevance of the research

This study seeks to provide a fresh perspective on the understanding of how the Book of Ecclesiastes merits being part of the canon of the Old Testament, and a fresh perspective on the understanding of what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates concerning all the possible images of God. Subsequently, a new attempt to provide answers to the relationship(s) between God and human beings, as portrayed in the Book of Ecclesiastes through the images of God, will feature in this study.

1.3 Preliminary literature study

Many scholars² tag the Book of Ecclesiastes with the label of scepticism, based on its understanding pertaining to the images of God. According to Bartholomew (1999:4), up until the end of the second millennium, there was still disagreement about the message of Ecclesiastes. Bartholomew stated that Whybray, for example, saw the message of Ecclesiastes as affirming joy, whereas Watson described the message of the book as despondent. Crenshaw (1987:52) referred to Gese (1958), who was of the opinion that *Qoheleth's* radical views rendered the understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes as that of an outsider that did not belong in the Old Testament. Crenshaw (1987:52) noted that the best answer to the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes was the added "points to the second epilogue, which removed the sting from *Qoheleth's* scepticism and advocated traditional views concerning observance of Torah". Anderson (1997:193) maintained that *Qoheleth* is pessimistic literature, which views God as distant and certainly impersonal. Anderson also believed that the Book of Ecclesiastes is pessimistic, based on *Qoheleth's* view of humanity and life in the world.

² See inter alia: Crenshaw (1987), Anderson (1997), and Smith (1953)

Zuck (1991:46) stated that many have concluded that Ecclesiastes presents only human reasoning apart from divine revelation. Zuck (1991:46) quoted Smith (1953:105), who wrote that “there is no spiritual uplift embodied within these pages”. Zuck pointed out many elements in the Book of Ecclesiastes that supposedly suggests this outlook of secularist despair. On the other hand, he used several counterbalancing ideas one cannot ignore to refute this secularist despair and in doing so, provided ample evidence for the place of the book in the canon of the Old Testament and wisdom corpus (cf Zuck 1991:47-48).

With regard to the message of the Book of Ecclesiastes, Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:15) noted that life does appear futile from the human point of view, and that it is easy to get pessimistic. Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:21-24) called attention, for humans to be mindful, as we study the Book of Ecclesiastes that the writer included goads to prod human thinking and nails on which to hang some practical conclusions. These goads, according to Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:21-24), gives a different perspective to the message of the book, which is to make human beings turn from all futility and put their faith in God. But for those who already have faith in God, who bury their heads in the sand and pretend that problems do not exist, should know that problems do exist and must be faced honestly. Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:21-24) stated that the nails provide humans the hang-down for the practical truth of looking at life from God’s perspective, as human philosophies will surely fail in the end. Human beings should use their God-given wisdom, but not expect to find answers to every question. It is imperative for human beings to obey God’s will and enjoy all that God allows them to have; keeping in mind that death is coming and to be prepared (cf Baugh & Wiersbe, 1990:21-24).

McCabe (1996:111-112) declared that the Book of Ecclesiastes provides counsel for human beings to have submissive faith in the sovereignty of God, to be diligently involved in their responsibilities of life, and to enjoy God’s blessings. McCabe’s view was that *Qoheleth* attempted to master life, but was faced with one frustration after another. Therefore, he used a system of reasoning to arrive at the truth by the exchange of logical, well thought out arguments to reflect on the conflicts he encountered and to commend the enjoyment of life from a theocentric viewpoint. McCabe (1996:111-112) held that one of the themes of Ecclesiastes highlights

human limitations as depraved, finite beings; and based on their limitations, human beings should not attempt to master life but to make the most of it and enjoy what God has given them. McCabe added that the message of Ecclesiastes counsels humans to be diligently involved in their responsibilities of life, to enjoy God's blessings and to have submissive faith in the sovereignty of God in the midst of a sin-cursed world and a veiled providence (1996:111-112).

Barrick (2011:13) contended with many scholars who tag Ecclesiastes with the label of scepticism. He argued that *Qoheleth* is no sceptic, but rather that he leaves human beings hungry to know God. Barrick (2001:15-16) also provided evidence, ranging from 190 BC through the first century up until the church fathers, and ultimately, the book's own internal evidence to support the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

There are obviously different views among scholars regarding the understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes pertaining to the images of God. It becomes necessary to study the book, considering all these views, in an attempt to understand what the book really communicates about the images of God; particularly narrowing down the core of the study to two possible images, as well as the relationship these images have with human beings.

1.4 Problem statement

The problem this research will address is the possible images of God as portrayed in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The main aim of this research is to attempt to determine the basic characteristics of the images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

In addressing the problem and given that different views exist, and considering the controversy as one approach the Book of Ecclesiastes, the following questions are asked:

- How does the Book of Ecclesiastes merit its place in the canon of the Old Testament?
- What literary genre is the Book of Ecclesiastes?
- What is the consistency of the understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes concerning the images of God, compared to the understanding of the images of God in other parts of the Old Testament?
- What does the Book of Ecclesiastes communicate regarding human relationship(s) with God's images?

1.5 Aim and objectives of the study

1.5.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to understand what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates concerning the images of God. In an attempt to determine the basic characteristics of the images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes, the author hopes to find answers to human relationship(s) with God's images. The overarching aim of this study is to present a different kind of possible relationship(s) between God and human beings based on the understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

1.5.2 Objectives of the study

This research will seek to provide answers to the following objectives from the Book of Ecclesiastes:

- What the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates concerning the images of God;
- the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes;
- the literary genre of the Book of Ecclesiastes;
- the consistency of the understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes concerning the images of God, with the understanding of the images of God in other parts of the Old Testament; and
- the relationship(s) that exists between God's images and human beings.

1.6 Methodology

This study adopts many historical/literary approach of interpretation of the Old Testament to the study of the selected passages. According to Smith (2008:170), this approach uses “the normal rules of communication”. The use of this interpretive approach to the Book of Ecclesiastes may influence the process of making exegetical decisions.

According to Smith (2008:169), the historical/literary approach “applies established tools (exegetical methods) to discover the meaning and implications of a biblical text (or groups of texts)”. The study will use this approach, in an attempt to expose the intentional fallacy of the writer within the historical/literary context of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

A qualitative study will be conducted on the identified objectives. An exegetical study on the chosen passages related to God’s images will be performed – narrowing them down to two possible images of God. The commentary structure approach proposed by Smith (2008:178) will be adapted to study each of these images of God. The commentary approach will allow the researcher to move through the passages verse by verse, and to present any relevant exegetical insights as they occur in the demarcations (Smith, 2008:178).

The exegetical study can thus be organised according to the following categories:

- Introduction
 - The passages
 - The problems
 - The perspectives of the passages
 - Summary
- Context of the book
 - General background: canonicity, date, author, the reception, and audience (Sources: The Bible, Bible dictionaries, commentaries)

- Historical context: occasion, purpose, the literary genre (Sources: The Bible, Bible dictionaries, commentaries)
- Theological: survey of major themes of the Book of Ecclesiastes (Sources: The Bible, commentaries)
- Literary structure: the structure of the chosen passages and argument (Sources: The Bible, commentaries)
- Summary
- Exegesis of the chosen passages
 - Introduction
 - Text (examine textual variants) and translation (Sources: Hebrew Bible, Hebrew dictionaries, different translations)
 - Possible meaning for the intended original readers (Sources: English/Hebrew dictionaries, Hebrew Bible, commentaries)
- Significance of the understanding of the chosen passages to today's readers
- Summaries

1.7 Research hypothesis

The supposition of this research is that by applying the historical/literary approach to the Book of Ecclesiastes, it will be possible to determine which images of God are portrayed in the book, as well as what they mean in terms of the relationship between God and human beings.

1.8 Orthography and terminology

1.8.1 Orthography

The following methodology of writing was applied:

- The adjusted Harvard system of referencing is used in this study.

1.8.2 Terminology

The following terminology applies to the research:

- Ecclesiastes refers to the book of the Old Testament that this study focuses on.
- The transliteration of the Hebrew term קהלת is spelt as *Qoheleth* in this study.
- *Qoheleth* refers to the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes.
- Exegesis is the historical/literary study of biblical text or group of texts.

1.9 Outline of chapters

This study consists of the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Interest

- Introduction of the focus of this study; the research problems; the relevance of the research; and the preliminary literature review
- Stating the problem statement; the aim and objectives; the methodology used in the research; the research hypothesis and the orthography and terminology

Chapter 2: The Literary Genre of the Book of Ecclesiastes

- A study of the uniqueness and theology of the wisdom book of the Old Testament

Chapter 3: Literature Study

- A study of the different scholars' viewpoints pertaining to the canonicity, the dating, the authorship, the reception, the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the images of God and human relationship to God's images.

Chapter 4: Exegesis – Historical/Literary Study

- What does the Book of Ecclesiastes communicate concerning the images of God?

Chapter 5: Hermeneutical Study

- What relationship(s) do human beings have with regard to God's images?
- Is the understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes concerning the images of God consistent with the understanding in other parts of the Old Testament?

Chapter 6: Concluding Remarks

- Remarks regarding the findings of the research; relevance of those findings; and critical issues that may require further study.

CHAPTER 2

The literary genre of the Book of Ecclesiastes

2.1 Introduction

The Book of Ecclesiastes has been considered by many scholars over the years as part of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The Wisdom literature have been interpreted and understood as having its own unique voice and theology.³

Therefore, it will be necessary for the understanding of the message of the Book of Ecclesiastes with regard to the images of God, to study the uniqueness and theology of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

The aim of the study of the uniqueness and theology of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament is to provide information that will help in the interpretation and understanding of what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates regarding the images of God. The underlying aim is to help understand all the possible human relationship(s) to God's images in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Penchansky (2010:1) noted that for at least one and a half century, the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament embarrassed many scholars in their search for harmony with the rest of the books of the Old Testament. He stated that it was not until the early 1960s that scholars put forward suggestions that the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament had its own unique voice and theology, which are different from the other genres of the Old Testament.

The undertaking of this chapter is to conduct a historical search into the understanding of the uniqueness and theology of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The underlying questions that will be answered include:

³ See inter alia: Penchansky (2010); Crenshaw (2010); Perdue (2008); Weeks (2010); and Murphy (2002).

- Which Old Testament books are considered as Wisdom literature?
- How do the Wisdom literatures of the Old Testament differ from one another?
- What is the sociological context of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament?
- Who wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament?
- For what reason(s) were the Wisdom literatures of the Old Testament written?

2.2 Which Old Testament books are considered Wisdom literature?

Clifford (1994:1) designated the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes as the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and the books of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon as the Wisdom literature of the Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical books. They also mentioned that Psalms such as 37, 49, 73, 112 and 127, which reflect on the problem of the innocent and righteous person, are usually considered wisdom Psalms, but held the view that there was no consensus amongst scholars regarding which Psalms should be included among the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

Enns (2011:1718) considered the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and numerous Psalms as the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. He based this consideration on some common features: “They have more affinity than the remainder of the Bible with non-Israelite ancient works” (Enns 2011:1718). He also refers to the fact that they tend to draw on practical matters of daily life.

According to Crenshaw (2010:5), the body of literature referred to as Wisdom literature of the Old Testament are Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon. Crenshaw stated that Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes were written in Hebrew, while Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon were written in Greek; and that particularly the Wisdom of Solomon was addressed to the Jews living in Alexandria, who primarily spoke Greek, rather than Hebrew.

Perdue (2008:413) considered the books of Proverbs, Job, and some portions of Psalms (Psalms 1, 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 119, and 127) and the Book of Ecclesiastes as the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

Perdue (2008:414-418) discussed the wisdom literature in the Apocrypha (Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon); the apocalyptic literatures (first Enoch and Daniel); the Wisdom Texts from Qumran (4Q Instruction); and the Rabbinic Wisdom (the Mishnah; Tosefta; and Midrashin) as a continuing stream of the same wisdom tradition.

According to Berry (1995:11), the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes can be considered as the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, for the reason that the writers wrote about wisdom as the application of the mind in a religious quest, as well as to reveal the following features: the writers of the Wisdom literature each described wisdom as the ability to live life well, and the use of practical skills and ultimate concepts.

Berry (1995:11) also referred to the Book of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon as Deuterocanonical books, which mirror certain aspects of Hebrew wisdom, as well as “provide some helpful comparisons to mark the transition from Hebrew wisdom to its early interpretation” (Berry 1995:11).

According to Johnson (1975:8-9), the Hebrew word חכמה (*Hokmah*) was used in the Old Testament to denote “wisdom” in a variety of contexts that allows for diverse meaning. Firstly, it was used to denote skill and dexterity, as in the work of the craftsmen in the narrative of the building of the tent in Exodus 28:3 and 36:4. In the narrative of 2 Chronicles 2:7, Solomon appeals for skilled (wise) men from Hiram of Tyre to work with gold, silver, and other precious metals. Secondly, it was used in the sense of shrewd or clever, as in the story of Jonadab in 2 Samuel 13:3; whom the writer introduced as “a very crafty man” who conceived a scheme which Ammon, the son of David, used to ravish his half-sister, Tamar. Thirdly, it was used in the sense of intelligence and wide-ranging knowledge, as in the story of the wisdom of King Solomon; exemplified in 1 Kings 4:29-34 with reference to Solomon’s three

thousand proverbs and his one thousand and five songs. Fourthly, it was used as a moral discernment; for example in King Solomon's life when he prayed to God to help him discern between good and evil. God answered him and gave him a wise and discerning mind (1 Kings 3:9, 12).

Johnson (1975:9) said that the fourth occurrence of the usage of wisdom, when combined with the knowledge of the concept of reverence for God, is what is found in the frequent usage of the word (*Hokmah*) in the different books that are regarded as the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Johnson (1975:10) referred to the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament as Hebrew wisdom; which observes life and sees that life works in certain ways to bring good things to those who obey its divinely planned order. This observation, according to Johnson (1975:10-11), can be defined as a set of useful conclusions or as guidelines for living; while being aware that there are two streams of Hebrew wisdom; both based on human experience rather than divine revelation.

The first stream is prudent and pragmatic, and guarantees results for following the rules, which is the position of the Book of Proverbs and certain Psalms. It can be called a theology of retribution with a causal effect. The second stream disagrees with the first and is polemical against the idea of retribution. The writers of the second stream argue that following the rule does not always work, that sometimes human beings do everything right and yet the results will be negative. Other times humans do not get what they deserve, but they get the opposite. An example of this type of wisdom writings are found in the Book of Job, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and in some Wisdom Psalms (Johnson 1975:11).

Weeks (2010:1) argued that, contrary to modern scholarship, certain books of the Old Testament – the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes – have usually been regarded as wisdom literature. According to Weeks (2010:1), the apocryphal books of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon are also considered as the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, as well as Song of Songs; and these books are in the least literature about wisdom; in addition to whatever else they may prove to be.

Penchansky's (2010:1) view was that the books categorised as the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament are the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira (also called Sirach or Ecclesiasticus), and the Wisdom of Solomon. Penchansky (2010:1) stated that the first three books are included in the Jewish and Protestant Bibles while the ancient Greek translation – the Septuagint, the Bibles of the Eastern Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church – include all five books in their canon.

According to Murphy (2002:1), what distinguishes Wisdom literature from other biblical books are their distinctive approach to reality and the unambiguous literary forms that can be found in such literature. Murphy (2002:1) argued that the most striking characteristics of the Wisdom literature are the absence of Israelite and Jewish history. The Wisdom literature of the Old Testament does not deal explicitly with the redemptive history. In other words, the Wisdom literature does not represent the actions of God in Israel's history as in the other books of the Old Testament. The Wisdom literature make no mention of the patriarchal promises, the Exodus and Moses, the covenant, the promise of David (2 Sam. 7), or any other historical referable event. However, there is still a veiled connection between God and wisdom in these books; which portrays the image of the God of Israel as the one who gave wisdom to human beings.

Murphy (2002:ix) held that the Wisdom literature deal directly with life; they are concerned with the present; and how to cope with the challenges provoked by human everyday experiences.

2.2.1 Summary

Customary to current views, the books that are considered as the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament by the Jewish as well as Protestant Bibles are the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and some portions of the Psalms (Psalms 1, 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 119, and 127).

However, the ancient Greek translation (the Septuagint), the Bibles of the Eastern Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, additionally include the books of the Apocrypha (Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon) as the Wisdom literature of their

Old Testament. There is also a suggestion that the apocalyptic literatures (Enoch and Daniel), the Wisdom Texts from Qumran, and the Rabbinic Wisdom (the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Midrashin) are a continuing stream of the same wisdom tradition.

These books were considered Wisdom literature based on the following: Firstly, their use of the Hebrew word for wisdom, *Hokmah*, in a sense of moral discernment combined with the knowledge of the concept of reverence for God, the giver of wisdom, is different from its use elsewhere in the Old Testament. Secondly, they do not represent the actions of God in Israel's history as in the other books of the Old Testament but are more universal in their approach. Thirdly, they deal directly with life; concerned with the present and how human beings can cope with the challenges in their everyday experiences.

2.3 How do the Wisdom literatures of the Old Testament differ from one another?

Penchansky (2012:1) argued that the five Wisdom books were written by the sages and fall within two distinct categories: the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes fall within the Hebrew wisdom because they were written in Hebrew; while the books of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon fall within the Greek wisdom because they were written in Greek. However, Penchansky (2012:1) suggested that the Book of Ben Sira may also be of Hebrew origin. Penchansky further distinguished the Wisdom literature of the Bible chronologically, saying that the first three were written before the second two. The first three were written before Hellenism, which is the period when Alexander the Great conquered and imposed his native Greek language on the Middle East. Hellenism is believed to have transformed Hebrew wisdom, and the last two Wisdom Books, the books of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon, reflect this transformation (Penchansky 2012:1).

Weeks (2010:1) stated that all the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament are very different from one another. He (Weeks 2010:1) described the books as follows: Proverbs as a compilation of several materials, which mostly offer instructions either

through far-reaching collections of short adages or through teachings that are divided more elaborately. The Book of Job uses a narrative structure to cover a long, expressive dialogue about God's justice. The Book of Ecclesiastes, on the other hand, offers similar instructions to Proverbs, but monologues in such a way that appears to give notice to the practicality of such instructions, as well as query the possibility of any enduring human accomplishment.

Proverbs, Job and some Wisdom Psalms, are regarded by Young (1952:281) as poetical. He mentioned that they have certain peculiarities and characteristics of their own. Young pointed out that their features are not rhyme but parallelism, with verses of two or more members with parallel thought in relationship to one another.

Penchansky (2010:1) offered helpful divisions to differentiate the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. According to Penchansky, these divisions separate the five supposedly Wisdom books— Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Solomon – into three different types of wisdom.

First is the folk wisdom, which is characterised by short, concise statements that are framed as instructions from parents to their children and examples are usually taken from natural surroundings. Second is royal wisdom, which is typically adages that provide instructions concerning palace politics to subordinate officials. Thirdly is theological wisdom, which seeks for answers to deep spiritual questions about God and his image as the one that controls the universe, human experiences, human relationship to animals, the question of afterlife, and whether human beings get what they deserve. This last category, according to Penchansky (2010:1), was usually written by skilled sages who wrote to affirm their position on these contentious issues.

The Book of Ecclesiastes seems to fall within theological wisdom according to Scott's classification of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Scott, 1961).

Gertz *et al.* (2012:612) also classified the Book of Ecclesiastes as theological wisdom, and held that its theology is characterised by its anthropological starting point. *Qoheleth* starts with a reflection about human beings, which lead to reflections

about God. Gertz *et al.* (2012:612) stated that human beings and the world surrounding humans appear mysterious but are profoundly ordered works of God.

Scott (1961:11) argued that the radicals' wisdom is strongly critical of the conservatives' plain affirmation of the principle of retribution, but agrees that both groups argue from the same premise, relying on reason. According to Scott (1961:11), the two streams of the Hebrew wisdom seek to understand the order of divine creation and providence, a moral and a right social order, as well as to conceive God's image as primarily the creator, the necessary ground of human existence, even though human beings may not know Him.

Both groups do not see human participation in any event in history with God, let alone salvation history as in the case of the narrative of Israel's lengthy participation with God in the other Old Testament books. Also, both groups have the feeling of order and structure. Scott (1961:11) illustrated this point by using two examples from the two wisdom streams: firstly, in Job's case, when the moral structure of his world seems to have fallen apart, Job agonises, not to justify himself as to bridge the chasm that was developing in his life, but in order to re-establish a possible order of justice, without which he would have found himself questioning his belief in God, whom paradoxically, he must have faith in.

The second example is found in the Book of Ecclesiastes, where the search for ultimate meaning in life proved fruitless for *Qoheleth*, the author, making him give up on life. Alternatively, *Qoheleth* chose to settle for the paradox of existence in order to achieve a balance of gratification in the midst of all the unappealing facts and rhythms of life, in anticipation of any good that can be hewn from human existence.

Gertz *et al.* (2012:612) similarly noted that for *Qoheleth*, God's activities were unpredictable by humans, but did not suggest in any way that God acts unjustly. Gertz *et al.* (2012:612) asserted that for *Qoheleth*, the world was inscrutable, God was unpredictable, and all the created objects and historical events were limited. In *Qoheleth's* worldview, it was the fear of God on the one hand and the enjoyment of the moment on the other hand.

Scott (1961:11) related that the conservative, conventional type of wisdom was dominant before the 6th century BC in Israel, when the sages assertively gloried in their wisdom. However, the radical type of wisdom, as can be seen in the Book of Ecclesiastes, grew in the 6th century BC when the tragic disorder of national life in Israel required the sages to put their old views into question. The Wisdom literature therefore, according to Scott (1961:12), resulted from reason reflecting upon human experiences – including religious experience and a number of forces contributed to the advancement of wisdom tradition – and in all of them it is evident that there is a need to reach out for a principle of balanced sense and right directive.

According to Gertz *et al.* (2012:608), the Book of Ecclesiastes engages critically with conservative, conventional wisdom. For *Qoheleth*, wisdom had only relative merit, which must be proven anew in each circumstance. A typical example of *Qoheleth*'s outlook can be seen in contrast to conventional wisdom, which upholds that one can manage life with wisdom; for *Qoheleth* this notion found its limit in the times established by God. According to Gertz *et al.* (2012:608), the key lines of argument in the Book of Ecclesiastes are its critique of wisdom with references to dependence on the inalterable existence and the impossibility of planning for the future. In this light, *Qoheleth* emphasised the possibility of a positive human life and an enjoyment of a relationship with God as the provider for human beings.

While there may be dissimilarities among the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, Perdue (1994:34-35) suggested that, with exception of occasional mention of God as Yahweh in the Book of Job, Hebrew wisdom writings are devoid of any address of God as Yahweh, the God of Israel, or any other name associated with the election tradition of Israel. In other words, the Hebrew wisdom literature did not write about the salvation history of Israel. Rather, at the centre of Hebrew wisdom, creation is the theme of theology.

Perdue's (1994:35) opinion was that creation is a uniting theme among the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and should be at the centre of the examination of wisdom theology; integrating all other dimensions of theology, as well as "anthropology, community, ethics, epistemology (both reason and revelation), and society". Perdue (1994:35) noted that "earlier examinations of wisdom theology have

approached the task through four major organising principles: anthropology, cosmology, theodicy, and the dialectic of anthropology and cosmology”.

Perdue (2008:412) further observed a uniting link by placing the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament within the socio-historical context of the eastern Mediterranean world, and also added that the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament responded to changes and developments in the social history of Israel.

2.3.1 Summary

There appears to be two streams of Hebrew wisdom based on current views, both founded on human experience rather than divine revelation.

The first stream is the conservative, conventional type of wisdom which was dominant before the 6th century BC in Israel and seems to guarantee results for following the rules, which is the position of the Book of Proverbs and certain Psalms. The second stream is the radical type of wisdom which developed in the 6th century BC when the tragic disorder of national life in Israel required the sages to question their traditional beliefs. This type of wisdom disagrees with the first in that following the rules does not always work. Examples of this type of wisdom writings are found in the Book of Job, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and some wisdom Psalms. The two streams of the Hebrew wisdom, however, seek to understand the order of divine creation and providence; a moral and a right social order; as well as to conceive God’s image as primarily the creator, the provider, and the necessary ground of human existence.

The books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes fall within the Hebrew wisdom; while the books of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon fall within the Greek wisdom.

Proverbs is understood as a compilation of several materials which mostly offer instructions through far-reaching collections of short adages or through teachings. The Book of Job provides a long, expressive dialogue about God’s justice. The Book of Ecclesiastes offers similar instructions as Proverbs but questions the practicality of the instructions.

There are further classifications within the Hebrew wisdom literature: folk wisdom, royal wisdom, and theological wisdom.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is understood by many to fit in within the theological wisdom.

However, in spite of their differences, the Wisdom literatures of the Old Testament were found to have great similarities as well.

2.4 The socio-historical context of the Wisdom literatures of the Old Testament

Perdue (2007:2) argued for the importance of the thorough treatment of the social history of wisdom in the study and articulation of wisdom literature. His argument was based on the viewpoint that social history provides the material and cultural data, as well as helps to reconstruct the human thought and behaviour that produced the data in different times and places in the past. From the perspective of this study, the value of the study of the social history of the Wisdom literature helps to locate the texts in the Book of Ecclesiastes in their socio-historical context, in order to understand what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates about the images of God and the possible human relationships with these images.

Perdue (2007:3) said that at the core of wisdom texts lie the theme of creation, which can be properly understood using an approach that involves a combination of insightful studies⁴ that may contribute greatly to this study; however, in-depth attention will not be given to these studies here as they do not necessarily form part of the core objectives of this study.

The study of the social history of the wisdom literature, according to Perdue (2007:325), allows one to allude to “historical events and people; language; and

⁴ 1. History of religion which examines the theological views present in the wisdom literatures of other cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean world. 2. Placing the various developing theologies of the sages within the on-going social-historical matrix of Israel and the world that affected their views. 3. Study of the literary character of myth and metaphors used by sages in the construction of their own theologies. 4. Finding the relationship between biblical and non-biblical wisdom theologies.

comparisons to other literature of Judaism, the ancient Near East, and Greece and Rome.”

An example can be seen in the social history of Israel, which reveals that the interaction of the people of Israel and Judah with a variety of people who had competing worldviews, impacted their cultures and religion, as well as impacted on the theology of the sages who wrote the Wisdom Books (Perdue 2007:331).

Perdue (2007:73) stated that the history of the collections of the Book of Proverbs, from the monarchy until the Second Temple in the Persian period, reveals that the sages in Proverbs made extensive use of metaphors in their teachings about two related creation traditions, namely cosmology and anthropology. Perdue (2007:73) argued that the language of creation the sages used in Proverbs, for example Proverbs 3:13-18,19-20; 8:22-31, makes frequent use of images that were analogous to the mythological traditions of the ancient Near East – in particular the mythology of ancient Egypt. According to Perdue (2007:73), the sages in the Book of Proverbs used imagery taken from their social world to portray the images of God as the creator and the one who sustains the universe.

According to Day *et al.* (1995:55), there is a recognisable kinship between the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the ancient Near East Wisdom Books. They (Day *et al.* 1995:55) mentioned that a remarkable parallel was discovered between the Egyptian instructions of Amenemope and Proverbs 22:11 and 23:11. In the light of the presumed kinship, one would suspect that Israel was dependent on the wisdom of all the Semitic people who inhabited Transjordan.

Further evidence of the cultural and social impact of a variety of people, in particular the Semitic people, on ancient Israel is further supported by Job 1:3, which states that “Job was the greatest of all the people of the East”. Also, King Solomon’s wisdom was said to surpass the wisdom of all the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt, according to 1 Kings 4:30. The implication is that the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament was in some form or another dependent or influenced by the wisdom of the ancient Near East people who surrounded them (cf Day *et al.* 1995:56).

Day *et al.* (1995:58) also noted parallels between the Book of Ecclesiastes and Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. There is a parallel between Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 and “the barmaid Šiduri’s exhortation to Gilgamesh on the same subject in the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh Epic (X.iii.6-14)”. Secondly, they found that there are at least six parallels between the Book of Ecclesiastes and Gilgamesh; pointing to Ecclesiastes’ dependence on Gilgamesh that is difficult to deny (cf Day *et al.* 1995:60).

According to Scott (1961:10), a comparative study reveals that, as in the wisdom literature of Mesopotamia and Egypt, there are two divergent streams in Hebrew wisdom. The one stream is conservative, assertive, world-wise, and instructive. This stream is characterised by the Book of Proverbs and Job; except for one of the contributors to the Book of Proverbs, and by Job’s counsellors. The other stream is radical, heterodoxical, and sceptical; as in the words of the poet who put together the greater part of the Book of Job, and of course, in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Clifford (1994:3) stated, concerning the importance of the study of social history of the Wisdom literature, that it reveals the significant information that the title “wisdom literature” has been applied to certain literary genres from Egypt and Mesopotamia; but these literary genres from Egypt and Mesopotamia would not have been regarded as constituting a special group had it not been for the examples of the Old Testament Wisdom Books. Clifford (1994:3) maintained that a comparative study of the Old Testament Wisdom literature and the extra-biblical texts is fruitful in two ways. Firstly, the foreign examples illuminate the literary genres, and secondly, they expose the social location of the writers, which data are only but scant in the Old Testament Wisdom Books.

According to Clifford (1994:3), many wisdom texts of Mesopotamia, like the Instructions of Suruppak and the Epic of Gilgamesh, were controlled and maintained by professional scribes. These scribes were associated with the palace, or with the economic prosper of their entire world, and these texts influenced the Old Testament wisdom texts. In these texts, the father who is the customary recipient of ancient instruction, instructs the son. Unlike in the Egyptian texts, instructions were generally given through metaphors and indirection. Clifford (1994:3) noted that the Book of

Ecclesiastes quotes Gilgamesh and that the Book of Proverbs may also have been drawn from Gilgamesh.

In addition, Clifford (1994:3) stated that the Egyptian wisdom literature were also comparable to the Old Testament Wisdom Books, and were written under three major genres: instructions, laments and political agendas. However, Clifford (1994:4) selected to provide information on the social context within the discussion of instructions because of the abundant information on the scribal profession. One instruction Clifford (1994:5) noted that directly influenced Proverbs 22:17-24:22 was that of *Amenemope*. Moreover, the Egyptian instructions were religious, like other ancient people, and their instructions upheld that the Egyptian God (who they referred to as *Ma'at*) embedded order in the world. The instructions were written to help the readers fulfil all the demands of *Ma'at* in every facet of life. According to Clifford (1994:3), Egyptian instructions were class-specific up until the first millennium but another type of wisdom writing emerged at the end of the second millennium. These new type of writings, like their Hebrew counterparts, were pessimistic and attacked the traditional ways of thinking.

2.4.1 Summary

The study of the social history of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament reveals recognisable kinship, as well as notable parallels between the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the ancient Near East Wisdom literature. There appears to be significant continuousness among the wisdom literature of the ancient Near East and that of the Old Testament wisdom literature; they all seem to have a common obligation to put pen to paper on the problems of their world and its rhythms and instructions. The professional group (the sages) who supposedly wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament used imagery taken from their social world to portray the images of God as the creator and the one who sustains the universe.

There are also noticeable parallels between the ancient Near East literature and the Hebrew wisdom: they were both written to encourage obedience to their respective ultimate concept, and went through the transition from traditional ways of thinking to being pessimistic and to challenge the traditional ways due to troubles that arose

within their respective societies. This is to say then that the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament were in some form or another dependent or influenced by the wisdom of the ancient Near East people who surrounded them.

Also, the two distinguished divergent streams in Hebrew wisdom are reported to be the case in the Wisdom literature of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Therefore, the importance of the study of the social history of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament was helpful and provided some insight into identifying the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, as well as in interpreting them.

2.5 Who wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament?

There seems to be diverse views among scholars concerning who wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Two views are evident in current debates. One view upholds that a distinct group of sages wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament; and the other that a non-distinct group of sages wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

According to Penchansky (2010:1), the opposing view attributed the wisdom writings to “a general intellectual movement among the Israelite elite”. This second group disagreed that there is no distinct sage group who wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament – as in distinct from the writers of the other books of the Old Testament, like the prophets and priests. The first question that then demands an answer before one proceeds is: Who were the sages?

2.5.1 Who were the sages?

A sage, according to Longman and Enns (2008:704), is also referred to as a wise person, and the word is used more often in the Old Testament wisdom literature than any other Old Testament books. Longman and Enns (2008:704) stated that the word signifies “not merely one with knowledge or skill but rather one with the ability to apply that experience advantageously”. Longman and Enns (2008:704) noted that the place of the sage in Israel is not very clear, but presumed that the sages wrote

the wisdom writings of the Old Testament. In addition, sages acknowledged and feared God, as can be seen in their writing in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. In these books, the sages' worldviews were always in existence in their discourses on the knowledge of the world and its ways as God's creation.

Longman and Enns (2008:704) did not view the sages as a professional class; rather that a person's wisdom, when recognised, drew followers who usually gathered around the sage to benefit in one way or the other. Longman and Enns (2008:704) viewed the sages as those who simply shared their knowledge, and supported their view by citing a few examples from Proverbs 15:7, Proverbs 1:6, Proverbs 22:17, and Ecclesiastes 12:9-10. There is also no evidence of schools where the sages taught, but the authors acknowledged that the sages' services might have been employed to advise the king or to educate the young in the royal courts.

Dean (2009:37) noted that the sages possessed traits of wisdom or were informed intellectual people with a reasoned approach to life. These individuals, according to Dean (2009:37), represented one of the three classes of leaders in ancient Israel, along with the priests and the prophets, and viewed their work as overlapping that of the elders and the scribes.

If one may grant that the sages wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, the question remains: did they constitute a professional set or were they a non-distinct group?

2.5.2 Arguments for a distinct sage group

Perdue (2007:327) supported the view that the sages wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and explained that central to their convictions was creation theology, which provided justification of faith in God as the creator of the world and the provider. According to Perdue (2007:326), the office of the sage and the compositions of wisdom were influenced by different cultures at different times.

Dean (2009:37) was of the view that the sages were a distinct group, which formed alongside the prophets and priests; public leaders in charge of running the

government and teaching traditions to the young people. Dean (2009:37) upholds the probability that the sages wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes and Job, and viewed the Book of Proverbs as a collection of literary works of many sages. Dean additionally ascribed many so-called Wisdom Psalms to the sages.

Perdue (2008:412) was of the opinion that the sages wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and that they wrote in response to the changes and developments in the social history of Israel. For Perdue (2008:412) these sages represented a group of intellectuals who observed the order that was present in the world, as well as presented the major themes of righteousness for the purpose of moral transformation. The sages also unlike in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, added additional elements of wisdom's worldview in the apocryphal texts by pointing to the divine direction of the history of the chosen people and humanity. Put in another way, the sages' work continued through streams of traditions that were present in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Rabbinic Judaism (Perdue, 2008:412).

Crenshaw (2010:25) maintained that the sages wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and that they constituted a distinct group in ancient Israel. Crenshaw (2010:24) provided various reasons to lend weight to the supposition that a professional class of sages existed in Israel.

First is the analogy with Egypt and Mesopotamia, where a professional class of intellectuals instructed the children of Pharaoh and other potential bureaucrats. Similar schools that existed in or near temples became the instruments by which Babylonian scribes acquired special skills that enabled them to assist the government in various projects, as well as provide numerous services for citizens. Second is the likelihood that a royal court would have needed the special talents of learned scribes. And thirdly, is the attack upon the wise within the prophetic texts, like Isaiah 5:21; 29:14, and Jeremiah 8:8-8. Crenshaw (2010:26) pointed out that the basic difference between the sages and other specialists like farmers, craftsmen, and porters was leisure. Crenshaw (2010:4) explained this on the logic that only those who had sufficient time would have been able to engage in intellectual pursuits. According to Crenshaw (2010:4), many interpreters have taken this observation as a clue and advocated that Israel's sages belonged to the upper class.

Penchansky (2010:2) maintained that a distinct sage group wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and explained that, unlike the prophets who received direct revelation from God and the priests who followed the rituals given to Moses at Mount Sinai, the sages had two different sources of information.

The first was from careful observation of both the natural world and human behaviour, and the second from wisdom and tradition passed down from one sage to another. Penchansky (2010:2) argued that this wisdom tradition that was passed down sometimes seems to contradict evidence from real life; recounting an example that sages believed in a balanced universe where humans got what they deserve. Humans receive rewards for their goodness, and the evil are punished. But experience shows otherwise: that good people suffer, while evil people sleep peacefully in their beds. Penchansky (2010:12) mentioned that this distinct sage group emerged as a professional group during the monarchy and that they wrote and edited the early forms of the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes over a period of almost 1 000 years.

Penchansky (2010:2) stated that the writers of all the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament were worshippers of the Israelite God, whom they called Yahweh. As sages, they uncovered and interpreted the messages that Yahweh embedded into the world, available and waiting to be discovered by the carefully observant. For the sages, “wisdom comes to those who carefully observe the ways of nature and the complexities of human behaviour” (Penchansky, 2010:2).

2.5.3 Arguments against a non-distinct sage group

Even though Penchansky (2010:11) agreed that a distinct sage group wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, he acknowledged that the early forms of wisdom reflected the works of a non-distinct sage group. He explained this point with three examples.

Firstly, parents shared their wisdom and experience with their children. Secondly, the elderly people in the communities were regarded as sources of wisdom by the

younger generation. Thirdly, certain individuals who were regarded as wise in the villages were looked up to by the people for advice and as a means of delivering good judgment. Penchansky (2010:11) noted that examples of this type of wisdom can be found in certain parts of the Book of Proverbs.

Murphy (2002:3) agreed that the sages wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament but did not view the sages as a distinct group. Murphy (2002:3) rather associated the sages with royalty and with teaching, and argued that before the Wisdom literature received literary form and permanency, there was an oral stage of the wisdom tradition that occurred at homes and in tribes. In this respect, Murphy (2002:4) regarded the home and the tribes as the original site of the wisdom teachings before such teaching became professionalised among the sages. Murphy understands that the sayings or the writings of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament were not the creation of a study desk but rather grew from human situations and needs. Therefore, according to Murphy (2002:4), we simply do not know the institutions that nourished the writings of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

Johnson (1975:12) argued that the advisors, administrators, teachers, and scribes attached to the royal house could be identified as the wise people who wrote the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Johnson (1975:12) wrote that the work of these advisors and scribes continued to be important as long as the monarchy existed in Israel, and he supported this view with an example from the Book of Proverbs – the introduction to the section of Proverbs 25:1 to 29:27 reads as follows: “These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out.” Based on this evidence, Johnson (1975:12) settled that among the duties of the scribes or political advisors was to preserve and interpret the religious history of Israel, as well as the wisdom of the nation.

2.5.4 Summary

There seems to be suggestions that certain parts of the Book of Proverbs were not written by a distinct sage group. These suggestions point to a non-distinct sage group as the contributors of the wisdom writings; tracing back to parents who shared

their wisdom and experience with their children, the elderly people in the communities who were regarded as sources of wisdom, and other individuals within the society who were regarded as wise in the villages.

However, major parts of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament are viewed by scholars as works by a distinct sage group: a professional group comparable to the priests and the prophets. Unlike the prophets who received direct revelation from God, and the priests who followed the rituals given to Moses at Mount Sinai, the sages had two different sources of information: careful observation of the natural world and human behaviour; and from wisdom tradition passed down from one sage to another.

This distinct sage group it seems emerged as a professional group during the monarchy, and they wrote and edited the early forms of the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. These sages worshipped Yahweh and attempted to uncover and interpret the messages that Yahweh embedded into the world.

2.6 Why was the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament written?

Penchansky (2010:2) suggested that, based on the contradictions the sages discovered in their systems, as they sought to observe the natural world and human behaviour, as well as through the wisdom tradition that was passed down to them, the sages were mostly left in agony that led them to different interpretations based on their observations. This resulted in different worldviews between the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Penchansky (2010:2) provided three different worldviews as an example to show that the Wisdom literature is the reflection of a conflicting world.⁵

⁵ 1) Anthropocentric: The sages believed that humans who honestly scrutinise their world can discern the divine secrets. The human perspective thus gains access into the divine mind. The prophets, in contrast, believed that God gives divine knowledge to select humans through dreams, visions, ecstasy, and divine appearance.

2) Optimistic: The wisdom enterprise bases itself on these two basic beliefs: that the universe makes sense – things happen for a reason, and those reasons make sense; and that humans actually are able, through diligent attention, to figure out the workings of the universe.

According to Penchansky (2012:3), the Wisdom literature was part of an instruction tradition. The sages' commitment to human observation as an unpretentious and significant basis of truth caused them to question their most basic assumptions about Yahweh's image concerning his justice and fairness. Each sage tried to solve this problem, depending on older wisdom principles passed down to them. However, they introduced new ways to look for answers to the question and also sought to justify to the wisdom audience the changes they introduced.

Penchansky (2012:2) argued that many sages accepted the traditional understanding of God as the sole governor of existence, while many others of the Hebrew wisdom, and not the Greek wisdom, expressed doubt and scepticism regarding God's goodness and reliability. The willingness of these sages to question the traditional understanding of God accords with the sages' commitment to observation. Penchansky (2012:4) provided an example of the early wisdom tradition, which held faith in the law of retribution that was passed down; that God punishes humans according to their deeds. However, the later generation of sages noticed, upon careful observation of human affairs that people did not really get what they deserved and thus they started to express doubt in the law of retribution.

Day *et al.* (1995:278) were of the view that the sages were preoccupied with questions of causation, the question of why things were the way they were; based on their belief in a single, all-wise creator. This question left the sages with the need to harmonise and explain the wide-ranging occurrences of life as they were actually perceived and experienced. Day *et al.* (1995:279) argued that the sages' quests were sometimes misjudged as secular – a humanistic quest. This was because the suppositions the sages made concerning the natural and moral order of the world seem to have created a certain distance between that natural and moral order and God. However, Day *et al.* (1995:279) held that the sages' heavy presumption upon reality and interrelationships of a divine order rendered such judgment unreliable.

3) Sceptical and doubting: Some of the sages felt outraged because their expectation was that the universe should make sense but in their experience it did not. So the sages, on the basis of their experience (no. 1), challenged the rationality of their universe and challenged the justice of God.

Nonetheless, Day *et al.* (1995:280) suggested that wisdom writings, both in their earlier and later forms, did not have any exclusively rounded form of instruction. This is due to the disagreements that still exist among scholars as to the role wisdom writings played in Israelite life. These disagreements make it difficult to determine the theological importance of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The disagreements range from whether the wisdom writings played a major and broad role, or were they restricted to small sections of the community; to the extent the Book of Job can be classified as a wisdom document; and how far the Book of Ecclesiastes represents an individual accomplishment deriving from one author, and so on.

The different arguments, according to Day *et al.* allow us to see the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament as methods of enquiry, “a use of particular forms of teaching, and a desire to compare and coordinate phenomena, instead of a formally stated set of propositions. It may be classified as a passion for education” (1995:280).

Johnson (1975:13) appealed to the contrasts that exist between the familiar knowledge of the work of the Israelite priests and prophets to explain the work of the wise and their writings. While the wise attempted to draw general conclusions as a guide for living through their engagement in the observations of life, the priests were engaged with religious observations. The wise did not only draw conclusions from experiences with the present, but also drew conclusions from their knowledge of the past. The prophets, on the other hand, did not depend on experience but announced truths delivered to them directly by Yahweh.

Crenshaw (2010:4) recognised the goal of the wisdom writings of the Old Testament as the formation of character in humans, and to make sense out of the anomalies in human existence. Crenshaw (2010:4) distinguished the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament as reasoned research into specific ways human beings can ensure their personal wellbeing in everyday life, and how to make sense of extreme misfortune and frustrating abnormalities, as well as to communicate this hard-earned knowledge so that subsequent generations could embody it.

Perdue (2008:413) differentiated the Wisdom literature based on their views. He said that the theological view of the materials that make up the seven collections and concluding poem of the Book of Proverbs point to the theme of “righteousness as the order of creation, society, and the life of the individual sage”. In this view, the Book of Proverbs contains the wisdom that is passed down, coupled with the experiences of the sages who observed the order of creation, and penned down responses to help shape a just society. In the Book of Job, according to Perdue (2008:414), at issue throughout the dialogues of all the human characters is the justice of God. Perdue (2008:415) regarded some Wisdom Psalms as collections, bearing the recurring themes of the “role of the Torah, theodicy, righteous and wise behaviour, and retributive justice”.

Perdue (2008:414) noted that in the Book of Ecclesiastes, *Qoheleth* does not forsake the wisdom he has learned, but questioned its advantage in life, which is but fleeting and soon to pass; also the advantage of wisdom in avoiding death or in experiencing joy. *Qoheleth's* worldview is not characterised by justice and meaning, but by endless repetition in a world where the fate of all human beings are subjectively determined by God.

Berry (1995:12) stated that the wisdom that is found in the Book of Job is a unique type of wisdom, which places emphasis on God’s activity rather than human activity. The Book of Job shows that wisdom involves not only human struggle for religious discernment, but also God’s intervention in human affairs and his provision of answers to human pursuits.

2.6.2 Summary

The Wisdom literature of the Old Testament is considered by many as methods of enquiry, rather than a formally stated set of propositions. The sages were committed to human observation. Many sages accepted the traditional understanding of God as the sole governor of existence, while many others expressed doubt and scepticism regarding God’s goodness and reliability. The willingness of these sages to question the traditional understanding of God, accords with their commitment to observation. They drew conclusions from experiences with the present and from knowledge of the

past. Their writings are considered reasoned reflection into specific ways human beings can ensure their personal wellbeing in everyday life; and how to make sense of extreme misfortune and frustrating abnormalities; as well as to communicate this hard-earned knowledge so that succeeding generations will embody it.

However, the various Wisdom literatures of the Old Testament took different directions in their approach. The Book of Proverbs contains the wisdom that is passed down, coupled with the experience of the sages who observed the order of creation, and penned down responses to help shape a just society. The Book of Job places emphasis on God's activity rather than human activity and shows that wisdom involves not only the human struggle for religious discernment, but also God's intervention in human affairs and his provision of answers to human pursuits. The Wisdom Psalms bear the recurring themes of the role of the Torah, theodicy, righteous and wise behaviour, and retributive justice. The Book of Ecclesiastes, which is the book of focus in this study, is understood to question the advantage of wisdom in life; in avoiding death or in experiencing joy. The Book of Ecclesiastes is characterised by endless repetition in a world where the fate of all human beings are predetermined by God.

The insights gained in this chapter will unquestionably assist in Chapter 4 in the exegetical exercise in an attempt to determine what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates regarding the images of God and all possible human relationships as portrayed in the book through the images of God.

For added insight, it is necessary to explore in the next chapter the development of studies and the range of different viewpoints with regard to the Book of Ecclesiastes.

CHAPTER 3

The historical studies and different viewpoints on the Book of Ecclesiastes

3.1 Introduction

The thrust of this chapter is to explore the development of studies, as well as the range of different viewpoints with regard to understanding and interpreting the Book of Ecclesiastes. The objective is to discern the different viewpoints that have developed over the years, especially with regard to the images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The main question this chapter will attempt to answer is: How was the Book of Ecclesiastes chosen to be included in the canon of the Old Testament by both the Jews and Christians?

The approach begins with a historical exploration of different scholarly viewpoints in answer to the following core question: What are the different scholarly viewpoints pertaining to the canonicity, the dating, the authorship, the reception, and the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes?

This study also scrutinises the possible understanding with regards to the images of God, as well as the possible relationship these images have with human beings.

The author presumes that the answers to these questions will provide essential background information for Chapter 4, which will be a textual analysis of texts chosen from the Book of Ecclesiastes that might portray something about the images of God in the book, as well as the possible human relationships to those images.

3.2 Canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes

3.2.1 Arguments in support of the canonicity of Ecclesiastes

Fredericks and Estes (2010:42) attempted to identify three areas of agreement among scholars just before the twentieth century with regard to the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes. They stated that despite its apparent inconsistency with itself and the other books of the Old Testament, the Book of Ecclesiastes remains part of both the Jewish and the Christian canon. They also referred to the Council of Jamnia held in AD 90 to resolve the disagreement between the two Jewish schools regarding the appropriateness of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the canon. Fredericks and Estes (2010:42) said the Book of Ecclesiastes' "undeniable orthodoxy in some sections and the presumption of Solomon authorship, were two critical arguments that won the day". They (2010:45) argued that the apparent internal inconsistency led some scholars omit some positive statements in the book in order to strike a better balance. This resulted in a universally accepted view that an Epilogist has added the final verses of the book, as well as Ecclesiastes 8:12b and Ecclesiastes 8:13.

Bartholomew (2009:18-19) recounted concerning the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes, that a council was convened in AD 90 to resolve a dispute between two Pharisaic schools. The source of the dispute is unknown, but Bartholomew referred to the Talmud to state that the dispute centred on Ecclesiastes' secular character, and the difficulty rabbis faced in harmonising the contradictions between Ecclesiastes 7:3 and 2:2 and between Ecclesiastes 8:15 and 2:2; and also between passages with supposed heretical tendencies such as Ecclesiastes 1:3 and 11:9. The school with the opinion that Ecclesiastes was inspired by the Holy Spirit like other biblical books gained the upper hand. Bartholomew came to the understanding that the book was regarded as authoritative well before the time of Christ; based on the fact that it was found among the Qumran texts (Bartholomew, 2009:18-19).

Bartholomew (2009:20) alluded to the most recent examination of the development of the canon to argue that the canon was established by the 2nd century BC.

According to Bartholomew (2009:20), the Book of Ecclesiastes is quoted once in the New Testament (Rom. 3:10) and the early Christian church accepted the Book of Ecclesiastes as part of the biblical canon. Bartholomew (2009:20) provided some helpful cues in terms of Ecclesiastes' canonicity; maintaining that the book does not function primarily as raw material for Christian teaching, but invites the reader to wrestle with the issues in such a way as to create relational viewpoints. Bartholomew (2009:20) stated that the Book of Ecclesiastes takes readers on a journey of faith through relentless pursuits, which goes back to the starting point of faith and results in more in-depth faith.

Barrick (2011:15-16) noted that following the 1st century controversy between the Jewish schools, later Jewish literature, the Midrash accepted Ecclesiastes as part of the Old Testament, and attributed the book to Solomon in his old age. Barrick (2011:15-16) referred to possible allusions to Ecclesiastes in the New Testament, particularly in Romans 3:10 and 8:20, as well as in James 4:14. Barrick (2011:15-16) also referred to many early church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandra, Origen, Tertullian, and Jerome, who all accepted the canonicity of Ecclesiastes by citing some of its teachings. Barrick additionally discussed the internal evidence in Ecclesiastes 12:11 as the book's own ultimate claim to divine inspiration to provide evidence for the canonicity (cf Barrick 2011:15-16).

Kidner (1976:13) understood *Qoheleth* as one who could easily be taken as a sceptic or a pessimist because of his relentless probing. However, Kidner held that there is no book in the Old Testament quite like it; that *Qoheleth's* "natural habitat, so to speak, is among the wise men who teach us to use our eyes as well as our ears to learn the ways of God and man" (Kidner, 1976:13).

Kidner (1976:13) referred to *Qoheleth's* sayings as both practical and orthodox, and observed that *Qoheleth's* main approach was from the bottom, which was resolved to see how far humans could go without any such bases as he finds there, the axiom of all the wise humans of the Old Testament, which is that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. He (Kidner 1976:14) maintained that the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes put himself and his readers in the shoes of the humanist and not the atheist, for atheism was hardly a growing concern in his day. Kidner added that the

category in which the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes placed his own work in Ecclesiastes 12:9, was witness to the book's own claim of divine inspiration and support for its canonicity.

Zuck (1991:46-56) referred to the instruction concerning God and man in the Book of Ecclesiastes to refute secularist doubts, in an effort to determine Ecclesiastes' rightful inclusion in the Old Testament canon. Zuck (1991:46-56) noted that many have concluded that the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates only human reasoning apart from God's revelation. Zuck (1991:46-56) recognised many elements in the Book of Ecclesiastes that supposedly suggested this outlook of secularist despair. These elements, according to Zuck, included the repeated refrains: "everything is meaningless"; the finality of death that removes any advantage or gain that humans may have in life, the fleeting nature of life, life's injustices that include the frustrating nature of labour, uncorrected injustices and the puzzle of life with its many enigmas. However, Zuck pointed to many statements in the book that seemingly counterbalance these sceptical elements; for example: life is a gift from God, life is to be enjoyed, that injustices will be corrected, that God is in control, and that humans are challenged to please God, and to remember and to fear Him (Zuck, 1991:46-56).

Kaiser (1979:11) qualified the negative estimates of the Book of Ecclesiastes as a reflection of superficial reading of the book, which results in negative terms like "nihilistic, pessimistic, fatalist, sceptical, cynical, materialistic, experimental, and the like". Kaiser (1979:15-16) wrote that *Qoheleth* was working on the problem of humans' attempt to find meaning in the world, without coming to know God, who created the world and sustains it.

3.2.2 Arguments against the canonicity of Ecclesiastes

Sneed (2012:1-8) argued that Ecclesiastes was sceptical about traditional wisdom and also pessimistic. Sneed believed the book was unorthodox, based on the discovery of words by the ancient rabbis who relished unorthodoxy. However, Sneed (2012:1-8) also acknowledged that the book was canonised, but that it almost ended up among sacred books as it was not deemed fit for use in the synagogues. Sneed similarly, acknowledged the acceptance of the canonicity of the book by the Jewish

school of Hillel, based on Solomonic authorship and the religious gloss in Ecclesiastes 12:13. However, Sneed considered this religious gloss as an intention to soften the book's seemingly heterodoxy and to present usefulness for modern fundamentalists and evangelicals, who would otherwise have largely ignored the book (cf Sneed 2012:1-8).

Perdue (2008:199) evidently did not seem to argue against the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes. But such an argument was suggested in his mention of the internal scepticism that engrossed the Jewish worldview in Israel and early Judaism. This suggestion was due to the case that was made for the inclusion of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the canon in the 1st and 2nd centuries BC. Perdue (2008:200) emphasised the books' sceptical view about God, wisdom, and human existence; which seriously contested the affirmations of the Jewish religion. Furthermore, Perdue (2008:200) suggested that *Qoheleth* must have been influenced by the "Greek and Egyptian traditions of wisdom, religious teaching, and philosophy vibrant during his time as a teacher". Perdue compared the Book of Ecclesiastes with The Book of Job to affirm that *Qoheleth* began with no affirmation of any theological convictions, as well as not discovering any "observable and knowable relationship between God, cosmology, human society, and the individual moral life" (Perdue, 2008:203).

Crenshaw (1987:52) questioned how the Book of Ecclesiastes gained acceptance into the canon. The usual answer he echoed was based on the book's attribution to Solomon. According to Crenshaw (1987:52), this attribution overlooked "a similar device that failed to gain acceptance into the canon for Wisdom of Solomon or for the Odes of Solomon. However, their linguistic medium, Greek, may have cancelled the effect of the claim to Solomonic authorship." Crenshaw (1987:52) maintained that the best answer to how the Book of Ecclesiastes gained acceptance into the canon of the Old Testament was based on the supposedly second epilogue which removed the sting from *Qoheleth's* scepticism and advocated traditional views concerning the observance of the Torah. Crenshaw (1987:52) further referred to the evidence that Ecclesiastes was among the books mentioned in the 2nd century BC in a discussion on canonicity, where the Jewish school of Hillel's view prevailed over the conservative Shammaite School, which objected to the canonicity of the book.

Crenshaw noted that the time of canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes is unknown; nevertheless, the book was eventually read by the Jewish worshippers in the synagogue on the third day of the Feast of Booths (Crenshaw, 1987:52).

Crenshaw (1987:23) maintained that the despondent message that lies at the heart of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Old Testament's strangest book, is that human beings should enjoy life while they can because the world is meaningless, virtue does not bring reward, the deity stands distant; abandoning humanity to chance and death. Crenshaw (1987:23) was of the opinion that this view certainly contrasted radically with earlier teachings expressed in the Book of Proverbs, which affirms a world in which fear of God and adherence to the insights of previous generations guarantee long life and prosperity, and God guarantees wellbeing for the righteous and self-destruction for the wicked. In contrast to the message of Proverbs, Crenshaw (1987:23) held that *Qoheleth*, the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, showed no such conservatism and discerned no moral order at all, as well as stating that humans could not know God's disposition.

Concerning the view that an epilogist is presumed to have removed the sting from the Book of Ecclesiastes' scepticism and advocated traditional views about the observance of Torah, the question is raised whether *Qoheleth* wrote the complete book or did other authors contribute to the present form of the Book of Ecclesiastes? Crenshaw (1987:34) stated that this question of an epilogist demands the question of literal integrity of the Book of Ecclesiastes. In which case, he was of the view that the author wrote the bulk of the book but that editorial glosses were entered at a later time (Crenshaw 1987:34).

Anderson (1997:195) believed that *Qoheleth* should not be in the canon, for the reason that the writer "did not recognise any concept of divine inspiration and revelation in his work. He simply wrote as he thought and what was on his heart." According to Anderson (1997:195), *Qoheleth* had a pessimistic view of God and humans, human life under the sun, and human wisdom. Anderson (1997:195) maintained that the inclusion of the book in the canon, and the fact that "the canon has a dialectical conversation within itself and existentially with believers, makes way

for this pessimistic theology to be valued and used in modern Christianity in an extremely relevant and meaningful way”.

Shields (2006:1-3) wrote that a number of theories have been put forward to account for the inclusion of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the canon of the Old Testament; however, none of the theories have found unanimous support among the readers of the book. Shields (2006:1-3) offered an interpretation of Ecclesiastes that acknowledged the unorthodox nature of *Qoheleth's* words, as well as accounted for the canonicity of the book. Shields (2006:1-3) noted previous approaches to resolving the problem of canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes. According to Shields (2006:1-3), the traditional explanation claimed that the implied association with Solomon, and the conclusion of the epilogue that redeemed the work, were sufficient to render it acceptable. Shields (2006:1-3) was of the view that both reasons appeared unlikely to be sufficient evidence for the acceptance of the book into the canon – given the failure of works that were more consistently orthodox.

Another approach, according to Shields (2006:1-3), made an attempt to demonstrate that the orthodox advice of the epilogist accurately represented the summary of *Qoheleth's* teachings. According to Shields (2006:1-3), this viewpoint proved to be unconvincing, based on the failure of attempts to find a reflection of *Qoheleth's* words in the epilogist's exhortation. This was also based, at the very least, on the view of not being able to account for *Qoheleth's* statement that everything was meaningless. Shields noted that the presence of this statement posed a problem for scholars who held that *Qoheleth* presented an orthodox message (Shields, 2006:1-3). Shields (2006:4) made allusion to a third approach, which argued that the entire work of the Book of Ecclesiastes “is an extensive dialogue between a pessimistic voice and a more measured presenter”. According to Shields (2006:4-5), this approach was unlikely, because the reader “is conditioned by the introduction to the work to hear only one voice, the voice of *Qoheleth*, son of David, king in Jerusalem”. This interpretation also failed to account for the absence of clear and explicit markers of dialogue. Shields noted one more approach, which argued for the presence of a legitimate tradition of scepticism in the Old Testament; thus making the Book of Ecclesiastes an example of that tradition. In this view, the Book of Ecclesiastes is not unorthodox, and takes the difficulties inherent in *Qoheleth's* words seriously.

Shields (2006:4-5) maintained that the problem with this view was that the supposed tradition of scepticism elsewhere in the Old Testament were not as unrelenting as the words of *Qoheleth*, which were in continuous denial of faith and doubt in God's goodness.

Shield's supposition (2006:4-5) was that it was not known for certain how the book became canonical but that the problematic nature of the book was widely recognised in early records of its interpretations. Shields wrote that there was also no evidence of its acceptance as canonical, but proceeds to state in the remainder of his book: "To present an understanding of Ecclesiastes that can both acknowledge that the words of *Qoheleth* are incompatible with the orthodoxy of the remainder of the Old Testament and still reconcile the book as a whole with that orthodoxy" (Shields 2006:6).

3.2.3 Summary

There are ranges of different viewpoints among Old Testament scholars with regard to the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Those who do not accept the canonicity of the book base their arguments on the contradictory elements that include the repeated refrains "that everything is meaningless", the finality of death that removes any advantage humans may have in life, the fleeting nature of life, and life's injustices that include the frustrating nature of labour, uncorrected injustices, and the mystery of life with its many enigmas. These elements, they said, are in contradiction with the messages from the other books of the Old Testament. In addition, they pointed to the religious gloss, which was considered as an intention to soften the book's seemingly heterodoxy.

There are those scholars who, to a degree, accepted the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes as a result of the question of an epilogist, who was thought to have introduced the question of literal integrity into Ecclesiastes. Significant to the question of an epilogist, is the universally accepted view that an epilogist added the final verses of the book, as well as Ecclesiastes 8:12b and Ecclesiastes 13.

Nevertheless, there are those scholars who accepted the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Their arguments were built on factors such as Solomonic authorship, the acceptance of the book in both Jewish and Christian canon, the acceptance by the Jewish School of Hillel and the early Christian church fathers, the fact that it was found among the Qumran texts, and that it was quoted in the New Testament. The scholars also pointed to the book's own internal evidence – its claim of divine inspiration in Ecclesiastes 12:11, as well as many statements in the book that seemingly counterbalance the sceptical elements.

Although there are different ranges of opposing arguments with regard to the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes, there appears to be no strong evidence thus far to refute the canonicity of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament, as well as to question the literal integrity of the book. Rather, based on the wide acceptance of the Book of Ecclesiastes by the early recipients, as well as the acceptance over the many years of its existence by both Jews and Christians to be included in the canon of the Old Testament, the Book of Ecclesiastes remains in the author's view part of the canon of the Old Testament.

3.3 Dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes

There seems to be no agreement among scholars concerning the dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes.⁶ Some scholars, especially those who believe the book was written by Solomon, date the book in the pre-exilic period; while other scholars hold to dating in the post-exilic period – based on some linguistic evidence. It becomes relevant in an attempt to determine the time the Book of Ecclesiastes was written, to present the different viewpoints concerning the dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes under the pre-exilic and the post-exilic periods.

3.3.1 Pre-exilic period

According to Barrick (2011:18-19), some Old Testament scholars like Delitzsch (1885:190) and Eissfeldt (1965:491-500), favoured a date for the writing of

⁶ This dispute will be discussed hereunder

Ecclesiastes at least 500 years after the death of King Solomon; grounding their argument on the vocabulary found in the book. Barrick (2011:18-19) explained their argument, which was based on linguistic evidence, that there was no history of the Hebrew language in the book, and they claimed that the book revealed substantial evidence of foreign language. Contrariwise, he (Barrick 2011:18-19) referred to Wilson (1959:109), who was of the view that the book was written by Solomon.⁷ Barrick (2011:18-19) added that the vocabulary was certainly limited more by the subject matter than by the timeframe for the writing and indicated a date of writing the Book of Ecclesiastes as approximately 940-932 BC (cf Barrick 2011:21).

According to Barker and Kohlenberger III (1994:1009), there were no passages in the Book of Ecclesiastes that ruled out the possibility of Solomonic authorship, and that if Solomon was the author, and then the book must have been written presumably in the later days of his life. Barker and Kohlenberger III (1994:1009) held that some of the expressions in the Book of Ecclesiastes seem to require a later date than the time of Solomon but they did not discuss these expressions. Nevertheless, Barker and Kohlenberger III (1994:1009) stated that it was reasonable to believe that Solomon's words were preserved over the years and eventually recorded by a new teacher in the Hebrew of his time.

3.3.2 Post-exilic period

Perdue (2008:219) wrote that most scholars of the wisdom corpus favoured a date of writing of the Book of Ecclesiastes at either the end of the Persian period or the early Hellenistic period. Perdue (2008:219) favoured the Hellenistic period based on linguistic and cultural reasons. Perdue (2008:220) stated that the original language of the Book of Ecclesiastes betrayed traces of late Biblical Hebrew, that there were traces of Persian words and numerous Aramaisms, as well as the possibility of cultural and philosophical contributions made by the Greek and Egyptian scepticism to *Qoheleth's* world, that is evident in his writing.

⁷ Wilson (1959:109) said that Solomon being the wisest man of his time and a poet, an observer of nature and of man, would, like Shakespeare, Milton, and Carlyle, have had a vocabulary much above the average.

Loader (1986:3-4) placed the Book of Ecclesiastes later than the 5th century BC, also based on the evidence of the language of the book; he noted that whereas Solomon lived in the 10th century BC, the Hebrew of the author shows considerable Aramaic influence typical of more recent works of the Old Testament. Loader (1986:3-4) also added that the Hebrew of the Book of Ecclesiastes contains several Persian words; this type of Hebrew is later than the Hebrew of the 5th century BC of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. These reasons Loader (1986:3-4) presented allowed him to arrive at a date in the middle of the 2nd century BC, which is seven centuries after Solomon.

Bartholomew (2009:44) noted that the arguments that focus on the language of Ecclesiastes as that of later Hebrew became the major argument among contemporary scholars for a late dating of Ecclesiastes, long after Solomon lived. Bartholomew (2009:46) pointed out that it was indeed only a few scholars that defended Solomonic authorship; agreeing that most date the book around the 3rd century BC; as well as regarding the book as written by an unknown Jew.

Murphy (1992:xxii) stated that a certain date cannot be assigned to the Book of Ecclesiastes but settled for a post-exilic period based on the general consensus among scholars about the language and thought of the book. Murphy (1992: xxii) referred to further arguments in which some scholars favour the Greek period over the Persian period. This was based on the hypothesis that there is a definite Hellenistic influence in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Murphy (1992: xxii) was of the view that a date in the middle of the 3rd century around 250 BC would be appropriate.

Bennett (2010:24-26) referred to different sources of evidence for the dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes. The first evidence he based on the oldest copy of the book, which is dated no earlier than 175 BC. He said this oldest fragments of Ecclesiastes are from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Second evidence is based on the allusion to Ecclesiastes in other writings like Sirach. The Book of Sirach was dated 175 BC. However, Bennett (2010:24-26) stated the book could be dated earlier than Sirach; based on the support of the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments. Subsequently, Bennett (2010:24-26) wrote that if the book could not be dated based on historical evidence and the development of thought, then the last resort, if every other method in dating

a historical book failed, was usually the linguistic evidence. In the case of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the language differs from the style of the language used in most of the Old Testament. The language of the Book of Ecclesiastes was influenced by Persian and significant Aramaic not found in pre-exilic writings. For Bennett (2010:24-26), linguistic arguments for a post-exilic date for the Book of Ecclesiastes were convincing. Thus, he interpreted the message of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the context of the post-exilic era in general and the Persian period in particular (Bennett, 2010:24-26).

According to Harmon (1956:12), the Book of Ecclesiastes was written in a late form of Hebrew akin to the language of the Mishnah (ca. AD 200) and was much affected by Aramaic. Based on its language, Harmon (1956:12) argued that the Book of Ecclesiastes was later than the Book of Esther (ca. 300 BC) and much later than the Chronicler. Harmon (1956:14) maintained that the Book of Ecclesiastes was written before 180 BC, based on the understanding that another book, Ecclesiasticus, which was written about 180 BC, made use of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Allowing the thinking in the direction of Greek period, Harmon (1956:14) placed the writing of the Book of Ecclesiastes between 250 and 200 BC and its geographical setting in Palestine.

3.3.3 Summary

There are opposing views with regard to the dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Some scholars favour a date in the post-exilic period, between the 2nd and 3rd century BC, some specifically favour a date in the Persian period, and others in the Hellenistic period. The post-exilic dating was mostly based on linguistic and cultural evidence. The linguistic and cultural evidences, allowed for the dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes during the early Hellenistic period. The original language of the Book of Ecclesiastes showed traces of late Biblical Hebrew, with traces of Persian words and numerous Aramaisms, as well as the possibility of cultural and philosophical contributions made by the Greek and Egyptian scepticism to *Qoheleth's* world, that is evident in his writing. This being the case, Solomon lived long before this period, in a time where this kind of philosophies did not exist. Therefore based on these evidences, Solomon cannot be the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

A few other scholars, on the other hand, like Barrick (2011) and Barker and Kohlenberger III (1994), based their preferred dating on their acceptance of Solomon as the author, favouring the dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes as written during his time (presumably in the later days of his life). These arguments constitute a problem, as far as the exact dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes is concerned.

The arguments for post-exilic dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes seem to outweigh the support for pre-exilic dating. Therefore, one can accept that the dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes can be post-exilic.

3.4 Authorship of Ecclesiastes

Scholars reveal different viewpoints on the authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes: those that favour Solomonic authorship and those that reject Solomonic authorship based on some internal and external evidence.

This section positions the arguments according to similar viewpoints; firstly those who favour Solomonic authorship, and secondly those who reject Solomonic authorship.

3.4.1 Arguments in favour of Solomonic authorship

Bryant (1967:141) wrote that even though Solomon is now generally rejected as the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, it can still be maintained on many grounds that he was the author.⁸

Barrick (2011:17) referred to Hugo Grotius, who proposed in 1644 that Solomon was not the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes but also did not associate the book with

⁸ Bryant (1967:141): Firstly, the one who calls himself “the preacher” is described as David’s son and as king in Jerusalem (1:1, 12). Secondly, this same person designates himself as a collector of proverbs (12:9), a description that obviously fits Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 4:32). Thirdly, the reference to the author’s great wisdom (1:16; 2:9) accords with Solomon’s ability (cf. 1 Kings 4:30f). Fourthly, the author’s description of the splendour of Jerusalem during his reign (2:4-9) points unmistakably to Solomon (cf. 1 Chron. 29:25). Fifthly, the author makes several references to characteristics of life (e.g. 4:13; 7:26, 10:6, 16) that points plainly to Solomon. As his (1967:141) final observation, the close parallel between this book and Proverbs is best explained by unity of authorship.

any author. Barrick said, “except for Martin Luther, who identified the author as Jesus ben Sirach,” no one else in the history of the Christian church prior to 1644 ever made such a suggestion (2011:17). Barrick referred to different scholars who held to the view that the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes was unknown; these included Deltzsch (1885) and Leupold (1983), who both reasoned that the Old Testament did not use “King in Jerusalem elsewhere as the Book of Ecclesiastes did”(Barrick 2011:17). Barrick (2011:17) noted that other scholars who denied Solomonic authorship “points out that Ecclesiastes does not make specific reference to Solomon as the author”. Barrick (2011:21) favoured Solomonic authorship, and provided a chart to support his argument. The chart considered factors of wisdom, works, wealth, and words, arriving at the conclusion that the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes was Solomon and indicated a date of approximately 940-932 BC.

Kidner (1976:21) was of the view that the writer almost came to the point of calling himself Solomon, and added that the enigmatic note he penned down in Ecclesiastes 1:16, “surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me”, rules out any successor to the unrivalled King Solomon.

Garret (1993:257-267) argued for Solomonic authorship, and in answer to Delitzsch’s (1885) often quoted history of the Hebrew language, Garret noted that one should be mindful of the limitations imposed by lack of knowledge of the particulars of the history of Hebrew. Garret (1993:257-267) argued that compared to Greek, there was indisputable evidence concerning the relative scarcity of the history of the Hebrew language. Garret (1993:257-267) cited a major study in which it was found that there were 46 points of agreement between the language of Ecclesiastes and Biblical Hebrew, six grammatical features of Ecclesiastes that depended on early Biblical Hebrew, and none that were dependent on late Biblical Hebrew. Garret (1993:257-267) wrote that the conclusion of the study held that the language of the Book of Ecclesiastes was fully in the realm of pre-exilic language. In response to the question of internal evidence that hinted at non-Solomonic authorship, Garret (1993:257-267) further argued that the use of perfect tense in Ecclesiastes 1:12 proved nothing; rather, it may indicate that the book was written by an aged Solomon near the end of his life. Garrett added that it was not clear that texts like Ecclesiastes 8:2-8, 10:16-17, and 12:9-14 could be used to disprove Solomonic authorship;

rather, it could be said that a king could reflect critically on a king's role and on appropriate behaviour in the royal presence. Garret (1993:257-267) added that these reflections posed a problem for advocates of a post-exilic date for the book, based on the fact that Jewish people no longer had their own local kings after the exile and were ruled by nations. Concerning the question of frame-narrator, Garret (1993:267) maintained that the Book of Ecclesiastes do not have two discourse levels of the frame-narrator and the teacher as proposed by many; rather, the book have three levels. The first level gives something of the external world and personality of the writer; the second level gives the wisdom instructions that make up the framework of his intellectual world, and the third level gives his personal meditations. Garret (1993:257-267) maintained that all of these levels were not indications of redaction history but a matter of literary technique, which flows so well because they were part of single perspective of one author.

Garret (1993:254-257) stated that Solomonic authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes has been the traditional belief of both Jews and Christians, which prevailed until the rise of historical criticism in the 18th and 19th centuries. In search of answer to this dramatic change, Garret (1993:254-257) presented arguments for non-Solomonic authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes.⁹

3.4.2 Arguments against Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes

Bennett (2010:23-24) maintained that there are reasons to think that Solomon was not the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes. His view was that the book was probably written much later than Solomon's time and that there are elements in the book that do not seem to come from Solomon, or even a king. Furthermore, Bennett (2010:23-24) stated that the book's perspective on kingship points to the fact that the author is of a non-royal background.

⁹ Garret (2010:23-24) said the most important issue in the arguments for non-Solomonic authorship is the linguistic evidence, which shows a high number of apparent Aramaisms in the text. The issues of internal evidences also suffice in the arguments; the use of perfect tense in Ecclesiastes 1:12, and the contention that the Book of Ecclesiastes maintains the so-called Solomonic fiction in the first two chapters and then abandons all reference to him. There are also the issues of the frame narrator, the author-editor who made his presence known in Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 and 12:9-10, as well as the historical and literary arguments that favour a post-Solomonic date for the book, and the question of canonicity.

Longman (1998:2-9) wrote that a small but vocal group of evangelicals still advocate the traditional view of Solomonic authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes, despite strong internal and external evidence to the contrary. According to Longman (1998:2-9), the argument presented by the small but vocal group of evangelicals is based on the point that to deviate from this view, can mean caving into suspect views. Longman was of the view that support for the tradition of Solomonic authorship could be attributed to a surface reading of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Nevertheless, Longman presented the arguments for the traditional view.

According to Longman (1998:2-9), these arguments were usually founded on internal and external evidences. However, this study is not concerned with fundamental reading of the text; therefore these traditional arguments will only be listed in a footnote for interest's sake.¹⁰

Longman (1998:2-9) argued that attentive readers of the Old Testament felt uncomfortable about the simple identification of *Qoheleth* with Solomon. Longman presented the counterevidence to Solomonic authorship under internal and external considerations.

Firstly, under internal consideration, Longman (1998:2-9) found a number of subtle hints distancing Solomon from *Qoheleth*, making it much more likely that the nickname was adopted by the actual writer to associate himself with Solomon, while retaining his distance from him. Secondly, Longman added that two specific verses seem to strongly indicate that *Qoheleth* was not Solomon. The implicit claim that Solomon was no longer a king while he was still alive by the use of past tense in Ecclesiastes 1:12, is not mentioned by the historical books and, according to 1 Kings 11, Solomon died while he ruled Israel. Also, the words of Ecclesiastes 1:16a refer to

¹⁰ Firstly, based on the contents of the following: The words of verse 1:1, which naturally point to Solomon, and the author speaking in the first person in 1:12, which bears resemblance to the picture of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:1-10:29. Also, the texts of 2:4-9 and 1:16 point to Solomon as the author of the book of Ecclesiastes. Secondly, the seemingly intertextuality in 1 Kings 8 subtly hint that Solomon is the author, thus it is seen as an intentional link between Solomon and *Qoheleth* based on the use of the verbal root קהל (qhl) in reference to Solomon in the story of the dedication of the temple. Thirdly, *Qoheleth* was identified with Solomon by the early interpretations of the book; for example by a disciple of Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgos (AD 213-270). Fourthly, the Targum illustrated the use of Ecclesiastes to fill in gaps in Solomon's life; so that it became the witness to his return from apostasy, in order to communicate to humans the dangers of wandering from God.

the author gaining wisdom surpassing everyone who ruled in Jerusalem before him, which would sound strange on Solomon's lips, because David was the only ruler before him in Jerusalem (Longman, 1998:2-9).

Longman maintained that, besides these two verses, the association between *Qoheleth* and Solomon only lasted for the first three chapters, so that even when the kingship is mentioned later in Ecclesiastes 4:1-3, there seems to be a gap between the speaker and the institution and the awkwardness of the words of Ecclesiastes in 5:7-8 and 10:20 coming from a king. Longman (1998:2-9) was of the view that *Qoheleth* was not Solomon, rather that the writer used Solomon as a perfect literary foil for his argument. Longman also advocated that Old Testament scholars should take cue from the literary structure of the book, by considering the change in point of view between the body of Ecclesiastes (1:12-12:7) on the one hand, and the prologue (1:1-11) and epilogue of Ecclesiastes (12:8-14) on the other hand.

Longman (1998:2-9) also made use of external evidence to show that *Qoheleth* bears a structural resemblance to a group of ancient Near Eastern literary texts. In these texts, Longman pointed out that there was a well-used genre in which a later author placed words in the mouth of another and that only the body of Ecclesiastes (1:12-12:7) paralleled these texts; highlighting that the prologue (1:1-11) and the epilogue (12:8-14) are a frame that is structurally distant from the body. Longman (1998:2-9) stated that this distance provided strong support of the view that a second voice can be heard in the frame in addition to that of *Qoheleth* – the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Murphy (1992:xx-xxi) referred to the superscription in Ecclesiastes 1:1, the statement in Ecclesiastes 1:12, and the description of the author's experience with wealth, as reasons for the longstanding tradition of Solomonic authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes. However, Murphy (1992:xx-xxi) argued that the adoption of the identity of a king was intelligible, since wisdom is usually associated with kings and Solomon had a great reputation for wisdom. Additionally, Murphy (1992:xx-xxi) wrote that the author's attitude towards kingship was distant, as in the observation regarding injustice in Ecclesiastes 3:16, 4:1-2, and 5:7; as well as the comments about royalty in Ecclesiastes 8:2-4, 10:4-7, 16-17, and 20; which all stem from one who appears to

know more about how to deal with a king than how to rule. Murphy (1992: xx-xxi) further argued that both the language in which the Book of Ecclesiastes is written and the tone of the book render the identification with Solomon impossible.

Loader (1986:3-4) argued that there is so much evidence that Solomon could not have been the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Loader (1986:3-4) stated that the evidence is based on the language of the book; the dating of the book in the middle of the 3rd century BC (seven centuries after Solomon); parts of the book, such as Ecclesiastes 3:16 and 4:1 that present the author as a royal subject and not as a king; as well as the words of Ecclesiastes 5:7 and 10:4 that would be unintelligible in the mouth of a king. Loader (1986:3-4) pointed to the known literary convention that the author and the editor put the wisdom of an unknown teacher into the mouth of the great king, for which reason Loader supposed that the ascription to Solomon was taken literally by later generations, which undoubtedly contributed to the preservation of the precious book in the canon.

Perdue (2008:200) placed the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes in Jerusalem, during the period of the late 3rd century BC. According to Perdue (2008:200), Jerusalem had undergone a succession of foreign rulers like the Persians, and in the time of the writing of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Greek. They have also witnessed the reinvigoration and reinterpretation of the Jewish worldviews. This is evidenced from *Qoheleth's* severe doubts about traditional wisdom's affirmation, his view of retributive justice, and his understanding of revelation through the Torah and apocalyptic visions. Additionally, because *Qoheleth* could not claim a revealed knowledge of God, he saw God as hidden and far removed from humans, for which reason he set out on a quest to determine what is good for humans to do while living.

3.4.3 Summary

Concerning the question of the authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes, there are very dissimilar views among scholars.

There are those who propose Solomonic authorship of the book, and on the other side are those who propose non-Solomonic authorship of the book. It is only in one

instance that a name outside Solomonic authorship was suggested. Their arguments can be categorised into internal and external evidences.

Under internal evidence, the proponents of Solomonic authorship argue that the author's references to the characteristics of life, the author's great wisdom, the splendour of Jerusalem during the author's reign, and the enigmatic notes he penned down, rule out any successor to the unrivalled King Solomon. They argue that the author designated himself as a collector of proverbs; a description that supposedly fits Solomon.

However, there are critical arguments raised by those who oppose Solomonic authorship, which one cannot simply ignore; for example: arguments concerning the post-exilic dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the unity of the book, whether it was written by one author, and the language of the book.

Nevertheless, based on the arguments presented, it does seem like only a few scholars still defend Solomonic authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes, while the majority proposes that Solomon could not be the author based on the dating of the book – long after Solomon lived – as well as the language and the cultural influence found in the book.

However, it is inconclusive who the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes is. But according to the research on the language and the dating, the author is of the opinion that the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes cannot be Solomon. Also this is based on the the whole concept of scepticism that was not part of the philosophy of Solomon's time – making the possibility of Solomon, or someone from his time being the author, impossible.

3.5 The reaction to the Book of Ecclesiastes

The reception here refers to the manner in which the Book of Ecclesiastes was welcomed; in other words, the response the Book of Ecclesiastes received from the early recipients, as well as over the many years of its existence.

The difficult nature of the Book of Ecclesiastes was widely recognised in the early records of its reception; Perdue (2008:200) attributed the difficult nature of the Book of Ecclesiastes to the book's sceptical view of God, wisdom, and human existence, which seriously contest the affirmations of the Jewish religion. However, Fredericks and Estes (2010:42) were of the view that, despite its apparent inconsistency with itself and the other books of the Old Testament, the Book of Ecclesiastes remained part of both the Jewish and the Christian canon.

According to Fredericks and Estes (2010:42), the development of reception regarding the appropriateness of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the canon of the Old Testament revealed disagreements in the early days of its interpretation between the two Jewish schools, the Jewish School of Hillel and the School of Shammai.

The Council of Jamnia, AD 90, was believed to have resolved this disagreement; the Shammaite School objected to the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes. The objection, according to Loader (1986:2), was based on the report from the Jewish writing, the Tosefta that the inspiration of the Book of Ecclesiastes was in question, and also from another Jewish writing, the Talmud, which reported that some rabbis took offence at the discrepancy between the Book of Ecclesiastes and the rest of the Old Testament, and the supposed inner contradictions in the Book of Ecclesiastes. However, the Jewish School of Hillel's view prevailed.

Fredericks and Estes (2010:42) stated that, at the Council of Jamnia, two critical arguments won the day. They were the Book of Ecclesiastes' undeniable orthodoxy in many sections, and the presumption of Solomonic authorship. The Jewish School of Hillel's acceptance of the Book of Ecclesiastes was also based on the fact that it was found among the Qumran texts.

Barrick (2011:15-16) noted that following this first-century controversy between the Jewish schools and later Jewish literature, the Midrash accepted Ecclesiastes as part of the Old Testament. Bartholomew (2009:20) alluded to the most recent

examination of the development of the canon of the Old Testament, to reason that the canon was established by the 2nd century BC.

The Book of Ecclesiastes was eventually read by the Jewish worshippers in the synagogue on the third day of the Feast of Booths (Crenshaw, 1987:52).

According to Loader (1986:2), the Book of Ecclesiastes was one of the five books in the Old Testament set aside after the 6th century AD to be read in the synagogues, and that the Book of Ecclesiastes specifically was read during the Feast of Tabernacles. Loader (1986:3) noted that the early Christian church always accepted the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Holy Scriptures (the Bible), and that the objections to the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes never found enough support to undermine the canonical status of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Barrick (2011:15-16) said that many early church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and Jerome, recognised the canonicity of the Book of Ecclesiastes by citing some of its teachings. Barrick (2011:15-16) also referred to the internal evidence in Ecclesiastes 12:11 as the book's own claim to divine inspiration to provide support for its acceptance into the canon.

Crenshaw (1987:52) was of the view that the best answer to how the Book of Ecclesiastes gained acceptance into the canon, was based on the second epilogue, which removed the sting from *Qoheleth's* scepticism and advocated traditional views concerning the observance of Torah. Sneed (2012:1-8) considered this second epilogue as a religious gloss that was intended to soften the book's seemingly heterodoxy and that presents usefulness for modern fundamentalists and evangelicals.

Crenshaw (1987:23) maintained that the despondent message that lies at the heart of the Book of Ecclesiastes contrasted radically with earlier teachings expressed in the Book of Proverbs. According to Crenshaw (1987:23), in contrast to the message of the Book of Proverbs, *Qoheleth*, the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, showed no reservation, and discerned no moral order at all. Crenshaw (1987:34) thus arrived at the view that the author wrote the bulk of the book but that editorial glosses were entered at a later time.

Shields (2006:1-3) argued against the traditional explanation that the implied association with Solomon and the conclusion of the epilogue were sufficient to redeem the work and render it acceptable. Shields (2006:1-3) stated that both reasons appeared unlikely to be sufficient evidence for the acceptance of the book into the canon; given the failure of works that were more consistently orthodox in the canon of the Bible.

In support of the so-called editorial glosses, Longman (1998:2-9) made use of external evidence to maintain that *Qoheleth* bears a structural resemblance to a group of ancient Near Eastern literary texts. In these texts, Longman (1998:2-9) pointed out that there was a well-used genre in which a later author placed words in the mouth of another and that only the body of Ecclesiastes 1:12-12:7 paralleled these texts; highlighting that the prologue (1:1-11) and the epilogue (12:8-14) are a frame that is structurally distant from the body.

There was a positive reception to the Book of Ecclesiastes by the early recipients but not without disagreements, which led to the convening of the Council of Jamnia in AD 90. The development of the reception of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the canon of the Old Testament revealed arguments concerning editorial glosses, whether the book was written by one author, and whether the prologue (1:1-11) and the epilogue (12:8-14) were frames that were added by a later editor. Over the many years of its existence, the Book of Ecclesiastes received wide-ranging acceptance and it remains part of the Jewish and the Christian canon. The next question is: For what purpose was it written?

3.6 The purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes

3.6.1 Presupposition

Granting that the Book of Ecclesiastes emerged from the wisdom tradition of the Old Testament, the purpose primarily is, as was discovered in Chapter 2, a method of enquiry, rather than a formally stated set of propositions.

The sage was committed to human observation and accepted the traditional understanding of God as the sole governor of existence, while at the same time expressing doubt and scepticism regarding God's goodness and reliability. The willingness of the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes to question the traditional understanding of God accorded with his commitment to observation. He drew conclusions from experiences with the present, and drew conclusions out of his knowledge of the past.

His writing, according to the findings in Chapter 2, can be considered reasoned reflection into specific ways human beings can ensure their personal wellbeing in everyday life, and how to make sense of extreme misfortune and frustrating abnormalities, as well as to communicate this hard-earned knowledge so that succeeding generations will embody it.

However, the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes took a different direction from the Book of Job and the Book of Proverbs in his approach. The Book of Ecclesiastes, through the review in Chapter 2, is understood to question the advantage of wisdom in life and in avoiding death or in experiencing joy. The Book of Ecclesiastes is not characterised by justice and meaning, but on endless repetition in a world where the fate of all human beings have been subjectively predetermined by God. The book also communicates the quality of being wise and sensible, but at the same time communicates the limitations of wisdom, which should make humans resign to the sovereignty of God and enjoy all the gifts that God allows. However, because of the possibility of the range of viewpoints that may exist among scholars concerning the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the researcher is obliged to explore these views to further inform this research.

3.6.2 Development of viewpoints

Loader (1986:14-15) was of the view that the Book of Ecclesiastes has double significance. Firstly, the book abandoned traditional Jewish wisdom that was based on retribution and cut through the weaknesses in the religion of its contemporaries, in which the writer did not see any match to the reality of life. Secondly, the book demonstrates that the fossilisation of wisdom clearly has consequences. Wisdom is

an insufficient system that cannot solve the problems of life. Loader (1986:14-15) stated that an unavoidable question confronts the modern reader: Is everything meaningless? Loader's answer to this question was yes, an answer he based on the possibility of the existence of emptiness between God and human beings (1986:14-15).

Delitzsch (1885:184) understood the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes as two-fold; firstly: "a proof of the power of revealed religion which has grounded faith in God, the All-wise Creator and Governor of the world, so deeply ... the present world are unable to shake it." Secondly, he said the book is proof of the inadequacy of revealed religion in its Old Testament form.

According to Leupold (1983:17-18), the Book of Ecclesiastes was written primarily as a book of comfort that shows how to solve difficult problems. Leupold suggests that the book also disillusiones the audience by pointing out to them the vanity of all earthly things, and that this disillusionment is the best service that can be rendered to humans – by divorcing them from the things of this world as completely as possible. Leupold stated that another significance of the Book of Ecclesiastes is to show that human beings who know the vanity of all things are better prepared for the trials of depressing times. And He maintained that the Book of Ecclesiastes also has a subsidiary purpose: to warn humans of the dangers of falling into sins of a certain age (Leupold 1983:17-18).

Harmon (1956:17) interpreted the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes as expressing what the author discovered regarding life and what humans can gain from life, but not to convey any concept about God. According to Harmon (1956:17), *Qoheleth's* conception of God is nevertheless fundamental to his conclusions about the world and life's profit under the sun – for which reason one should always start with a consideration of his perception of God. Harmon (1956:17) reasoned that *Qoheleth's* teaching keynote was neither faith nor obedience in God, like the prophets who received words from God and declared these messages; rather, *Qoheleth* claimed to present the results of his reflections and searches that human beings must accept as the truth for the guidance of life.

Bennett (2010:28) understood that the Book of Ecclesiastes shared the same tone as other wisdom literature such as Proverbs. He viewed *Qoheleth* as one who wanted to identify with the scepticism that characterises the youth, as well as see that wisdom still has value and that God is still sovereign (Bennett 2010:28).

Barrick (2011:13) said that the author wrote to sway humans away from the futility of any worldview that does not rise above the vanishing point of humanity. Barrick's view (2011:13) was, that as a result of the author's devotion to careful study and exploration by wisdom of all that is done under the heaven (Eccl. 1:13), the author would leave us hungry to seek God. According to Barrick (2011:13), the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes is to gather the people of God from the various realisms to which they have resorted into the community of the Lord. It shows them the complete insufficiency of all self-efforts to obtain real happiness, the enjoyment of life in the resignation to God's sovereignty. Also to show God's divine providence and the belief in an imminent state of justice when all anonymitities in the present development of the world will be resolved.

Barrick (2011:14) agreed with Kaiser's conclusion (1979) that the book of Ecclesiastes is a missionary outreach to Gentile people through the channel of wisdom. The purpose of the book, one may possibly agree, could be a missionary outreach and a channel of wisdom. However, if one limits the Book of Ecclesiastes as an outreach only to Gentile people, it may provide the unfounded suggestion that the Jews could not be considered as a possible audience of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

According to Barker and Kohlenberger III (1994:1009), the purpose must be discovered within the framework of the prologue: that everything is meaningless, and the epilogue: "which speaks of fearing God and keeping his commandments because we must one day give account to Him." Barker and Kohlenberger III (1994:1009) said, concerning the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes, that it seeks to provide answers, that even though human life may be subject to frustration, that we must accept our circumstances and even enjoy them. The view of Barker and Kohlenberger III (1994:1009) was that in order to fulfil this purpose, human beings must use their God-given senses, as well as the experiences of others; humans can

meditate on the total work of God, but should glorify God in the common things in life by making the most of the present moment.

According to Longman (1998:37), “*Qoheleth’s* pessimistic theology is not the concluding voice in the book. A second voice is heard at the beginning of the book.” Longman reasoned that the placement of a frame around the author’s speech would provide the perspective through which one should read his opinion. And that the body is composed of an introspective autobiography of *Qoheleth*. The body of Ecclesiastes he believes, contains much that rub people the wrong way in terms of the traditional understanding of Old Testament wisdom. For Longman (1998:37), the book so vividly captures the despair of a world without God, and he maintained that even though *Qoheleth* believed in God, his love and concern could be questioned. As a result, nothing had meaning; after all, death brought everything to an end. Because death ends it all for *Qoheleth*, he alternated between hating life and taking what meagre enjoyment God hands out.

Eaton’s view was that “the preacher wishes to deliver us from ... self-confident godless life ... and from trusting in wisdom, pleasure, wealth, and human justice or integrity. He wishes to drive us to see that God is there, that He is good and generous, and that only such an outlook makes life coherent and fulfilling” (1983:48).

Douglas (1962:331) interpreted the Book of Ecclesiastes as a search for meaning in life, upholding that the writer examined life from every angle to see where satisfaction could be found, and discovered that only God holds the key and that human beings must just trust in Him. Humans are to take life day by day as a gift from God’s hands and glorify Him in the everyday things of life. Douglas (1962:331) summarised the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes by saying that it “constitutes an exhortation to live a God-fearing life, realizing that one day account must be rendered to Him”.

Jennings (1946:3-4) suggested that all the hopelessness in the Book of Ecclesiastes, its apparent fruitlessness of human toil, its difficulties that surround humans on every side, and its unsatisfactory character made the Book of Ecclesiastes an enigma for the shallow student of the Bible. Jennings (1946:3-4) said that when properly studied

and understood, the book shows, by its dark background, the glory of the Lord to bring glorious relief against the black cloud of human need.

3.6.3 Summary

The purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes, based on the development of viewpoints, is primarily to prepare the audience and to apply knowledge and insight in understanding the human relationship with God's images communicated in the book. This is to look beyond the limited human stand, from which everything seems pessimistic. And to realise that real meaning can be found when humans look to God for meaning. The development of viewpoints regarding the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes, all point to the possibility of human relationships to God's images.

The author will seek to discover the different elements that make up these images of God that are possibly communicated in the Book of Ecclesiastes in the next section.

3.7 The images of God in Ecclesiastes

Fox (1989:15) stated that *Qoheleth's* belief was that the world had a master who was incomprehensible, and he (*Qoheleth*) recognised that life's limited possibilities accorded with the will of God.

According to Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:17), *Qoheleth* mentioned the name of God 40 times in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and in all the occurrences, he used Elohim, which means "the mighty God, the glorious God of creation who exercises sovereign power", and never YHWH, the God of the covenant, which was typical of Old Testament wisdom. This observation portrays the image of God as creator and sovereign. Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:17) argued that the choice of the name Elohim for God is based on the point that *Qoheleth* was dealing solely with what he observed under the heaven.

Zuck (1991:50) referred to the passages Ecclesiastes 5:2, 12:1, 11:5, 8:15, 9:9, 3:21, 12:7, 7:29, 3:11, 3:1-8, 3:14, 7:13, and 3:14, 18), to demonstrate the contributions

the book makes concerning the images of God. These passages, stated in their order of appearance, that God is transcendent, that He is in heaven, and that He is the Creator (the Maker of all things). The works of his creation include humans, whom He gave life and a spirit, making them upright, and setting eternity in their hearts. In his sovereignty, God has planned the timing of all things, which is unalterable by humans.

Zuck (1991:50) used this internal evidence to point out God's motive for humans, which is to fear Him and to show human beings their finiteness, and the human incomprehensibility of God. Zuck (1991:51) held that *Qoheleth* did not support human killing, destroying, hating, or engaging in war. Rather, *Qoheleth* simply affirmed that God made human beings upright. These things only occur as human beings seek their own schemes – as a result of sin – without grasping that all of human life is under God's appointment and timing. What God has planned, humans cannot change.

Zuck (1990:17) noted other images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes, which include his personality – God can hear us even though He is in heaven (Eccl. 5:2); He can be pleased, as Ecclesiastes 2:26 assures that God rewards those who please Him. God may seem to delay his punishment of the wicked, but his justice will surely be exercised against wickedness. God will judge everything, whether open or hidden, good or evil (Eccl. 12:14). Zuck (1990:17) maintained that even though God's images cannot be fully understood, the Book of Ecclesiastes mentions some motives for God's actions; for example: God wants humans to fear Him (Eccl. 3:14), and God tests humans to show them their finiteness (Eccl. 3:18).

Zuck (1991:56) also alluded to Castellino's summary (1968:28) that human beings should "avoid all speculation on God's ruling of the world and be thankful to God for whatever satisfaction He gives you, valuing and measuring everything as a gift from Him and enjoying it, never forgetting that you shall have to render strict account to God."

McCabe (1996:95) argued that the theological presuppositions that influenced *Qoheleth's* writing were that there is a Holy God, and that God would bring

everything into judgment. McCabe (1996) noted that what *Qoheleth* advised was special revelation, because:

Ultimately it was given to him by the One Shepherd, God. *Qoheleth* is claiming divine authority and inerrancy for his book. He reminds us then, in vv. 13-14, that we are to fear God and be obedient ... and that we are accountable for our actions to God. *Qoheleth's* intent is not to solve life's vexing mysteries but to recommend an acceptance of life as given by God with both its joys and sorrows, and he argues for an active participation and engagement with life, despite its uncertainties. (112)

According to Anderson (1997:193), "*Qoheleth's* view of God was one which was distant and certainly impersonal. He talked of God as an objective abstraction without any personal sense of intimacy." Anderson used a historical-critical method in his exegesis. In the exercise of his responsibility to let the text speak for itself arrived at *Qoheleth's* view of God as absolutely sovereign. According to Anderson (1997:96-122), *Qoheleth* had a very deterministic view of God. In this light, *Qoheleth* held God responsible for much evil, injustice, and incongruities in the world. There was no intimacy between *Qoheleth* and God because of *Qoheleth's* observations of God's capricious determinism in the life of human beings.

Anderson (1997:96-122) agreed that the Book of Ecclesiastes has much to say about God, and that *Qoheleth* mentioned the name of God (אלהים) 43 times in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Nevertheless, Anderson (1997:96-122) believes that *Qoheleth* did not have a positive beginning to his view of God. Anderson (1997:96-122) supposed that *Qoheleth* had a very pessimistic view of God: "*Qoheleth* holds God responsible for all evil which is in and active in the world." Since God is sovereign and the Creator (Eccl. 3:11a), He is responsible for all that is done under the sun, including the supposedly unfortunate fate of the righteous and the wise. God's unpredictable determinism raises the question of his morality (Anderson, 1997:96-122).

Anderson (1997:96-122) accepted that God is infinite in all his qualities and activities, God judges and punishes humans here on earth and in death, but the fairness of his judgement seems questionable because of his determinism. Anderson held that *Qoheleth* did not clearly define who that God is, the YHWH of the covenant, as well as did not define him as other Old Testament wisdom and the revealed religion in Israel knew him (Anderson, 1997:96-122).

Fredericks and Estes (2010:30) stated that the theme of God's sovereignty fills the Book of Ecclesiastes and is in agreement with the other Old Testament books. Fredericks and Estes maintained that God is the giver of affliction, but also the giver of pleasures of food, drink, work, wisdom and knowledge, riches, and wealth; God gives the days and years of human life; God is the Creator that gives the common breath of humans and animals; God's actions are beyond human comprehension; God's judgement takes away blessings from the sinner and judges both righteous and wicked in his timing; and God's ways are unchangeable by humans (Fredericks & Estes, 2010:30).

Barrick (2011:10-11) maintained that the contribution the Book of Ecclesiastes makes to the images of God provides sufficient reason to reassess the pessimistic and worldly view many schools hold concerning the book. He also contested the view of the Book of Ecclesiastes as devoid of divine truth; saying that it was like engaging in empty speculation.

Barrick (2011:10-11) noted that the title of God appears 40¹¹ times in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and he listed 13 theological topics¹² concerning the images of God that appears in Ecclesiastes. Barrick (2011:24-26) maintained that the numerous images of God that are portrayed in the Book of Ecclesiastes are consistent with the images of God portrayed in other books of the Old Testament. According to Barrick (2011:24-26), God's divine sovereignty and providence characterises human existence on earth, God is the Creator and the giver of life, his world cannot be

¹¹ The title of God (*Elohim*) does appear 40 time in the Book of Ecclesiastes as Barrick noted, however, it does not contradict the 43 times Anderson noted previously. The extra three counts can be accounted for in the three other places where *Elohim* is not used but God is definitely referred to in the third person.

¹² Barrick (2011:11) listed 13 theological images of God in the book of Ecclesiastes: 1. God's sovereign control over man; 2. God's providential grace; 3. God's eternity; 4. God's creatorship; 5. God's perfection; 6. God's justice and holiness; 7. God's abode; 8. God's omnipresence and omniscience; 9. God's omnipotence; 10. God's preservation of his saints; 11. God requires reverential fear; 12. God requires obedience before sacrifice; and 13. God's word.

altered to human liking, and God's plan dictates the pattern of events that happens in the world. Human beings must believe that God is the judge and will judge all wickedness.

Sneed (2012:202) maintained that *Qoheleth* resolved the problem of theodicy by fundamentally dissolving it. According to this view, God is sovereign and humans cannot question God's allowance of suffering, which will amount to questioning God's omni-benevolence and divine justice. The result is *Qoheleth's* conception that God is impersonal and capricious. *Qoheleth* felt there was disharmony in reasoning; by the failure of justice actually taking place in the course of his lifetime – giving rise to the problem of theodicy. Sneed (2012:202) postulated that *Qoheleth* did not give assurance on the eventual reward of reverent behaviour; however, *Qoheleth* gave wise counsel that may permit one to have a better chance of success in life.

Sneed (2012:229) understands that *Qoheleth* returned to a more embryonic view of God that made him more true to religious dispositions than other wisdom writings of the Old Testament. For *Qoheleth*, God was ultimately mysterious and beyond human grasp. Sneed (2012:229) added that even though the Book of Ecclesiastes has a secular and contemporary feel to it, it ultimately represents the more fundamental religious impulse.

According to Loader (1986:12), the Book of Ecclesiastes portrays God's images as distant and remote. God does what He pleases with respect to life and death, as well as with respect to his provision of happiness, misfortune, and work. Loader (1986:13) stated that a tension existed in the mind of the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes in refusing to fill the vacuum he saw between God and humans. It is this unresolved tension that made *Qoheleth* declare that all is vanity, and meaningless. Loader (1986:15) explained that the meaning of the statement in the Book of Ecclesiastes, that everything is meaningless, simply implied that emptiness exists between God and humans. This emptiness for the Christian is filled by a mediator, the Man Christ (Loader 1986:15).

Loader (1986:15) interpreted the image of God as portrayed in the Book of Ecclesiastes as God whose actions do not have fixed patterns. Humans cannot enclose God within a fool-proof system.

3.7.1 Summary

The development of viewpoints over the years concerning the understanding of what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates about the images of God reveals different images about God that seems to be consistent with the images of God in the other wisdom writings of the Old Testament. Some scholars hold that *Qoheleth* had a very pessimistic view of God; that *Qoheleth* viewed God as absolutely sovereign, and in this light, *Qoheleth* held God responsible for much of the evil, injustice, and incongruities in the world.

However, other scholars hold a more positive view: that what *Qoheleth* advised is special revelation. In this view, God's images in the Book of Ecclesiastes are reflected in his creatorship, sovereignty, and as an unsearchable wisdom. God is incomprehensible; God is transcendent; He is in heaven; and He is the Creator, the maker of all things. The works of his creation include humans. In his sovereignty, God has planned the timing of all things, which cannot be altered by humans. God can hear human beings even though He is in heaven; He can be pleased; He is a holy God and will bring everything into judgment.

These viewpoints regarding what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates about the images of God has certainly provided a springboard to the researcher's exegetical work in Chapter 4, where he will attempt to discover what the Book of Ecclesiastes really communicates concerning the images of God, and all the possible human relationship to those images.

3.8 The human relationships to God's images in Ecclesiastes

Kaiser (1979:42) stated that the primary duty of humans, according to the Book of Ecclesiastes, is to fear God, after which human life can possibly accord to the mood

of Ecclesiastes, which is one of delight, living, and enjoying all the goods that God provides to humans. Kaiser (1979:122) understood that when *Qoheleth* said all is vanity of vanities that he meant to communicate the futility of human life, if it is spent without knowing what life is all about. Kaiser (1979:124) noted that “*Qoheleth*’s words are designed to prod the sluggish into action ... but they are also meant to be ‘nails’ that are fastened as definite points in the sluggard’s mental furnishings to give him ... anchorage, stability, and perspective on life”.

Kaiser (1979:125) interpreted that the grand conclusion of the Book of Ecclesiastes concerning humanity was that humans get the living God in answer to their entire quest; all human gain consists of fearing and obeying God. Kaiser (1979:125) paralleled Ecclesiastes’ instruction to Paul’s instruction in 2 Corinthians 5:10.¹³ Kaiser (1979:125) noted this similarity was to support the uniformity of Ecclesiastes’ instruction with the other portions of the Bible. Whether human beings fear or disobey God in their lifetime, they are destined to be confronted by God concerning every work, whether good or bad. Kaiser (1979:125) summarised this view as: “the beginning, middle, and end of life as humans know it on earth; coming to know and trust the living God; receiving the gifts of life’s goods; learning how to enjoy those gifts; understanding the major part of the plan of God ... even while portions of life remain enigmatic”.

Crenshaw (1987:158-159) stated that humans cannot understand God’s actions on earth, based on Ecclesiastes 8:17. In this view, *Qoheleth* emphasised that all who undertake to comprehend God’s work are destined to fail, and based on Ecclesiastes 9:1-10, human destiny is entirely at God’s disposal.

Anderson (1997:172) used the historical critical exegetical method to arrive at the understanding that *Qoheleth*’s teaching concerning human work and the world, which is the context of human work, was purposely to substantiate his theory that all is absurd. Anderson accepted that *Qoheleth*’s moral character surpassed his

¹³ Kaiser (1979:125) noted that similar to Ecclesiastes 12:13, “which says for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil,” 2 Corinthians stated that for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

pessimism; however, *Qoheleth* demonstrated that one of his motives was to show that humans are finite, that ultimately, life, materialism, and work were meaningless in and of themselves. This motive only confirms that *Qoheleth* is pessimistic literature (cf Anderson 1997:173-174).

Furthermore, Anderson (1997:191-192) wrote that *Qoheleth* had a pessimistic view of human wisdom because human wisdom gives insight into the mechanics of the way the world works, as well as exposes the injustice and oppression of surrounding human life under the sun. For Anderson (1997:192), *Qoheleth* viewed death as a brutal reality that was painful and fearful, based on his lack of hope in the afterlife for humans.

On the other hand, using the canonical and dialectical method of exegesis, Anderson (1997:235) arrived at a different view that *Qoheleth* acted as a corrective wisdom literature, which demonstrated the vanity of human life without a Saviour God. The only response for humanity to the mysteries of life is to put their faith in a holy God, who created the heaven and the earth.

Zuck (1991:51-56) referred to many verses in the Book of Ecclesiastes to point out the contribution the book makes to the understanding of the relationship between humans with the images of God, which are consistent with the images of God communicated elsewhere in the Old Testament. Zuck (1991:51-56) noted, for example, the following concerning the nature of humans: that humans are finite as created beings (12:1); “and subject to death (3:19-20, 6:6, 7:2, 9:5); humans are rational creatures, for they can be guided by their minds (2:3); human beings can evaluate (v. 1); understand (1:1.7); investigate (v. 13); reflect (1:16, 2:1, 12, 15, 8:9, 12:9); and draw conclusions (2:14, 17; 5:18)”.

Zuck (1991:51-56) explained that human sin is universal (Eccl. 7:20), and that the sinful nature of humans manifested itself in acts of oppression of the poor (Eccl. 4:1, 3, and 5:8), envy (Eccl. 4:4), and greed (v. 8, 5:10). The human heart is fully set to do evil, for the reason that sentences against evil work are not executed speedily (Eccl. 8:11). Sin holds sinners in its grasp (Eccl. 8:8). Human sin results in consequences that can even lead to an untimely death (Eccl. 7:17). With regards to

human death, death is certain (Eccl. 2:14-16), God has appointed human death (Eccl. 3:2), and human beings cannot change it or know when it will occur (Eccl. 8:8, and 9:12). Naked as humans come into this life, naked shall they depart (Eccl. 5:15-16).

Zuck (1991:54) referred to Forman's writing (1960:256-263) to support his argument for the consistency of the understanding of the relationship between humans with the images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes, with the same instruction in other parts of the Old Testament:

A number of truths about man in Ecclesiastes are consistent with truths elsewhere in Scripture, particularly the early chapters of Genesis. Man was originally created good (Gen. 1:31, Eccl. 7:29) but fell into sin (Gen. 3:1-19, Eccl. 3:16, 4:1, 7:29), with the consequence of toil (Gen. 3:14-19, Eccl. 1:3, 8, 18, 2:11, 17, 22) and death (Gen. 3:19, 24; 4:5, 8, Eccl. 2:14-16, 3:20, 4:2, 9:5, 12:6-7). Made from dust and breath (Gen. 2:7, 3:19, Eccl. 3:20, 12:7), man has limited knowledge (Gen. 2:17, Eccl. 8:7, 10:14, 11:5). He was created to live in companionship with others (Gen. 1:27, 2:21-25, Eccl. 4:9-12, 9:9). P. 54

Zuck (1991:54-56) held that in the light of the futilities and mysteries of life; *Qoheleth's* recommendations for humans consisted of at least six actions that aid human beings in their pursuit of life: to be wise, to worship and please God, to remember God, fear God, be diligent, and enjoy life.

Fredericks and Estes (2010:30) viewed human life and their activities as encompassed by the Book of Ecclesiastes' claim that all is temporary, that human beings are mortal; making a firm distinction between humans, and God who is eternal.

Barrick (2011:26) stated that Ecclesiastes refers to human life is a gift from God; that humans are not sovereign for the reason that humans cannot control their own destiny. This, according to Barrick (2011:26), was as a result of the uncertainty of time and change that happens to human beings. Humans are not good, as can be

seen in humanity's prevalent and inherent wicked nature. Human beings are mortal, as death has the final word in all human affairs.

Sneed (2012:165), in his literary analysis of *Qoheleth's* message, explained the great distinction between humanity and God; admitting that human life is fleeting and transitory. But what God does, lasts forever and is unalterable by humans. Human beings are weak and frail but God is eternal. Human foolishness and their inability to attain true wisdom are far removed from God, who is wise and omnipotent. Human beings were made upright by God but became wicked and morally culpable. Human beings are nothing, while God is everything. Sneed (2012:166) illuminated the positive function of *Qoheleth* within the negativity; explaining that the Book of Ecclesiastes' pessimism and scepticism are geared to persuade humans to abandon their quest to become self-sufficient, and wanting to become like God. In light of this explanation, Sneed (2012:167) maintained that the Book of Ecclesiastes is orthodox. Sneed's view was that *Qoheleth* tried to solve the problem of theodicy by explaining the broad gap between humans and God; advising human beings to keep this in mind in their daily life (2012:175).

Loader (1986:4) posited that the Book of Ecclesiastes is a wisdom literature which examines communications about wise actions concerned with the correct ordering of life in which humans must integrate harmoniously into the order that God has created. Loader (1986:5) maintained that a lack of this integration results in emptiness between God and humans; causing real alienation that cannot be filled by humans themselves.

3.8.1 Summary

With regards to human relationships to God's images in the Book of Ecclesiastes, many scholars have pessimistic views. These views are based on the interpretations that *Qoheleth* had a pessimistic view of human wisdom, which resulted in a stand against the orthodoxy of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

On the other hand, those who hold a positive view of the human relationships with God in the Book of Ecclesiastes understand the futility of human life as a direct result of living life without knowing what life is all about. They presuppose that humans get the living God in answer to the entire human quest. All human gain consists of fearing and obeying God's word. They also hold to the uniformity of Ecclesiastes' instruction with other portions of the Old Testament concerning human relationships with God's images. The only response for humanity to the mysteries of life according to this view is to put faith in a holy God who created the heavens and the earth. This positive approach makes way for the supposedly pessimistic theology of Ecclesiastes to be valued and to be used by both Jews and Christians in their Bibles. The Book of Ecclesiastes' pessimism and scepticism are geared to persuade humans to abandon their quest to become self-sufficient or desiring to become like God.

From the perspective of this study, the review in this chapter provided much insight into the differing viewpoints that exist concerning the authorship, the canonicity, the reception, the intended audience, and the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes. It also provided insight to the understanding of the images of God communicated in the Book of Ecclesiastes and all the possible relationships God have with human beings. The researcher will endeavour to consider these viewpoints in the next chapter, which proceeds with the literary exegesis of selected passages from the Book of Ecclesiastes that seem to communicate about the images of God.

CHAPTER 4

Literary study of the Book of Ecclesiastes

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter allowed the opportunity to explore the different viewpoints that have developed over the years with regard to the images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes, as well as the canonicity, the dating, the authorship, the reception, and the purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes. These historical backgrounds will provide a springboard for Chapter 4 to progress into the next exegetical phase, namely the literary study of the texts of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The thrust of this chapter therefore is to conduct a literary study of the Book of Ecclesiastes. This exegetical phase requires the study of the meaning of words and sentences in the historical context and in the original language: the Hebrew language of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The underlying task in this chapter entails five objectives: Firstly, an attempt through observation to plot the themes found in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Secondly, an attempt to demarcate the Book of Ecclesiastes based on those themes, with special emphasis on the images of God. Thirdly, the author will attempt to summarise all the images of God communicated within the Book of Ecclesiastes. Fourthly, an attempt to narrow the study down from this chapter going forward to selected images of God, as well as selected passages within themes that seem to communicate about specific images of God. Lastly, the author will attempt to translate the selected passages from Hebrew into English, in order to grammatically study each and every word, while noting any textual variants, as well as discuss any meaningful variants.

The overarching purpose of this chapter is to seek to discern what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicated concerning God's images.

4.2 Observation of the Book of Ecclesiastes

4.2.1 Introduction

In this section, the author will conduct an observation of the Book of Ecclesiastes making use of the different available translations of the English Old Testament,¹⁴ as well as using the original language of the book (Hebrew Bible).¹⁵ The aim is to expose the diverse discourses, which seem to demarcate the Book of Ecclesiastes into different themes. The author will endeavour to map these themes according to the order in which they ensue. The objective is threefold: an attempt to map the themes in the Book of Ecclesiastes; to differentiate which themes communicate the images of God, and to be able to narrow down the study going forward to the selected images of God and selected passages within the demarcations that contain those themes.

4.2.2 Chapters 1 and 2

Ecclesiastes 1.1

Introduction

Verse 1 pronounces the Book of Ecclesiastes as the words of the *Qoheleth* (קהלת), who is identified as King David's son and a king in Jerusalem.

Ecclesiastes 1:2- 2:26:

Theme 1: Everything is meaningless.

The writer, who identified himself as (*Qoheleth*) קהלת speaks in the first person, and addresses himself as a king who ruled in Jerusalem (Eccl. 1:12). *Qoheleth* (קהלת) speaks about the meaninglessness of everything that is done under the sun; including the futility of wisdom, the futility of pleasure, and the futility of work. *Qoheleth* said he discovered this meaninglessness through searching for

¹⁴ NLT (1998); NKJV (1982); NIV (1999).

¹⁵ Hebrew Bible edition *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS).

understanding and exploration into everything that is done in the world. He points out that God is the giver of all that human beings do. *Qoheleth* refers to this God as אֱלֹהִים (Strong, 1890: H430). God's image is portrayed under this theme as one who controls the activities of human beings, the endless cycle of human life, wisdom, folly, work, and pleasure. *Qoheleth* concludes that the best thing in human life is to enjoy food and drink and find satisfaction in work.

4.2.3 Chapters 3 and 4

Theme 2: A time for everything and the repetitive cycle of events (Eccl. 3:1-15).

Qoheleth speaks about the repetitive cycle of events and the fact that each and every event in the world happens at an appointed time. *Qoheleth* revealed various images of God within this theme of time. He attributed the giver of the various kinds of works that human beings do to God; God made everything beautiful in its time; God placed eternity (NLT, NIV and NKJV) or the world (KJV) in the human heart; God's work cannot be fully understood by humans; God is the giver of human fruits of labour; God's work cannot be altered by humans and the purpose is that humans should fear him; and God calls every event back in its turn in a repetitive cycle.

Theme 3: Life's injustices (Eccl. 3:16-22 and 4:1-6).

Qoheleth observed the injustices that take place in the world, and used that to portray God's image as a judge, as the one who will judge both the good and the wicked. God allows human beings their wicked ways to test them so that they can see that they are not better than animals. Both humans and animals came from dust and must return to dust.

4.2.4 Chapter 4

Theme 4: The advantages of companionship (Eccl. 4:7-12).

Theme 5: The meaninglessness of political power (Eccl. 4:13-16).

These themes do not have anything to do with God's relationships with human beings.

4.2.5 Chapters 5 and 6

Theme 6: The fear of God (Eccl. 5:1-7).

This theme expressed the importance of human beings fearing God, rather than making rash promises to God. God's image is portrayed in this section as a God who lives in heaven, as compared to human beings that live on earth; God takes no pleasure in fools; and God can get angry at empty human promises, and destroy the works of human hands.

Theme 7: The meaninglessness of riches (Eccl. 5:8-20 and 6:1-9).

Qoheleth compared the life of the rich with the poor, and the hard worker with one who loves money. He concluded that at the end of life under the sun, both the humans who chased after riches and the hard worker amounts to nothing – all their effort is like chasing after the wind. The only thing worthwhile for human beings to do is to enjoy all that God has given, rather than desiring what is not there, and to eat, drink, and enjoy the fruits of human work. In this conclusion, *Qoheleth* portrays the image of God as follows: God is the giver of the span of human life on earth; God gives human wealth; and God gives human beings health to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Theme 8: God is sovereign (Eccl. 6:10-12).

In this section, *Qoheleth* proclaims that God is in control of human destiny; human beings cannot determine what will happen in their lifespan or in the future when they are gone.

4.2.6 Chapters 7 and 8

Theme 9: The value of practical wisdom for life and the limitations of wisdom (Eccl. 7:1-29 and 8:1).

Qoheleth compares wisdom to foolishness, and gives many advantages of the practicality of wisdom in everyday living. However, he also points out that wisdom is always distant and never easy to find. Within this theme *Qoheleth* portrays many of God's images; for example, God's ways cannot be changed by human beings as they wish, therefore the wise person observes the ways of God and falls in line; God is the giver of both prosperity and adversity; God gives success to human beings who fear him; God helps humans who fear him to escape the snares and nets of a seductive woman but does not help sinners escape the snare of a seductive woman; God created human beings; and God made humans upright.

4.2.7 Chapter 8

Theme 10: Obey the king for God's sake (Eccl. 8:2-8).

Qoheleth advised his audience on the necessity of obedience to the king, based on vows the audiences supposedly make to God.

Theme 11: The good and the wicked compared (Eccl. 8:9-17).

Qoheleth observed the injustices that occur in this world, where good people often receive what is due to the wicked, while the wicked receive what is due to the good. The wicked are the human beings who do not fear God, while the good are the ones who fear God. *Qoheleth* is certain that in a time yet to come it will be better for those who fear God. However, under the prevailing circumstances of life, he recommends enjoyment of life along with human labour in people's lifetime. *Qoheleth* portrays God's image in this section as the giver of human life, and that all of God's work under the sun cannot be discovered by human beings – irrespective of how much humans try to discover it.

4.2.8 Chapter 9 and 10

Theme 12: Death comes to all (Eccl. 9:1-12).

Qoheleth writes in this section that the same fate awaits all human beings, whether they are good or wicked in their lifetime. In other words, *Qoheleth* views death as the equaliser for all humans, for which reason he recommends that humans eat their food and drink their wine with a happy heart. Here he portrays the image of God as one who holds the actions of both the godly and wise people in his hands; God has the sovereignty to show humans favour in life, and human beings do not know whether God will show them favour in this life or not; God approves the enjoyment of food and wine; God gives the days that humans enjoy in this world. All basic human needs are provided by God and should be celebrated as gifts from his hand

Theme 13: Wisdom compared to folly (Eccl. 9:13-17 and 10:1-20).

In this section, *Qoheleth* notes the value of wisdom over foolishness. He expresses with many illustrations the advantages of being wise, and the harm that can be caused by a little foolishness.

4.2.9 Chapters 11 and 12

Theme 14: The value of open-handedness and diligence (Eccl. 11:1-6).

In this pericope *Qoheleth* gives advice concerning the value of being generous and about the importance of being diligent in spite of life's uncertainties. He likened life's uncertainties to the work of God, and in doing so portrays God's image as one whose work cannot be understood by humans, as well as the one who made all things.

Theme 15: Advice to the young and the old (Eccl. 11:7-10 and 12:1-8).

Qoheleth advised both the old and the young people to enjoy all the days of their lives, but also to remember that God will require them to give account of everything they did in life. Here he portrays God's image as the judge, the creator, and the giver of human spirit to whom the human spirit will return when death comes.

Theme 16: Closing thoughts (Eccl. 12:9-14).

This section refers to *Qoheleth* in the third person (masculine singular), and also as someone who was wise, who imparted knowledge to the people, and wrote many proverbs. In conclusion, after all the searches and pondering about everything, the final advice for humans is that the whole duty of human beings is to fear God and uphold his commandments. God's image is portrayed here as one who should be feared and obeyed; God will bring everything into judgement, whether good or bad.

4.2.10 Summary

After careful observation, it appears that the Book of Ecclesiastes contains 16 major themes. All of the themes portray images of God, except for Themes 4, 5 and 13.

Giving special emphasis to God's images, the themes can be summarised as follows: Theme 1: God is referred to as *Elohim* who is sovereign over human activities.

Theme 2: God is the giver of human works; God made everything beautiful in its time; God placed eternity or the world in the human heart; God's work cannot be fully understood by humans; God is the giver of human fruits of labour; God's work cannot be altered by humans, and God calls every event back in its turn in a repetitive cycle.

Theme 3: God is the judge; God will judge both the good and the wicked.

Theme 4 and 5 do not portray any images of God.

Theme 6: God lives in heaven; God takes no pleasure in fools; God can get angry at empty human promises, and destroy the works of human hands.

Theme 7: God is the giver of the span of human life on earth; God gives human wealth; and God gives human beings health to enjoy the fruit of their labour.

Theme 8: God is sovereign over human destiny.

Theme 9: God's ways cannot be changed by human beings as they wish; God is the giver of both prosperity and adversity; God gives success to human beings who fear him; God helps humans who fear him to escape snares and nets in their path way, but does not help sinners escape the snare and nets in their way; God created human beings; and God made humans upright.

Theme 10: God expects humans to obey the king, based on vows the audience supposedly makes to God.

Theme 11: God is the giver of human life; and all of God's work under the sun cannot be discovered by human beings.

Theme 12: God holds the actions of both the godly and wise people in his hands; God has the sovereignty to show humans favour in life; God approves the enjoyment of food and wine; God gives the days that humans enjoy in this world. All basic human needs are provided by God and should be celebrated as gifts from his hand

Theme 13 portrays no images of God.

Theme 14: God's work cannot be understood by humans; and God made all things.

Theme 15: God is the judge; the creator; the giver of human spirit; and human spirits return to God when death comes.

Theme 16: God should be feared and obeyed; and God will bring everything into judgement, whether good or bad.

Evidently, the Book of Ecclesiastes portrays many images of God. However, this study will henceforth focus on two of these images: his creative image and his providential image. Therefore, the author will endeavour to narrow down the next section, which will focus on a literary study of the themes that portray these two images of God (creative and providential), as well as the passages that contain the two themes.

4.3 The creative images of God

The key Hebrew word that portrays a creative image of God is עשה. According to BDB (2010:793), the word is a verb that means “to do” or “to make”. BDB further defined the word as a *qal* perfect, third-person masculine singular verb, which results in “he made”.

According to Strong (1890:H6213), the verb is a primitive root; “to do or make”, and is used in the broadest sense and widest application: accomplish, advance, appoint, and bring.

Schoors (2013:255) wrote that in Ecclesiastes 3:11 and 11:5, the importance of the objects הכל and העולם are stressed by them appearing in the front position in the two clauses. These objects he agrees are the objects of God’s making, however he maintains that they do not refer to the universe but to all that happens in human life (Schoors 2013:255).

With no exception, all the English translations render the Hebrew word עשה “he made”, therefore it is appropriate to settle for the meaning “he made”. The word is recorded three times in the Book of Ecclesiastes: Eccl. 3:11, 7:29, and 11:5.

In Ecclesiastes 12:1, a similar Hebrew word ברא with synonymous meaning is used. It means “to create, shape, form” and can also mean “to do” and “to make”. In the present form, it is a verb *qal* participle masculine plural construct suffix 2nd person masculine singular, which means ‘your creator’ (BDB, 2010:135). Schoors (2013:794) wrote that the imperative זכר (remember) has as its object את־בוראִיךָ, making ‘your creator’ the most obvious meaning.

In a present-day sense, according to Rundell & Fox (2005:327), “to create” is “to make something new that did not exist before”, and a “creator” is “someone who has created something.”

The creative images of God as used in this study therefore refers to the search to discover God's images as the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates concerning Him as one who made things, as well as to discover the things He made new that did not exist before.

This section of the study on God's creative images will be restricted to the following passages that contain the Hebrew words עשה and ברא. The passages will be studied within their respective themes and demarcations:

1. Ecclesiastes 3:11 illustrates the theme of "a time for everything and repetitive cycle of events". Therefore, the passage will be studied in the context of its demarcation, namely Ecclesiastes 3:1-15.
2. Ecclesiastes 7:29 illustrates the theme of "the value of practical wisdom for life and the limitations of wisdom". Therefore, the passage will be studied in the context of its demarcation, namely Ecclesiastes 7:1-29 and 8:1.
3. Ecclesiastes 11:5 illustrates the theme of "the value of open-handedness and diligence", and therefore will be studied in the context of Ecclesiastes 11:1-6.
4. Ecclesiastes 12:1 illustrates the theme of "advice to the young and the old". Therefore, the passage will be studied in the context of Ecclesiastes 11:7-10 and 12:1-8.

4.3.1 Ecclesiastes 3:11

4.3.1.1 *The Hebrew text*

את־הכל עֲשֵׂה יִפֶּה בְּעֵתוֹ גַּם אֶת־הָעֵלֶם נֹתֵן בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלֵי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר־
עֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מֵרֵאשִׁית וְעַד־סוֹף

4.3.1.2 *The translation (first clause Ecclesiastes 3:11a)*

את־הכל

“Everything”

אֵת is used in this Hebrew word as a sign of the definite direct object, not translated in English but generally preceding and indicating the accusative (Kelly 1992:12). In this case it precedes הַכֹּל, a direct object of a verb and joined to it by a *maqgef* which is “a short horizontal stroke used to join together two or more words within a verse. Words so joined are pronounced as one speech unit” (Kelly 1992:12). According to BDB (2010:481), הַכֹּל means “totality or everything”. הֵ is a Hebrew particle article and כֹּל is a Hebrew (noun common masculine singular absolute). Therefore, used together, the word means ‘everything’, which is the accusative or the direct object of the sentence.

עָשָׂה

“He made”

The root of this verb means “make” (BDB 2010:793). In its present form, it is a *qal* perfect verb, a simple active perfect verb in the third person, masculine singular form of the verb, which results in “he made” (Kelly 1992:80).

According to Schoors (2013:255), the object of God’s making in this clause is everything, which means that adversities as well as prosperity are adjudged beautiful. He maintains that the object of God’s making is the things that happen in human cycle of life, which would lead to the understanding of the suffix conjugation עָשָׂה as a present tense. Therefore for him, the interpretation of Ecclesiastes 3:11a is not a statement of history or of creation, but about the continuous workings of God in human history (Schoors 2013:256). One may agree that the force of the suffix conjugation עָשָׂה be translated as a present tense, as well as agree that it refers to the continuous workings of God in human history. However, this clause occurs within the theme of a ‘time for everything and repetitive cycle of events’. Therefore it is still fitting to accept the translation of the perfect ‘he made’. This would then refer to the things God made that occurs in their endless repetitive cycle.

יפה

“Beautiful”

This is an adjective, and means “beautiful” (BDB 2010:421).

בעתו

“In its time”

The root of this word is עת, and is a feminine noun, denoting “time” (BDB 2010:773).

The word is prefixed by an inseparable preposition ב, which can mean “in, by or with” (Kelly 1992:28). In the context of the theme of time and repetitive cycle of events, “in” will be more suitable. The word is also suffixed by the pronominal suffix ו, which can mean “his” and indicates possession (Kelly 1992:75). However, Cowley (1985:108) wrote that the pronoun of the third person may refer to things as well as persons. Schoors (2013:257) is of the view that בעתו refers to appropriate times in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, so that the referent of the suffix cannot be God, but הכל (everything). Therefore, put together, the word can mean “in its time”.

The first clause can thus be summarised: “He made everything beautiful in its time”.

4.3.1.3 Comparing the English translations

All of the English translation variants seem to agree on the subject (he) as the one who made everything beautiful.

However, there are variations with regard to the translation of the pronominal suffix (i). KJV and MKJV render the suffix “his time”, while NKJV, ISV, and ESV render “it’s time.” BDB (2010:421) also defined יפה as “beautiful of everything in its time”.

“Its time” appears to be the most suitable translation and can be grounded in the context of Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, which speaks of the theme of time, that there is a

time for everything and a time for every purpose under heaven. Nevertheless, as far as this study is concerned, the significant element in this clause is that He (the subject), which is antecedent to God in Ecclesiastes 3:10, is the one who made everything, portraying God's image as the maker or creator.

4.3.1.4 Translation (second clause: Ecclesiastes 3:11b)

גם

“Also”

גם is a Hebrew particle conjunction denoting “also, addition, moreover” (BDB 2010:168). The particle modifies the verb “he made” by adding to it so that it could possibly accommodate all the ranges of meaning (also, addition, or moreover). According to Schoors (2013:258), common opinion among commentators¹⁶ is that גם cannot be regarded as adversative, but simply denotes addition. Therefore it adds to the first clause that states that God made everything.

את־העלם

“Eternity or long duration or world”

את is the sign of definite direct object, not translated in English, and is joined by a *maqfef* to העלם, which is a Hebrew noun common masculine singular absolute that means “long duration, antiquity, futurity, forever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, world” (BDB 2010:761).

There seems to be different renderings between the English translations with regard to the Hebrew word את־העלם. Some English translations such as NKJV, ISV, MKJV, and ESV render the word “eternity”, while KJV renders “world”. However, BDB, as quoted above, offers the range of meaning “long duration, antiquity, futurity, forever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, and world”, making it challenging to choose between these different meanings, for which reason the

¹⁶ See inter alia: Crenshaw 1997:8, Barton 1998:?, Margoliouth 1923:30, and Muller 1986:13 etc.

author may need to turn to historical developments in the scholarly views concerning the translation of the word אֶת־הָעֵלָם.

Kidner (1976:39) interpreted the Hebrew word אֶת־הָעֵלָם as “eternity”, resulting in the view that what God has put in the hearts of humans, according to Ecclesiastes 3:11, differentiates human beings who know something of eternity from animals that are simply engrossed in time.

Loader (1986:39-40) translated the Hebrew word אֶת־הָעֵלָם in Ecclesiastes 3:11b as “world”, resulting in a view that holds that “God forces man to occupy himself with the temporal world order by putting it in his heart”. In this view, God forces human beings to occupy themselves with the unceasing succession of events that come upon them. Yet, humans cannot understand anything God has done from beginning to end, because God’s work remains a mystery.

Crenshaw (1987:97-98) wrote that *Qoheleth*’s point was that an action performed at the right time is appropriate, hence lovely to behold, suggesting that what God placed in the human heart is good and among many possible answers to what that might be, are the world, eternity, and darkness. Crenshaw (1987:97-98) wrote that modern interpreters arrived at the word “eternity”, while others supplied different vowels that led to the interpretation of the word as “ignorance” or “darkness”. Crenshaw (1987:97-98) settled on “ignorance” or “darkness”, as his conclusion suggested, regarding *Qoheleth*’s observation in Ecclesiastes 3:11, that human beings are incapable of comprehending anything pertaining to God’s activity.

Perdue (1994:217) translated the Hebrew word אֶת־הָעֵלָם in Ecclesiastes 3:11 as “eternity”, resulting in the view that God put eternity in the heart of humans – yet humans cannot understand what God does from beginning to end. Perdue (1994:217) understood that God denied humans knowledge of cosmic and historical components of time and divine events. The controls over these events are not in human hands, but in God’s hands or are left to mere chance.

Shields' view (2006:139-142) on the second clause of Ecclesiastes 3:11 is that, in spite of the apparent rejections of the idea, what really makes sense is that *Qoheleth* appears to be emphasising that human beings ought to discover God's work from beginning to end because God has put eternity in the human heart. This view, according to Shields (2006:139-142), is based on the entire context of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3, for *Qoheleth* proceeds in verses 3:14-15 to summarise what God does from beginning to end.

Christianson (2007:175) noted, with reference to Ecclesiastes 3:11 that God made everything beautiful in its time, but God set eternity in human hearts, so no one can discover what God has done from beginning to end. This view, according to Christianson (2007:175), reminds "the reader once again of God's frustrating discretion and suggesting alarmingly that God's purposes may be malign".

Bartholomew (2009:166) recognised the difficult issues surrounding the translation of Ecclesiastes 3:11 regarding how the Hebrew word אֶת־הָעֵלָם is to be translated and understood. Bartholomew (2009:166) referred to dissimilar interpretations of the word: "Is it a sense of the world, a sense of the past or future, a sense of duration, a sense of ignorance, or a consciousness of the eternal?" Bartholomew (2009:166) additionally pointed out a second interpretive problem in Ecclesiastes 3:11b, which seeks the answer to how the verse should be understood. Should it be understood as "introducing a result clause and thereby referring to the limitations of human knowledge"? Bartholomew (2009:167) suggested that the first negative response to the understanding of Ecclesiastes 3:11b acknowledges the inability of human beings to discover the timing of events, while positively recognising that the timing of events is under God's appointment. He (2009:167) proposed three contextual clues that help in the understanding of Ecclesiastes 3:11; saying that these clues suggest that the Hebrew word אֶת־הָעֵלָם should be understood as "something to do with how God made humans and the world". In this view, the translation of אֶת־הָעֵלָם takes the line of duration; human beings acknowledge that the world is timed, but humans need a sense of the bigger picture in order to be able to discern time. However, *Qoheleth's* problem was that humans do not have access to this bigger sense of duration. This

limited human perspective, *Qoheleth* “sees as making humans’ toil enigmatic... the ‘gift’ of ‘eternity’ is a terrible burden from this angle” (Bartholomew 2009:167).

Enns (2011:54-55) argued that *Qoheleth* is not reminding humans that there is an afterlife where all the questions will be answered; rather *Qoheleth* is affirming that God has made humans aware of the expanse of time, both past and future. According to Enns (2011:54-55), the Hebrew word אֶתְהֵעֵלָם, means a great expanse of human existence, and it is this very awareness that God has placed in human hearts, thus time goes on and on, both into the past and future.

Barrick (2011:66) accepted that Ecclesiastes 3:11 presents an interpretive problem concerning how the Hebrew word אֶתְהֵעֵלָם should be translated. Among the options are “eternity”, “duration”, and “ignorance”. Barrick (2011:66) favoured “eternity”, based on contextual factors such as the poem itself, which is about time and repetition of the same term in verse 14 with the obvious meaning of eternity. The resulting understanding is that God made human beings, placing eternity within them.

The development of arguments among scholars concerning the translation of the Hebrew word אֶתְהֵעֵלָם seems to favour mostly two words, namely “eternity” or “world”. The author may consider using either of the two words, but allowing context to determine the one that is more suitable in the theme of ‘time and repetitive cycle of events, the meaning of אֶתְהֵעֵלָם can be described as a time span of indefinite duration that cannot be known or verified by human beings,.

גַּתְן

“He put or he set”

The root of this Hebrew word means “to give, put, set” (BDB 2010:678). It is a verb *qal* perfect 3rd person masculine singular, an active verb in its present form, meaning “he put” or “he set”. According to Schoors (2013:262), this verse describes human conditions as ordained by God, and can be seen in the human nature that

wants to know more than can be seen and understood. It is this nature that deals with knowledge or understanding that God put in the heart of humans.

בלבם

“In their hearts”

The root of the word לב denotes “heart” (BDB 2010:524), prefixed by ב, which means “in, by or with” (Kelly 1992:28). It is also suffixed by a pronominal suffix ם, meaning “their” (Kelly 1992:71). Put together, the word means “in their hearts”, a noun common masculine singular construct suffix 3rd person masculine plural. Schoors (2013:262) wrote that the heart here refers to the mind, in other words that what God put in the human heart, the organ of knowledge is the desire to know about the great expanse of time or duration in a sense of unlimited time filled with cycles of what happens to human beings and their world.

מבלי

“Without”

This Hebrew word is used as a conjunction and means “so that no, without, no” (BDB 2010:115). The first part מן is a Hebrew particle preposition that means ‘from’ and בלי is a Hebrew particle adverb. Schoors (2013:262) describes the etymology of בלי as meaning “defect, failure”. Based on this meaning, he adopts ‘without man being able to grasp’ as the explanation here. He also alluded to Grimm (1880:279), Lohfink (1980:32-3), Muller (1986:13), Loader (2001:273) and Schellenberg (2002:129) to support this explanation (Schoors 2013:263). Therefore, together the word can mean ‘without’.

אשר

“Which”

This is a Hebrew relative particle, denoting “which” (Strong 1890:H834).

לא-ימצא

“No or not found out”

אֵל is a negative particle, which means “not” (the simple or abstract negation); by implication no; often used with other particles” (Strong 1890:H3808). It is joined by a *maqfef* to the Hebrew word ימצ, a verb *qal* imperfect 3rd person masculine singular, meaning “to find out, to explore” (BDB 2010:598). However, the word is negated by אֵל, to mean ‘no’ or ‘not found out’.

האדם

“Human being”

The word is a Hebrew noun common masculine singular absolute that means “man, human being” (BDB 2010:9).

את-המעשה

“The work” or “the deed”

את is encountered again and is a sign of the definite direct object, not translated in English but generally preceding and indicating the accusative (Kelly 1992:12). It is joined by a *māqqef* to המעשה. The root word is מעשה, which is a Hebrew noun common masculine singular absolute, made definite by the definite article ה (the), a particle article. The word is a noun denoting “deed, work” (BDB 2010:795). It is in the absolute form, and sums up to “the work” or “the deed”. Schoors (2013:264) wrote that ‘the work’ here has God as the subject and is not limited to God’s initial creation, but also consists of all God does to assign to everything its time.

אשר-עשה

“Which he makes” or “which he does”

אשר is a relative particle denoting “which or who” (BDB 2010:H834). It is a noun joined in a construct relationship by a *maqfef* to עשה, verb *qal* perfect 3rd person

masculine singular, a simple active perfect verb (do or make) used as in God's commands, statutes, etc. (BDB 2010:793). The construct therefore results in "which he makes" or "which he does". According to Schoors (2013:264), 'the work which God does' is the object of the negative clause, and fits in with *Qoheleth's* agnostic approach of human knowledge.

האלהים

"God"

This word is transliterated *Elohim*. ה is a Hebrew particle article, and אלהים is a Hebrew noun common masculine plural absolute. Together, it is a masculine plural noun, a deity or the deity: "God, god" specifically used in the plural, thus, especially with the article ה of the supreme God (Strong 1890:H430 and H433). Thus the word is used for "God".

מראש

"From beginning"

מן is a Hebrew particle preposition, which precedes a noun that is indefinite. It attaches like an inseparable preposition, denoting "from". ראש, on the other hand is a Hebrew noun common masculine singular absolute, which can mean "head, top, total, sum, height, beginning". In the context, it is most fitting to use "beginning", resulting in "from beginning" (BDB 2010:H7218).

ועד־סוף

"Even 'as far as or until' the end

ו is a Hebrew particle conjunction "and or but or even", prefixed to the Hebrew particle preposition עד, which means "as far as, even to, until, up to" and joined by a *maqfef* to סוף, a Hebrew noun common masculine singular absolute, denoting "end, conclusion". Put together, the word means "even as far as" or "even until the end" (BDB 2010:5490).

Re-enacting the second clause of Ecclesiastes 3:11, and joining it together with the first clause, results in: “He made everything beautiful in its time; He also put eternity in their hearts without which no human being would find out the work which God makes from beginning even until the end.”

4.3.1.5 Summary

Based on the translation and understanding of the passage of Ecclesiastes 3:11, God is the one who made everything, as well as the one who created human works and ordained the timing of everything that happens in the human cycle of life. Therefore human beings are made by God, and they cannot find out God’s work from the beginning to the end. Ecclesiastes 3:11 revealed God’s creative image, and at the same time revealed the human relationship with God’s creative image.

4.3.2 Ecclesiastes 7:29

4.3.2.1 The Hebrew text

לבד ראה-זה מצאתי אשר עשה האלהים את-האדם ישר והמה בקשו חשבנות רבים

4.3.2.2 The translation

לבד

“For belonging to itself” or “for alone”, or “for by itself”

The letter ל is a Hebrew particle preposition, an inseparable preposition that can mean “to, for, at, or belonging to” (Kelly 1992:28). It is prefixed to the Hebrew word בד. The word בד is a noun common masculine singular absolute, and means “separation, alone, by itself”, used to express the idea of by oneself, alone (BDB 2010:94). When used together, the word can mean “for belonging to itself”, “for alone” or “for by itself”.

ראה־זה

“I behold this or I perceive this”

This is a compound Hebrew word that is joined by a *maqfep*. The first part is a verb *qal* imperative masculine singular, ראה, which denotes “to see, look at, inspect, perceive, consider” (BDB 2010:906). According to Strong (1890:H7200), the word has a primitive root, which can mean to see, either literally or figuratively and it is used in numerous applications: advise self, appear, approve, behold. It is a singular verb, meaning “I behold” or “I look at” or “I perceive”. זה, on the other hand is an adjective masculine singular absolute that denotes “this or that” (Strong 1890:H2088). It therefore results in “I behold this”. According to Schoors (2013:587), what *Qoheleth* has found is a conclusion”, thus Schoors could present the sentence as a conclusion as follows: “However, I reached a conclusion...” (Schoors 2013:587).

מצאתי

“I learned” or “I devised”

The root of this word מצא is a Hebrew verb *qal* perfect 1st person common singular, which denotes “to learn, devise” and is suffixed by the pronominal suffix first person common singular to mean “I learned” or “I devised” (Strong 1890: H4672).

אשר

“That, which”

This Hebrew word is a relative particle, which denotes “that, which” (Strong 1890:H834).

עשה

“He made”

This is a Hebrew verb *qal* perfect 3rd person masculine singular or simple active perfect Hebrew verb with root (do or make) used in God’s commands, statutes, etc. – “He made” (BDB 2010:793). Schoors (2013:587) noted that unlike in his previous

comment in Ecclesiastes 7:14 and 3:11 where he opted for a present tense to render the phrase עֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים, the situation here seems to be different. Schoors (2013:256) interpreted Ecclesiastes 3:11a as the continuous workings of God in human history. However, in this instance, he wrote that the situation seems to be different, that *Qoheleth* was dealing with mankind or human nature, therefore *Qoheleth* was referring to the creation of human nature at the beginning (Schoors 2013:587).

הָאֱלֹהִים

“God”

This Hebrew word is transliterated *Elohim*, a masculine plural noun, a deity or the deity: God, god, specifically used in the plural, thus especially with the article הַ of the supreme God (Strong 1890:H430; H433). Thus the word means “God”.

אֶת־הָאָדָם

“Man or mankind”

אֶת is a Hebrew particle direct object marker and is used here as a sign of the definite direct object, not translated in English but generally preceding and indicating the accusative (Kelly 1992:12). In this case it precedes and indicates the accusative הָאָדָם. הַ is a Hebrew particle article and אָדָם is a Hebrew noun common masculine singular absolute and together they denote “mankind” (BDB 2010:9).

יָשָׁר

“Upright”

יָשָׁר is a Hebrew adjective masculine singular absolute, an adjective, used for “man” or “mankind”, denoting “uprightness, righteous, upright” (BDB 2010:449). Schoors (2013:587) wrote that the word originally denotes the physical straightness of an object, and is used in the present verse to mean that God made human beings straight, in the sense of moral quality of human beings.

והמה

“But they”

The Hebrew letter ו is used here as a Hebrew particle conjunction, a *waw* conjunction, which never stands alone but is prefixed to other words as an inseparable preposition. “Normally it is translated as simple ‘and’; it can also be taken as any of the following as context dictates: ‘but’, ‘or’, ‘even’, ‘with’, ‘so that’” (Waltke *et al.* 1990:71f). In this context of the theme of the value of practical wisdom for life and the limitations of wisdom, the most suitable word is “but”, as it seems to introduce a sharp contrast. The Hebrew word והמה, on the other hand, is an independent personal pronoun in the third person masculine plural, “they” (Kelly 1992:52). Therefore, used together, the word denotes “but they”.

בקשו

“They seek”

The Hebrew word בקש is a *Pi'el* perfect verb, a verb stem in the intensive active mood. The root of the word is “seek”; it is used in the context of “to aim at” or “practise”, as an object of direction (BDB 2010:134). The word is suffixed by ו a pronominal suffix in the third person common plural denoting “they” (Kelly 1992:69). Therefore, it becomes “they seek”.

חשבנות

“Inventions” or “devices”

The root of this Hebrew word is חשבנון, a masculine plural noun. It is a Hebrew noun common masculine plural absolute. The word denotes “from; a contrivance, that is, actual (a warlike machine) or mental (a machination): – engine, invention” (Strong 1890:H2803). According to BDB (2010:874), the root of the noun denotes devices or inventions. In its present form, with the ת ending, it is a masculine plural absolute noun – “inventions” or “devices”.

According to Schoors (2013:587), the word חשבונן is the object of בקש, and is clearly valued negatively in opposite of ישר which is the right state in which God made human beings. Schoors (2013:588) wrote that the noun here does not have any military connotation, but refers to human planned and conceived activities that are often wrong or evil. He stresses however, that we should not think of this as moral integrity, but in the sense of human beings seeking greater things that are beyond their strength. The author agrees with Schoors' that all of these makes sense "within Qoheleth's tenet of man's inability to fathom God and his work" (Schoors 2013:588).

רבים

"Many"

The root of this word is רב, a Hebrew adjective masculine plural absolute, an adjective that means "much, many, great". It is used in the attributive sense, preceding the noun חשבנות and is in agreement with the noun. Also, there is inflation of usage for numerals. Thus we have רבים, with a plural ending for the same word.

4.3.2.3 Summary

The translation of Ecclesiastes 7:29 results in "for behold, this alone I learnt, that God made mankind upright, but they seek many inventions or devices". A comparison of the different English translations – KJV, ISV, ESV, MKJV, GNB, ASV, and EMTV – reveals different approaches to the translation of Ecclesiastes 7:29. Nonetheless, none of the translations are in disagreement: God is the one who made mankind. As a result, Ecclesiastes 7:29 expressively exposes God's creative image, portraying God as the one who created human beings, as well as made human beings upright.

4.3.3 Ecclesiastes 11:5

4.3.3.1 *The Hebrew text*

כֹּאֲשֶׁר אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ מִה־דֶּרֶךְ הַרוּחַ כַּעֲצָמִים בַּבֶּטֶן הַמְּלֵאָה כִּכְהָ לֹא תִדְעַ אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר
יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַכֹּל

4.3.3.2 *The translation*

כֹּאֲשֶׁר

“As what” or “like what”

According to BDB (2010:81), the root of this word is אֲשֶׁר, a Hebrew relative particle, denoting “that, which, that which.” It can be denoted by what in object clause, and is a sign of relation that brings the clause introduced by it into a relationship with an antecedent clause. It is prefixed by כ, an inseparable preposition meaning “as, like, according to” (Kelly 1992:28). Together it is most suitable to use “according to that which”.

אֵינְךָ

“You not”

This Hebrew word is an adverb particle suffix 2nd person masculine singular, that means “nothing, not, nought” (Strong 1890:H120). According to BDB (2010:34), it is very frequently used “as particle of negation, is not, are not, was not, were not, etc.” Being a particle of the second person, it results to ‘you not’.

יֹדֵעַ

“To know”

The root of this Hebrew word, יָדַע, means “to know” (properly to ascertain by seeing). It can be used in a great variety of senses. It can be used figuratively, literally, and

inferentially including by observation, care, and recognition (Strong 1890:H3045). It is a Hebrew *qal* participle masculine verb in the singular absolute. In the present context, it is in the second person singular, in agreement with the preceding word, and also negated by the preceding word, **אֵינְךָ**, meaning not to know, instead of to know.

מה־דרך

“What way of”

The above Hebrew word is a compound word. The first part, **מה**, is a primitive Hebrew particle; that serves as interrogative “what?”. It can also serve as an exclamation like what! (Strong 1890:H4100). It is joined in a construct relationship to **דרך**, that means “a road (as trodden); figuratively a course of life or mode of action, often adverbially: along, away” (Strong 1890:H1870). According to Schoors (2013:773), **דרך** is used in this context in a figurative sense, to denote a habitual behaviour or manner. The construct in this type of relationship according to Kelly “is used to express genitival relationships and the various nuances of meaning associated with the preposition ‘of’ since Hebrew lacked such an all-purpose preposition” (Kelly 1992:58). Therefore together they form “what way of”.

הרוח

“The spirit”

The root of this Hebrew word can mean “wind, breath, mind, or spirit” (BDB 2010:925). In the context of the passage, BDB favours that which departs at death, allowing the choice of “spirit” to be used. The word is further prefixed by the Hebrew definite article **ה** “the”, to form “the spirit”. According to Schoors (2013:773), **רוח** is understood as wind by some scholars and as breath or life spirit by others. The author prefers the choice of spirit, based on the context of the passage in agreement with the figurative use of **דרך**.

כעצמים

“In the bones”

The root of the word is עצם, a noun common feminine plural absolute meaning “a bone (as strong); by extension the body; figuratively the substance, that is, (as pronoun) ...body, bone” (Strong 1890:H6106). In the context, it is inflated for number in the plural absolute; therefore it means “bones”. The word is also prefixed by the inseparable preposition כ, “as, like, according to” (Kelly 1992:28). However, Schoors (2013:773-774) noted a scribal error concerning many Masoretic manuscripts and the Tg. (cf. supra), that they should read ב preposition instead of the כ preposition. He wrote that the correct emendation should have ב instead of כ, as it would wrongly represent an abbreviated comparison, a resumption of באשר. The author accepts the ב (in, by, with) preposition as the most fitting in the present context, as none the nuances of the preposition כ (as, like, according to) will make any sense in the context (Schoors 2013:774).

According to Kelly, the preposition, when it is prefixed to a noun that has a definite article, the ה of the article drops out and is replaced by the consonant of the preposition. Therefore, the Hebrew word can possibly be written as follows: “in the bones”.

בבטן

“In womb of”

The root of this Hebrew word בטן is a noun and means “belly, body, womb” (BDB 2010:105). It is prefixed by the inseparable preposition ב, which can mean “in, by, with” (Kelly 1992:28). They are in a common feminine singular construct, so that it can denote “in womb of”.

המלאה

“The pregnant woman”

The root of this Hebrew word is מלא and means “full (literally or figuratively) or filling (literally); also (concretely) fullness; adverbially fully: ...she that was with child” (Strong 1890:H4390). It is prefixed by the definite article ה (the), and also suffixed by the pronominal feminine ending ה. Schoors (2013:774) wrote that “the feminine form of מלא, used substantively refers to a pregnant woman.” Therefore, the word in the context can denote “the pregnant woman”.

ככה

“Even so”

This Hebrew word, according to Strong (1890:H3602), means “just so, referring to the previous or following context: after that (this) manner, this matter, (even) so, in such a case, thus”. BDB (2010:462) noted that the word is an adverb that is usually prefixed to the word which it qualifies and in the present context, it provides an answer to באשר. Therefore, in the context, it seems to introduce a clause that is comparative to the previous clause. According to Schoors (2013:773), this word is a correlative that starts the second half of the verse. For these reasons, the author sees it most fitting to favour “even so”.

לא

“Not”

This is a Hebrew negative particle, an adverb that can mean “not, no” (BDB 2010:518).

תדע

“You know”

The root of this Hebrew word is the verb ידע, which denotes “to know, to perceive and see, find out and discern” (BDB 2010:393). In the present context it is a *qal* imperfect of the strong verb, formed by adding to it the fixed prefix ת (second-person

masculine singular) (Kelly 1992:127). According to Kelly, the imperfect here in the context is used “to express repeated, habitual, or customary actions, whether in the past, the present, or the future” (Kelly 1992:130). Therefore, the word means “you know”. However, it is negated by the negative particle before it to denote ‘you do not know’.

את-מעשה

“Work of”

This Hebrew word is a compound word. The first part, את, is a sign of the definite direct object, not translated in English but generally preceding and indicating the accusative (Kelly 1992:12). It is joined by a horizontal line (*maqṣef*) to the masculine noun מעשה (deed, work) in a construct relationship that expresses ownership (BDB 2010:795). Therefore, the word becomes “work of”.

האלהים

“The God”

This word according to Strong is specifically used in the plural, especially with the particle article of the supreme God (Strong 1890:H430).

אשר

“Who”

This Hebrew word is “a primitive relative pronoun (of every gender and number); who, which, what, that; also (as adverb and conjunction) when, where, how, because, in order that” (Strong 1890:H834). In the context, it is more fitting to use “who”.

יעשה

“He makes”

The root of the Hebrew word עשה is also found in Ecclesiastes 3:11 and 7:29. However, this time the word is an imperfect verb, unlike in previous cases where it

was a simple active perfect Hebrew verb (“do” or “make”). In Ecclesiastes 11:5 it is a Hebrew verb *qal* imperfect 3rd person masculine singular, and is used to express actions that are contingent upon other factors in the context. In the context of the theme which held that God made all things and that God’s work cannot be understood by humans, this form of imperfect verb used after the particle אשר, is used to express end or purpose. The purpose here the author presumes is that *Qoheleth* instructs that God makes all things and his works cannot be known by humans (Kelly 1992:130-131).

According to Schoors (2013:775) the function of the imperfect here is to make reference to the “creation continua and cannot refer to creation in the beginning.” He substantiated this view by indicating that *Qoheleth* gives reason here thereof, to express that it is God who makes everything happen, that God is the one who determines the activities in human history.

את־הכל

“The whole” or “everything”

This Hebrew word is a compound word. The first part, את, is a sign of the definite direct object, not translated in English but generally preceding and indicating the accusative (Kelly 1992:12). The second part is כל, is prefixed by the definite article ה, together meaning “properly the whole; hence all, any or every (in the singular only, but often in a plural sense): (in) all ... any (manner), enough, every (one, place, thing), howsoever, as many as” (Strong 1890:H3605). According to BDB (2010:481), it can mean “totality, everything”. Therefore, the word can mean “the whole” or “everything”.

4.3.3.3 Summary

The translation of Ecclesiastes 11:5 is as follows: ‘As you do not know the way the spirit (enters) the bones in the womb of the pregnant woman. Even so, you do not know the work of God who makes everything.’

According to Ecclesiastes 11:5, God is the one who makes all things, portraying his image as a maker. However, God is portrayed as a maker in this verse, not in the sense of the creation in the beginning, but in the sense of continuous creation of what happens in human history.

4.3.4 Ecclesiastes 12:1

4.3.4.1 *The Hebrew text*

וזכר את־בוראִיךְ בימי בחורתִיךְ עד אשר לא־יבאו ימי הרעה והגיעו שנים אשר תאמר אין־לי בהם

חפץ

4.3.4.2 *The translation*

וזכר

“And remember”

The root of this Hebrew word is זכר, a Hebrew *qal* imperative verb, masculine singular which is a “primitive root; properly to mark (so as to be recognized), that is, to remember; by implication to mention” (Strong 1890:H2142). It is prefixed by the waw conjunction ו, meaning “and” (Kelly 1992:31). Together they form “and remember”. The imperative mood of the verb in the author’s opinion, does not necessarily express a command, but is of a middle voice in the sense of a mood that is intended by *Qoheleth* to influence the listener's behaviour.

את־בוראִיךְ

“Your creator”

The above word is a compound Hebrew word. The first part, את, serves merely as a sign of direct object (Kelly 1992:12). It is joined by a horizontal line (*maqfef*) to בוראִיךְ, which has a primitive root, בָּרָא, that denotes “(absolutely) to create; (qualified) to cut down (a wood), select, feed (as formative processes): choose,

create (creator), cut down, dispatch, do, make (fat)” (Strong 1890:H1254). In the present form, the word is a verb *qal* participle in the construct state, and is suffixed by a pronominal suffix in the second person masculine singular “your” to show possession (Kelly 1992:71). Therefore, together the compound word means “your creator”.

Schoors (2013:794) also accepts ‘your creator’ as the most obvious meaning of the Hebrew word אֱת־בּוֹרֵאֵיךְ and recognizes the word as the object of the imperative זכר. He understands that *Qoheleth* is not calling the audience to remember God in the sense of offering prayers, praise or blessing, but to remember God by doing his will. He also wrote that a number of scholars¹⁷ consider Ecclesiastes 12:1a as an orthodox gloss. But he argued with support from other scholars (like Fox 1989:299, and Backhaus 1993:299-300) to refute such as being syntactically impossible, since it would leave the whole of Ecclesiastes 12:1b-7 without a main clause (Schoors 2013:795).

In addition, the author understands this verse based on careful observation, as a continuation of the theme of advice for the young and the old that *Qoheleth* started from Ecclesiastes 11:7-10 right up to 12:1-8. Under this theme *Qoheleth* advised both the old and the young people to enjoy all the days of their lives, but also to remember that God, who is their creator, will require them to give account of everything they did in life.

Significantly here with regard to this study, is that God’s image is portrayed as the creator. He created human beings, and it is imperative for human beings to do his will.

בימי

“In the days of”

This Hebrew word has the root יום, which is a masculine noun that means “day, time year” (BDB 2010:398). It is prefixed by the inseparable preposition ב, which can mean “in, by, with” (Kelly 1992:28). The word in the present form is a masculine

¹⁷ See inter alia: McNeil 1904:26, Ellemeier 1967:127-128, Whitley 1979a:95-96 and Michel 1988:167.

plural noun that is placed in the construct state, to form “in the days of” (Kelly 1992:59).

בחורתִּיךְ

“Your youth”

The root of the above Hebrew word is בַּחֲרוּת, meaning “youth” (Strong 1890:H979). It is Hebrew noun common feminine plural construct. The word is suffixed by the pronominal suffix “your” in the second-person masculine (Kelly 1992:71). Therefore, together they form “your youth”.

עד

“Until”

This word is a Hebrew particle preposition, and can mean “as far as, even to, until, up to, while” (BDB 2010:723). In the author’s opinion, based on the present context, “until” is the best option. In the author’s opinion, until is used here to indicate a transition in time from the good days of one’s youth to the bad or unpleasant adult years that comes later in one’s life. Therefore, until can also mean before the bad or unpleasant years.

אשר

“When”

This Hebrew word is a “primitive relative pronoun (of every gender and number); who, which, what, that; also (as adverb and conjunction) when, where, how, because, in order that, etc.” (Strong 1890:H834).

לֹא־יבֹאוּ

“Not come”

This Hebrew word is a compound word. The first part, לֹא, is an adverb, a negative particle that denotes “not, no” (BDB 2010:518). It is joined by a horizontal line

(*maqef*) to יבאו, a Hebrew *qal* imperfect verb in the 3rd person masculine plural which denotes “to go or come” (Strong 1890:H935).

ימי

“Days of”

This Hebrew word is a common noun in a construct relationship. It is a plural construct and denotes “days of” (Kelly 1992:59).

הרעה

“The bad”

This Hebrew word is an adjective that denotes “bad, evil” (BDB 2010:944). It is prefixed by the definite article “the”. Therefore, together they form “the bad or the evil”. Many English translations¹⁸ render the word רעה as “evil”. Only ISV renders the word רעה as “troublesome”. The author does not think that evil is a fitting translation in the present context, since evil is connected in people’s minds as something from the dark side of life. The word in this context is rather referring to troublesome days, in the sense that there will be days that are not so good or not so happy. Therefore, “bad” fits best in the present context.

והגיעו

“Nor draw near”

The root of this Hebrew word is גגע a *hiphil* verb, a perfect waw consecutive Hebrew verb of the 3rd person common plural that can mean “come (nigh), draw near (nigh), get up, happen, join, near, plague, reach (up), smite, strike, touch” (Strong 1890:H5060). It is prefixed by the conjunction ו, that can denote “and, or nor” (BDB 2010:1090). In the author’s opinion, the conjunction ו is used here to introduce an alternative statement to indicate that either of the two conditions can be true. In this context, the two conditions are firstly, the bad days that could come, and secondly

¹⁸ See inter alia: RV, MKJV, KJV, ASV ESV, all render the word רעה as ‘evil’.

the years of displeasure, which are true conditions that unfailingly befalls all youths in their future. Therefore, 'nor' will be favoured here instead of 'and'.

שנים

“Years”

The root of this Hebrew word is a common feminine noun that is in the plural absolute and denotes “year” (Strong 1890:H8141). It is plural in the present form and therefore means “years”.

אשר

“When”

This Hebrew word is a “primitive relative pronoun (of every gender and number); who, which, what, that; also (as adverb and conjunction) when, where, how, because, in order that, etc.” (Strong 1890:H834). In the context of the passage, when is more preferable.

תאמר

“You shall say”

The root of this Hebrew word is the verb אמר and means “utter, say” (BDB 2010:55). In the present form, the word is prefixed by the remnant of a personal pronoun that serves to indicate person, gender, and number. In this case, it is prefixed by ת, which can stand for third-person feminine singular or second-person masculine singular to form the *qal* imperfect of the strong verb. In the context, the author favours verb *qal* imperfect 2nd person masculine singular, because it expresses action that is contingent upon other factors. It is dependent on the imperative זכר, the call to remember, and therefore it expresses end or purpose (Kelly 1992:127-131). Therefore, the word means “you shall say”.

אין-לי

“For me I have no”

This Hebrew word אֵין is a Hebrew particle adverb, a primitive root meaning to be nothing or not exist; a non-entity; generally used as a negative particle” (Strong 1890:H369). Also according to BDB (2010:H369) it can mean nothing, not or I have no. The word is suffixed by the Hebrew particle prepositional לְ with the pronominal suffix 1st person common לִי, which can mean “for me” (BDB 2010:34). The word can be translated ‘for me I have no’.

בהם

“In them”

This Hebrew word is made up of the preposition ב, which can mean “in, by, with” (Kelly 19992:28) and the 3rd person masculine plural suffix הם, that means “them” (Kelly 1992:68), and it serves as the object of the preposition. Together, they mean “in them”.

חפץ

“Delight or pleasure”

The above word is a Hebrew noun, common masculine singular absolute that means “delight, pleasure” (BDB 2010:342).

4.3.4.3 Summary

The translation of Ecclesiastes 12:1 can thus be put as follows: “And remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the bad (not so good) days come and the years draw near of which you shall say: for me there is no pleasure in them.”

The beginning of this passage starts with the coordinating conjunction “and”, indicating that the passage is joined to the previous. The passage is also found within the theme where *Qoheleth* advised both the old and the young people to enjoy all the days of their lives, but to remember that God will require them to give account

of everything they did in life. He portrayed God's image here as the judge, the creator, and the giver of human spirit, whom the human spirit will return to when death comes. Within this context, the antecedent to "your creator" is God.

Therefore, God's image is portrayed here as the creator of human beings and *Qoheleth* reminds the audience to remember God by doing his will.

4.4 Providential images of God

Several passages in the Book of Ecclesiastes also seem to portray the providential images of God, namely Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, 3:13, and 5:18-20.

This section of the chapter, however, will be delimited to the study of Ecclesiastes 2:24-26. The study will be conducted in the context of the theme, which search for understanding and exploration into everything that is done in the world, *Qoheleth* pointed out that God is the giver of all that human beings do. *Qoheleth* refers to God as אלהים (used of the supreme God) (Strong 1890:H430). God's image is portrayed under this theme as the one who controls the activities of human beings, the human endless cycle of life, wisdom, folly, work, and pleasure. *Qoheleth* concluded that the best thing in human life is to enjoy food and drink and find satisfaction in work.

4.4.1 Ecclesiastes 2:24

4.4.1.1 *The Hebrew text (Ecclesiastes 2:24)*

אין־טוב באדם שיאכל ושתה והראה את־נפשו טוב בעמלו גם־זה ראיתי אני כי מיד האלהים היא

4.4.1.2 *The translation*

אין־טוב

"Nothing good"

This Hebrew word is a compound word. The first part אֵין is a particle adverb, “a primitive root meaning to be nothing or not exist; a non-entity; generally used as a negative particle” (Strong 1890:H369). According to BDB (2010:34), it also means “nothing”. It is joined to טוב, a noun, denoting “a good thing, benefit, welfare”. It is used in the context of the passage in the sense of welfare, prosperity, happiness (BDB 2010:375). Schoors (2013:207) wrote that the concern of טוב in this passage is the enjoyment of life and argues that it functions here as a substantive rather adjectivally, so that it can be translated as “pleasure, happiness.”

Loader (1979:106) interprets this text as a negative statement “it is not good”. Kruger (1997:135-136) likewise interprets the text as “nothing good”. However, Schoors (2013:208-209) favours a comparative interpretation ‘there is nothing better’, based on the following factors: Firstly, RSV’s comparative interpretation, which tallies with Ecclesiastes 3:12, 3:22, 8:15 and 5:17. Secondly, it is supported by LXX. In the author’s opinion, a comparative interpretation does not seem to be correct one, more so because the verse seems to be a further search to the question *Qoheleth* posited in Ecclesiastes 2:22. After *Qoheleth*’s search for understanding and exploration into everything that is done in the world, he could not find anything worthwhile for all human labour; he found that even eating and drinking and happiness is not under human control. Therefore, the compound word can be translated as “Nothing good”.

בָּאָדָם

“In man or human beings”

The root of this Hebrew word is אָדָם, denoting “man, mankind” (Strong 1890:H120). According to De Gruyter (1973:4), the word can be used in the collective sense, referring to humanity, people, and human beings, or as a person, e.g. Adam. It is prefixed by the inseparable preposition ב, denoting “in, by, with” (Kelly 1992:28).

The context of the verse addresses human needs; in other words, “human beings” may be used. However, the context does not allow “human beings” to be used here, based on the following: firstly, the Hebrew word אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ found in the same verse

has a masculine pronominal suffix “his life” or “his soul”; and secondly, another word, בעמלו, found in the same verse, has a masculine pronominal suffix “in his labour” as well. Therefore, put together, it becomes “in man”. Nevertheless, based on the context that the passage addresses all human needs, the word can rightly be substituted with “human beings”.

שיאכל

“Cause to eat”

ל is used for the relative pronoun אשר; which is used with a prepositional prefix and often followed by some affixed pronoun, meaning “on account of, whatsoever, whatsoever: cause, sake” (Strong 1890:H7945). אכל, on the other hand, is a Hebrew verb *qal* imperfect 3rd person masculine singular of a primitive root denoting “to eat (literally or figuratively) burn up, consume, devour” (Strong 1890:H398). Together, the two words form “cause to eat”.

ושתה

“And to drink”

שתה is a simple active perfect verb, used of humans in the sense of “drink, water, wine, etc.” It means “to drink” (BDB 2010:1059). The word is prefixed by the waw ו, a conjunction which normally means “and”, which does not stand alone in Hebrew. It can also mean any of the following as the context dictates: “but, or, even, with, so that”. Therefore, the word can be translated “and to drink” (Waltke *et al.* 1990:187f).

והראה

“And cause to see”

The root of this Hebrew word is ראה, a verb meaning “to see” (Brown 1907:422). In its present context, it is a Hebrew *hiphil* waw consec perfect 3rd person masculine singular verb. *Hiphil* according to Kelly (1992:108) is a verb stem in the causative active mood. It is prefixed by the ו conjunction “and”, resulting in “and cause to see”.

את־נפשו

“His soul”

The root of this word is נפש, a feminine noun meaning “soul, life, creature, person, living being, desire, emotion, passion” (BDB 2010:659). The same meaning is also held by Brown (1907:659): “soul, life, creature, person, living being, desire, emotion, passion”. It is prefixed by the article את; “a sign of the definite direct object, not translated in English but generally preceding and indicating the accusative” (De Gruyter 1973:26). The word is also suffixed by the pronominal suffix ם, meaning “his” (Kelly 1992:71); to arrive at “his soul”.

טוב

“Good”

This word is a masculine noun meaning “a good thing, benefit, welfare” used in the sense of “welfare, prosperity, happiness” (BDB 2010:375; Brown 1907:375).

בעמלו

“In his labour”

The root of this Hebrew word is עמל; meaning “toil, trouble, labour” (BDB 2010:765).

The word is prefixed by the inseparable preposition ב, meaning “in, on, by, with, against” (Walke *et al.* 1990:187f). It is also suffixed by the pronominal suffix ם, meaning “his” (Kelly 1992:71); to arrive at “in his labour”.

גם־זה

“Also this”

This is a compound word. The first part, גם, means “also” (BDB 2010:H1571) and is joined by a *maqṣef*, a horizontal stroke that joins two or more words within a verse (Kelly 1992:12) to the second part, זה, “this” (BDB 2010:H2090). Therefore, the word combines to mean “also this” or “this also”.

ראיתי

“I saw”

The root of this Hebrew word is a verb, רָאָה, meaning “see” (BDB 2010:906). It also means “take for, become aware of, observe, look at, consider, experience, and know” (De Gruyter 1973:253). In its present form it is a verb stem which is transliterated as a *Hif'il*, a verb root that is causative active and has a first-person common singular pronominal suffix י, meaning “I”. Together they mean “I saw” or “I become aware of” or “I consider” (Kelly 1992:68).

אני

“I”

This is a personal pronoun. “I” is a first-person singular – usually used for emphasis (BDB 2010:H589).

כי

This word means “that, for, because” (De Gruyter 1973:122).

מיד

“From hand of”

This Hebrew word is a noun in a construct relationship (a joining together of two nouns within a sentence) (Kelly 1992:58).

The root word is יָד, meaning “hand” (De Gruyter 1973:102). It is prefixed by the preposition מִן, meaning “from, or out of”, which is usually written as *mem* מ before indefinite nouns, plus *hireq* (a dot under the *mem*), plus a *dagesh forte* (a doubling dot or doubling letter in Hebrew) (Kelly1992:30). Being in a construct relationship, the word therefore means “from hand of”.

האלהים

“God”

This is a masculine plural noun, denoting God as reflecting divine majesty and power (BDB 2010:44).

הוא

“Himself”

This is a Hebrew independent pronoun, it is the third person pronoun singular, he (she or it) that is used for expression when emphatic, or without a verb; also (intensively) self (Strong 1890:H1931).

4.4.1.3 Summary

“(There is) nothing good in man (which) cause (him) to eat and to drink and to cause his soul to see good of his labour. This also, I saw, it came from the hand of God himself.”

This passage therefore portrays God’s image as the provider of all the basic human needs, including food, drink, and happiness.

4.4.2 Ecclesiastes 2:25

4.4.2.1 The Hebrew text

כי מי יאכל ומי יחוש חוץ ממני

4.4.2.2 The translation

כי

“For”

כי is a Hebrew particle conjunction. According to Strong (1890:H3588), this is the full form of the prepositional prefixes, which indicates causal relations of all kinds, antecedent or consequent; often largely modified by other particles annexed: and, (for as much, in as much, where-) as, assured [-ly], but, certainly, doubtless.

Other words that allow for either the antecedent or the consequent causal relationships, according to De Gruyter (1973:122), are “because, for, that, as” and so on. Based on the context, which deals with human needs and God’s provision for those needs, it becomes more appropriate to use “for” in the sense of a consequent causal relationship. For here therefore, serves as a conjunction to explain the reason that; or on account of what was said in Ecclesiastes 2:24.

מי

“Who”

This word is an interrogative pronoun of persons as well as of things, it is a Hebrew interrogative pronoun of no gender no number i.e. “who?” (Strong 1890:H4310; De Gruyter 1972:145).

יאכל

“Can eat”

אכל is a primitive root denoting “to eat (literally or figuratively), burn up, consume, devour” (Strong 1890:H398). In the present form of יאכל, it is an imperfect verb used to express actions that are contingent upon other factors in the context. The possibilities of translation, according to Kelly (1992:130), involve modal auxiliaries such as “may, can, shall, might, should, would, etc.” In the present context, it is dependent on prior action, on the statement that the basic things in human life, like eating, and drinking and happiness are from the hands of God; thus the rhetorical question. This is determined by the use of the preceding conditional particle “who” (Kelly 1992:131).

ומי

“And who”

The root of this Hebrew word is also an interrogative pronoun of persons as well as of things, i.e. “who” (Strong 1890:H4310; De Gruyter 1972:145).

In this instance, it is prefixed by the *waw* conjunction (ו) “and” to arrive at “and who”.

יחוש

“Can enjoy”

This is “a primitive root; to hurry; figuratively, to be eager with excitement or enjoyment: (make) haste (-n), ready” (Strong 1890:H2363). The root of this Hebrew word, *יחוש*, according to BDB (2010:301), is a verb meaning “feel, enjoy (with the senses)”. In its present form, it is a *Qal* imperfect third person masculine singular verb, meaning a verb used frequently to express actions that are dependent upon other factors in the context, with possibilities of many translations that often involve the use of modal auxiliaries such as “may, can, shall, might, etc.” (Kelly 1992:130). In the context, one may possibly use “can enjoy”. Therefore, the imperfect verb in this instance is dependent upon the prior statement in Ecclesiastes 2:24, that to eat, drink and to be happy is from the hand of God. Similarly *Qoheleth* employs another rhetorical question that does not necessarily demand response or reaction (Kelly 1992:130-131).

חוץ

“Outside of or without”

The root of this word is a Hebrew noun common masculine singular absolute, “from an unused root meaning to sever; properly separate by a wall, that is, outside, outdoors: abroad, field, forth, highway, more, out (-side, -ward), street, without” (Strong 1890: H2351).

According to BDB (2010:300), it means “outside of” and indicates a construct relationship, which according to Kelly (1992:58) is used to express genitival relationships and the various nuances of meaning associated with the preposition “of”. Since Hebrew lacked such an all-purpose preposition, the construct relationship helped to fill the gap.

ממני

“From me”

The root of this Hebrew word, מן, is a preposition and means “from or out of in many senses” (Strong 1890: H4480). According to Kelly (1992:70), it means “from, away from, more than”. In the present form it is the first-person common singular, made up of מן-ני מן-, literally meaning “from me.” The two final nouns are assimilated into the letters above by means of the two *dagesh fortes* (a dot that indicates the doubling of the consonant in which it stands) (Kelly 1992:70).

4.4.2.3 Comparison of the English translations

There are dissimilar renditions of this verse by the different English translations that are available. A few examples will reveal these differences.

KJV renders, “For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?”

ASV renders, “For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?”

MKJV renders, “For who can eat, or who can enjoy, apart from me?”

ISV renders “For who can eat or enjoy life apart from him?”

The different translations seem to agree on the first two clauses “for who can eat, or who can enjoy”, except for KJV that replaces “or who can enjoy” with “or who else can hasten hereunto”.

Dissimilarity is especially noted in the last clause, חוץ ממני. KJV and ASV translate as a comparative statement “more than I”, MKJV renders “apart from me”, and ISV renders “apart from him”.

חוץ has a wide range of meanings, but all express the sense to sever, the idea of separation that cannot accommodate a comparative translation. Also in the context of the surrounding verses, it may be inappropriate to translate the word as a comparative clause “more than me.” It would suggest the idea of comparing the audiences’ ability to eat and enjoy to *Qoheleth’s*. Rather, the verse in the author’s view, suggest the idea of not being able to eat and enjoy in separation from God who is the giver of food and enjoyment, as verse 26 suggests.

Additionally, מִמֶּנִּי has a first-person pronominal suffix that renders the word incapable of accommodating the third person “him” as ISV suggests. The suffix can either be “me” or “I”.

Schoors (2013:216) wrote that most commentators deem it necessary to have a third person masculine singular suffix here, for which reason they emended מִמֶּנִּי to מִמֶּנּוּ. This emendation, he said follows a few Masoretic manuscripts: LXX¹⁹, Syriac Peshita Version, Syro-hexaplar and Jerome. Nevertheless, he noted that De Waard in a careful study demonstrated that מִמֶּנִּי is the *lectio difficilior* (2013:216). Schoors (2013:216) also noted that “the construction חוּץ מִמֶּנִּי, ‘apart from me / except me’... is the only biblical instance of חוּץ מִן with that connotation of ‘exception’”. He wrote that it is rare in *Qumran* but frequently used in the Mishna as well as corresponds to Aramiac מִן לְבַר, for which reason חוּץ מִן can be termed an Aramism in the sense that *Qoheleth* took the meaning under the influence of Aramaic.

According to Schoors (2013:216) the reference, based on the context of the passage is to God, and is possibly an implicit quotation. Therefore, the author agrees with Schoors that what *Qoheleth* wrote in this passage, is that even the basic things in human life like eating and drinking and happiness are not in human hands, but in the hands of God, portraying God’s image as provider of all the basic human needs.

4.4.2.4 Summary

Ecclesiastes 2:25 can therefore be translated as follows: “For who can eat and who can enjoy without me?”

¹⁹ LXX as used by Schoor (2013:216) includes the following manuscripts: Septuagint, A Codex Alexandrinus, B Codex Vaticanus, C Codex Ephraemi rescriptus, S Codex Sinaiticus.

4.4.3 Ecclesiastes 2:26

4.4.3.1 *The Hebrew text*

כי לאדם שטוב לפניו נתן חכמה ודעת ושמחה ולחוטא נתן ענין לאסוף ולכנוס לתת לטוב לפני האלהים גם־זה הבל ורעות רוח

4.4.3.2 *The translation*

כי

“For or because”

According to Strong (1890: H3588), this is “a Hebrew primitive particle indicating causal relations of all kinds, antecedent or consequent; (by implication) very widely used as a relative conjugation or adverb”.

BDB (2010:471) defines the word as a conjugate, i.e. “that, for, when”. The causal relationship in this case is consequential of the statement in Ecclesiastes 2:25. Therefore, the researcher may translate the word as “for” or “because”.

לאדם

“To human beings”

This is a compound Hebrew word. The first part, ל, is a Hebrew inseparable preposition denoting “to, for, at” (Kelly 1992:28). It is prefixed to the noun אדם, which denotes a human being (an individual or the species, mankind, etc.) or person (Strong 1890:H120). Therefore, combined they form “for human beings”.

שטוב

“Who ‘is’ good”

This Hebrew word is a compound word made up of two words, namely שָׁל and טוב.

The first part, שֶׁל is a relative particle that denotes “who” or “which” (BDB 2010:980). טוב, on the other hand, is a Hebrew adjective masculine singular absolute and means “pleasing” or “good” (BDB 2010:373). It combines to form ‘who is good’.

לפניו

“Before his face”

This Hebrew word is a compound word derived from the root that is plural, but always used as a singular. The first part ל is a Hebrew particle preposition (to, for, at) and joined to פנה, a Hebrew noun common both plural construct suffix 3rd person masculine singular, meaning the face (as the part that turns), is also used in a variety of applications, among which as a noun with prepositional prefix, i.e. “before” (BDB 2010:819). According to Kelly (1992:29) when put together, לפני functions as unattached or independent preposition, much like prepositions in English “before, in front of”. The word is also suffixed by ו, a third-person masculine personal pronoun. Together, the word can mean “before his face or in front of his face”.

נתן

“He gives”

This word is a Hebrew *qal* perfect 3rd person masculine singular verb and means “to give, put, set” (BDB 2010:678). It is a simple active verb which means “he gives”.

חכמה

“Wisdom”

This word is a Hebrew noun common feminine singular absolute that means “wisdom (in a good sense): skilful, wisdom, wisely, wit” (Strong 1890:2451).

According to Schoors (2013:219), wisdom is here presented as a gift from God. The wisdom here he wrote is in the sense of being wise to enjoy life, and not in the sense of knowledge, for such might increase the beneficiaries’ misery as it did for *Qoheleth*.

ודעת

“And knowledge”

This word can mean “knowledge: cunning, [ig-]norantly, know(-ledge), [un-]awares (wittingly)” (Strong 1890:1847). It is prefixed by the ו conjunction “and” (Kelly 1992:31). Together they become “and knowledge”.

ושמחה

“And joy”

The root of this Hebrew word, שמחה, means “joy, gladness, mirth” (BDB 2010:970).

It is also prefixed by the ו conjunction “and” (Kelly 1992:31). Together they mean “and joy”. As was the case with wisdom, Schoors (2013:220) maintained that the joy here cannot be understood as spiritual joy, especially as a reward for good behaviour, rather it denotes pleasure.

ולחוטא

“But to him that is a sinner”

This Hebrew word is a compound word that has the root חטא, which, according to BDB, is a *qal* perfect verb which means “miss (a goal or way), go wrong, sin” (2010:306). In this context it is used as a noun, i.e. “sinner” (BDB 2010:307). The root word is prefixed by the ו conjunction “and” (Kelly 1992:31). ו can also be used to “connect[s] contrasted ideas, where in our idiom the contrast would be expressed explicitly by ‘but’” (BDB 2010:252). The word is also prefixed by the inseparable preposition ל, which can mean “to, for, at” (Kelly 1992:28). Together the compound word becomes “but to him that is sinner”.

According to Schoors (2013:217-218), חטא is the parallel and opposite of טוב. He wrote that many commentators understand this verse as an expression of moral connotation. However, he argues that it does not have the traditional moral meaning, but expresses the idea that some people are in God’s favour without any previous

moral achievement on their part. This expression he noted is typical of Hellenistic utterances in *Qoheleth's* time, which was not the case in Israelite wisdom before *Qoheleth's* time. He further stressed that during *Qoheleth's* time, the deed-consequence relationship has been abandoned in favour of the divine disposition, where everything is preordained by God.

נתן

“He gives”

This word is a Hebrew *qal* perfect 3rd person masculine singular verb and means “to give, put, set” (BDB 2010:678). It is a simple active verb which means “he gives”.

ענין

“Task”

This Hebrew word can mean “task, occupation, or job” (BDB 2010:775). The task here according to Schoors (2013:220) has a negative connotation, it does not however, imply the whole occupation of human beings. He argued rather, that if the gifts of wisdom and knowledge are given to those that God likes, then the task to gather and collect wealth are the portion of those that God does not like. This point can be deemed correct in the context, for just as God can give or take away the pleasure of eating and drinking, he can also give and take away wisdom and knowledge. It comes down to the point that these things lie outside human control, but are in God’s hands, who’s image is portrayed here as the provider of all basic human needs.

לאסוף

“Of to gather”

This Hebrew word has a primitive root *אסף* that can mean “to gather for any purpose; hence to receive, take away, that is, remove (destroy, leave behind, put up, restore, etc.): assemble, bring” (Strong 1890:H622). The word is a verb *qal* infinitive construct that caters for (of) that is unrepresented in Hebrew. It is also prefixed by the

inseparable preposition ל, which can mean “to, for, at” (Kelly 1992:28). Combined, the word becomes “of to gather”.

ולכנס

“And of to amass”

The root of this Hebrew word, כנס, is a verb, *qal* infinitive construct that also means “gather, collect”. In the context it means ‘of to amass wealth’ (BDB 2010:488). It is prefixed by the ו conjunction “and” (Kelly 1992:31). The word is also prefixed by the inseparable preposition ל, which can mean “to, for, at” (Kelly 1992:28). Together they become “and to amass”.

לתת

“Of to give”

This Hebrew word is a verb *qal* infinitive construct and means “to give, put, set”. It is a simple active verb. Unlike its previous occurrences where it was an indicative verb, this time it is in the infinitive mood. Therefore, it means “of to give”. The first part ל is a Hebrew particle preposition (to, for, at), and is joined to נתן (give) and together they become a Hebrew verb *qal* infinitive construct (BDB 2010:678).

לטוב

“To the good”

The Hebrew word טוב can mean “good (as an adjective) in the widest sense; used likewise as a noun, both in the masculine and the feminine, the singular and the plural (good, a good, or good thing, a good man or woman; the good, goods or good things, good men or women)” (Strong 1890:2896). It is prefixed by the inseparable preposition ל, which can mean “to, for, at” (Kelly 1992:28). Together they form “to the good”.

לפני

“Before”

This Hebrew word is a preposition which is used as an unattached or independent preposition much like in English. It means “before, in front of” (Kelly 1992:29).

האלהים

“God”

This Hebrew word is transliterated *Elohim*, a masculine plural noun, a deity or the deity: “God, god”, specifically used in the plural, thus especially with the article ה of the supreme God (Strong 1890:H430 and H433). The word thus denotes “God”.

גם־זה

“Also this”

This is a compound Hebrew word. The first part, גם, is “used only adverbially also, even, yea, though; often repeated as correlation both ... and: again, alike, also, (so much) as (soon), both (so) ... and, but, either ... or, even, for all, (in) likewise (manner), moreover” (Strong 1890:H1571). The word is joined by a *maqṣef* (horizontal line) to the second part זה, which is a primitive word; the masculine demonstrative pronoun, “this or that” (Strong 1890: H2088). Together they become “also this”.

הבל

“Vanity”

This is a Hebrew noun common masculine singular absolute and word means “emptiness or vanity; figuratively, something transitory and unsatisfactory; often used as an adverb” (Strong 1890:H1892).

ורעות

“And grasping after”

The root of this Hebrew word, רָעוּת, is a feminine noun common singular construct and according to Strong, means “a feeding upon, that is, grasping after: vexation” (Strong 1890:H7469). It is prefixed by the ו conjunction “and” (Kelly 1992:31). Together they mean “and grasping after”.

רוח

“Wind”

This Hebrew word is a feminine noun, less often masculine, that can mean “breath, wind or spirit”. In this context it means “spirit or wind” (BDB 2010:925).

4.4.3.3 Summary

The translation of Ecclesiastes 2:26 can thus be presented as follows: “For to human being who is pleasing before his face, he gives wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he gives task to gather and to amass (only) to give to the good before God. Also this (is) vanity and grasping after wind.”

4.4.4 Summary

Based on the translation and understanding of the passages of Ecclesiastes 3:11, 7:29, 11:5, and 12:1, God is the one who made everything, as well as the one who creates human works. According to the verses, God made everything. Therefore, human beings are made by God. God’s image is also portrayed as the judge, the creator, and the giver of human spirit, whom the human spirit will return to when death comes.

Also based on the translation and understanding of the passage of Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, which falls within Theme 1 that says that “everything is meaningless”, *Qoheleth* conducted a search for understanding and exploration into everything that is done in the world, *Qoheleth* pointed out that God is the provider of all that human beings do. *Qoheleth* refers to this God as אֱלֹהִים (used of the supreme God).

God's image is portrayed under this theme as the one who controls the activities of human beings, the endless cycle of human life, wisdom, folly, work, and pleasure. *Qoheleth* concluded that even the basic things in human life like enjoyment of food and drink and to find satisfaction in work, are not in human hands, but in the hands of God. *Qoheleth* discovered that God is the provider of all the basic human needs.

These passages reveal God's creative image, and at the same time reveal human beings, as well as all the human activities are created by God's.

The next chapter will further explore the human relationships with God's images.

CHAPTER 5

What relationship do human beings have with God?

5.1 Introduction

The thrust of this chapter is to explore human relationships with God's images. This chapter presents what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates concerning the relationship(s) between God and human beings.

This chapter functions as the findings of the study. It is an attempt to present all kinds of possible relationship(s) between God and human beings, as portrayed in the Book of Ecclesiastes through the images of God.

This study generally adopted the historical/literary approach of interpretation of the Old Testament. The historical approach applied existing exegetical methods to discover the meaning and implications of texts of the Book of Ecclesiastes. This approach required the author to conduct two units of study: 1) a study of the uniqueness and theology of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and 2) a study of the development of research and different viewpoints on the book of Ecclesiastes. These two units of study provided background information that helped in the interpretation and understanding of all the possible human relationship(s) to God's images in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The study also utilised a literary exegetical approach in Chapter 4 in an attempt to discover all the possible images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes. These images are narrowed down to two images. The choice of the two images is in accordance with the delimitation implemented in Chapter 4 – to limit the study to only two of God's images: creative and providential. In this chapter the author will focus specifically on what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicates regarding human relationship(s) with God's creative and providential images.

The objective of this chapter is twofold: firstly, to present human relationships with God's creative and providential images based on knowledge gleaned during the historical exegetical processes in Chapters 2 and 3; and secondly, to present human

relationships with God's creative and providential images based on the literary exegetical process in Chapter 4.

The aim is to compare the development of understanding of the human relationship with the creative and providential images of God over the years, with the understanding of the human relationship with the creative and providential images of God gained through the literary exegetical process in this study.

The overarching aim is to portray all possible relationship(s) between God and human beings, based on the images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

5.2 Human relationship with God's creative and providential images based on historical study

5.2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to present the interpretation and application of all the possible human relationship(s) to God's creative and providential images in the Book of Ecclesiastes garnered from a historical survey of the uniqueness and theology of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, as well as the development of studies and different viewpoints on the book of Ecclesiastes.

5.2.2 Human relationships with God's creative and providential images

Kaiser (1979:42) arrived at the conclusion that God is the provider of all human needs, and the primary duty of humans in relationship with God, according to the Book of Ecclesiastes, is to fear God, after which human life can possibly accord with the attitude of Ecclesiastes, which is one of delight, living, and enjoying all the goods that God provides to humans. Kaiser's conclusion was based on the understanding that when *Qoheleth* said all is vanity of vanities that he meant to communicate the futility of human life and human abilities; if it is spent without knowing what life is all about (Kaiser 1979:122).

Kaiser (1979:125) wrote that the grand conclusion of the Book of Ecclesiastes concerning humanity was that human beings receive the living God in answer to their entire quest. This conclusion portrays God's image as the creator of human beings and all human gain consists of fearing and obeying God. He further stressed that whether human beings fear or disobey God in their lifetime, they are destined to be confronted by God concerning every work, whether good or bad (Kaiser 1979:125). This also portrayed God's image as the one who provides judgment to humans.

Loader (1986:4) wrote that the Book of Ecclesiastes is wisdom literature, which examines communications about wise actions concerned with the correct ordering of life in which human beings must integrate harmoniously into the order that God has created. Loader (1986:15) interpreted the image of God as portrayed in the Book of Ecclesiastes as a creator God, whose actions do not have fixed patterns, and human beings should strive to integrate into the order that God has provided. Loader's view (1986:5) was that a lack of this integration results in emptiness between God and humans; causing real alienation in the relationship between God and humans that cannot be filled by humans themselves.

Crenshaw (1987:158-159) concluded that the human relationship with God's images is such that humans cannot understand God's actions on earth. In this view, *Qoheleth* emphasised that all who undertake to comprehend God's work are destined to fail, and human destiny is entirely at God's disposal. God's image is portrayed in Crenshaw's view as the provider of all that happens to human beings in their lifetime.

Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:21-24) reminded readers to be mindful as they study the Book of Ecclesiastes, that the writer included "goads" to prod human thinking and nails on which to hang some practical conclusions. The goads, according to Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:21-24), contributed to the understanding that the message of the Book of Ecclesiastes is to make human beings turn from all futility and put their faith in God as the sole provider.

Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:21-24) stated that the purpose of the nails is to provide humans the hang-down for the practical truth of looking at life from God's perspective, as human philosophies will surely fail in the end. In this view, God is the

provider of human wisdom and humans should use their God-given wisdom, but must not expect to find answers to every question. It is imperative for human beings to obey God's will and enjoy all that God provides.

Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:17) also wrote that *Qoheleth* mentioned the name of God 40 times in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and in all the occurrences, he used *Elohim*, which means "the mighty God, the glorious God of creation who exercises sovereign power", and never *YHWH*, the God of the covenant, which was not typical of Old Testament Wisdom literature. God's image is portrayed here as the creator.

Based on the understanding by Baugh and Wiersbe (1990:17), God's image is portrayed as the sovereign creator, and the choice of the name *Elohim* for God is based on the point that *Qoheleth* was dealing solely with what he observed under the heaven.

Zuck (1991:50) wrote that God's motive for humans is to fear Him in a relationship where God is infinite, and humans are finite. Humans cannot comprehend God. In Zuck's view, God made human beings upright and all human life is under God's appointment and timing. What God has planned, humans cannot change. In this view, God's image is portrayed as the creator who has sovereign power over humans. Therefore, humans should live in fear of Him.

Zuck (1991:51-56) noted the following concerning the nature of humans: that humans are finite as created beings and subject to death; and God created humans upright, but they went in search of their own schemes, which led to human sin against God. Zuck (1991:51-56) explained that human sin is universal and that the sinful nature of humans manifests itself in acts of oppression of the poor, envy, and greed. Furthermore, the human heart is fully set to do evil, for the reason that sentences against evil work are not executed speedily by God.

Zuck (1991:51-56) wrote, however, that human sin results in consequences that can even lead to an untimely death. Death is certain for all humans and has been appointed by God, and human beings cannot change it or know when it will occur.

Naked as humans came into this life, naked shall they depart. Contrariwise, God remains forever.

Zuck's conclusion (1991:54-56) in the light of the futilities and mysteries of life based on the communication of the Book of Ecclesiastes, is that, for *Qoheleth*, human life should consist of at least six actions that aid human beings in their pursuit of life in relationship with God: to be wise, to worship and please God, to remember God, fear God, be diligent, and enjoy life.

Zuck (1990:17) also portrayed the image of God as a God that can be pleased, as Ecclesiastes 2:26 assured that God rewards those who please Him. In this regard, human relationships with God are such that require humans to live with a positive desire to always please God, for if God rewards those who please Him, inversely He will punish those who do not please Him. In this view, God's image is portrayed as the provider of rewards and punishment to human beings.

McCabe (1996:111-112) was of the view that the Book of Ecclesiastes provides counsel for human beings to have submissive faith in the sovereignty of God, to be diligently involved in their responsibilities of life, and to enjoy God's blessings; that *Qoheleth* attempted to master life, but was faced with one frustration after another. God is portrayed here as the provider of blessings.

McCabe (1996:111-112) understood that one of the themes of the Book of Ecclesiastes highlights human limitations as being depraved and finite; and based on their limitations, human beings should not attempt to master life but must make the most of it and enjoy what God has provided. He added that the Book of Ecclesiastes counsels humans to be diligently involved in their responsibilities of life, to enjoy God's blessings, and to have submissive faith in the sovereignty of God in the midst of a sin-cursed world and a veiled providence (cf McCabe 1996:111-112).

According to Anderson (1997:96-122), God judges and punishes human beings on earth and in death. This understanding is based on the view that portrays God's images as sovereign, a creator, judge, and punisher. This view also portrays God as deterministic, which questions the fairness of his judgment. As a result of God's

determinism, based on Anderson's view, human beings should have a relationship with God that is based on the fear of Him as the one who created humans and at the same time determines the affairs of humans.

Anderson (1997:173-174) wrote that one of *Qoheleth's* motives was to show that humans are finite, while God is infinite and that ultimately, human life, materialism, and labour were meaningless in and of themselves. Anderson (1997:235) also arrived at the view that *Qoheleth* acted as corrective wisdom literature, which demonstrated the vanity of human life without a Saviour God. The only response for humanity to the mysteries of life is to put their faith in a holy God, who created the heaven and the earth.

Fredericks and Estes (2010:30) understood that the theme of God's sovereignty fills the Book of Ecclesiastes. They maintained that God is the provider of affliction to human beings, but also the provider of pleasures of food, drink, work, wisdom, knowledge, riches, and wealth to humans; God gives the days and years of human life; God is the creator that gives the common breath to humans and animals; God's actions are beyond human comprehension; God's judgement takes away blessings from the sinner and provides judgement both to the righteous and the wicked in his timing; and God's ways are unchangeable by humans. They also viewed human life and human activities as encompassed by the Book of Ecclesiastes' claim that all is temporary, and that human beings are mortal; making a firm distinction between humans and God (who is eternal) (Fredericks & Estes, 2010:30).

Barrick (2011:26) wrote that Ecclesiastes communicated that human life is a gift from God, that human beings, unlike God, are not sovereign for the reason that humans cannot control their own destiny. God controls human destiny. According to Barrick (2011:26), this was as a result of the uncertainty of time and change that happens to human beings. Human beings are mortal, as death has the final word in all human affairs.

According to Barrick (2011:24-26), God's divine sovereignty and providence characterise human existence on earth, based on the Book of Ecclesiastes. God is the creator and the giver of life, his world cannot be altered to human liking, and

God's plan dictates the pattern of events that happens in the world. Human beings must believe that God is the judge and will judge all wickedness.

Sneed (2012:165) explained the great distinction between humanity and God, based on the message of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Sneed (2012:165) understood that human life is fleeting and transitory but what God does, lasts forever, and is unalterable by humans. Human beings are weak and frail but God is eternal. Human foolishness and their inability to attain true wisdom are far removed from God, who is wise and omnipotent. Human beings were made upright by God, but became wicked and morally culpable. Human beings are nothing, while God is everything.

Sneed (2012:166) illuminated the positive function of the Book of Ecclesiastes by explaining that the Book of Ecclesiastes' pessimism and scepticism are geared to persuade humans to abandon their quest of becoming self-sufficient and wanting to be like God. Rather humans should rely on God's providence. Sneed (2012:167) explained that the message of the Book of Ecclesiastes is orthodox, and that what *Qoheleth*, tried to solve is the problem of theodicy by explaining the broad gap between humans and God; advising human beings to keep this in mind in their daily life (Sneed 2012:175).

5.2.3 Summary

The development of studies with regard to human relationships to God's creative and providential images in the Book of Ecclesiastes reveals many possibilities of relationships these images have with human beings.

The Book of Ecclesiastes used the name *Elohim* for God, which means the mighty God, the glorious God of creation who exercises sovereign power over humans. God has created the order that is in the world, and humans must integrate harmoniously into God's order. The lack of this integration results in an emptiness between God and humans, causing real alienation in the relationship between God and human beings.

Human beings cannot understand God's actions. The Book of Ecclesiastes, as understood over the years, is to make human beings turn from all futility and put their faith in God, looking at life from God's assumed perspective, relying on the wisdom that God provides, as human philosophies will surely fail in the end.

God is holy and made human beings upright and all human life is under God's appointment and timing. God is infinite and lives forever, while humans are finite and subject to death. Death is certain for all humans and has been appointed by God, and human beings cannot change it or know when it will occur. What the Book of Ecclesiastes recommends is for humans to rely on the wisdom that is provided by God, to worship and please God, to remember God, to fear God, to be diligent, and to enjoy the life God has given them.

God provides reward to those who please Him, but also provides punishment to those who displease Him. God is the provider of affliction to human beings, but also the provider of pleasures of food, drink, work, wisdom, knowledge, resources, and wealth; God provides the days and years of human life; God is the creator that gives the common breath to humans and animals; God's actions are beyond human comprehension; God's judgement takes away blessings from the sinner and judges both the righteous and the wicked; and God's ways are unchangeable by humans.

According to development in the historical understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes, human beings should not attempt to master life, but to make the most of it and enjoy what God has provided. The only response for humanity to the mysteries of life is to put their faith in a holy God, who created the heaven and the earth.

God's divine sovereignty and providence characterise human existence on earth, God is the creator and the provider of life, his world cannot be altered to human liking, and God's plan dictates the events that happen in the world.

5.3 Human relationships with God's creative and providential images based on the author's literary study

5.3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to present the interpretation and application of all the possible human relationship(s) to God's creative and providential images in the Book of Ecclesiastes garnered through the author's literary study of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

5.3.2 Human relationships with God's creative and providential Images

The first theme, based on the author's observation of the Book of Ecclesiastes, portrayed God's image as one who controls the activities of human beings, and who provides the endless cycle of human life, wisdom, folly, work, and pleasure. The basic things in human life, according to *Qoheleth*, like enjoyment of food and drink and satisfaction in work, are not under human control, but are all provided by God. Since these activities are not under human control, the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes advised that human beings should live in a relationship with God; acknowledging that these activities are left in God's hands as the provider.

The second theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes also attributed the provider of the various kinds of human activities to God; God made everything beautiful in its time; God placed eternity or the world in the human heart; God's work cannot be fully understood by humans; God is the provider of human fruits of labour; God's work cannot be altered by humans; and God calls every event back in its turn in a repetitive cycle.

Under this theme, human beings should live in a relationship with God, realising that God is the one who created everything, and he made them occur at their appropriate times. Therefore, human beings should not endeavour to change the things that God made to suit them, for this cannot be done. Rather, humans should understand the purpose for which God made things the way He made them, and rather live in fear of God.

The third theme of the Book of Ecclesiastes portrays God's image as a judge; as the one who will provide judgement for both the good and the wicked. God allows human beings their wicked ways to make them realise that they are not better than animals. Both humans and animals came from dust and must return to dust. This theme portrays a human relationship with God that recognises God as the provider of justice, and reminds human beings that they are not better than animals.

The sixth theme compares human life with God, by communicating that God's place of residence is in heaven, while human beings live on earth. It also shows that God takes no pleasure in fools; that God can get angry at empty human promises, and destroy the works of human hands. If God takes no pleasure in fools who rashly make empty promises to Him, human beings should then think carefully before making any promises to God, so that God does not get angry with them and destroy the works of their hands.

The seventh theme portrays the image of God as follows: God is the provider of the span of human life on earth; God gives humans wealth; and God also gives human beings health to enjoy the fruits of their labour. In this section, *Qoheleth* proclaims that God is in control of human destiny, and that human beings cannot determine what will happen in their lifespan or in the future when they are gone.

God's ways cannot be changed by human beings as they wish, therefore the wise person observes the ways of God and falls in line; God is the provider of both prosperity and adversity; God gives success to human beings who fear Him; God helps humans who fear Him to escape danger, but does not help sinners escape danger; God created human beings; and God made humans upright.

Qoheleth portrays God's image in the seventh theme as the giver of human life, and that all of God's work under the sun cannot be discovered by human beings – irrespective of how much humans try to discover it. Here he portrays the image of God as one who holds the actions of both the godly and wise people in his hands; God has the sovereignty to show humans favour in life, but human beings do not know whether God will show them favour in this life or not; God approves the

enjoyment of food and wine; God gives the days that humans enjoy in this world; and God gives a man a wife to enjoy as part of his gifts to humans.

Here *Qoheleth* portrays God's image as the judge, the creator, and the giver of human spirit to whom the human spirit will return when death comes.

God's image is portrayed here as one who should be feared and obeyed. God will bring everything into judgement, whether good or bad.

Based on the author's translation and understanding of the selected passages of Ecclesiastes: Ecclesiastes 3:11 revealed God's creative image, and at the same time revealed the human relationship with God's creative image. God is the one who made mankind. Ecclesiastes 7:29 also expressively exposes God's creative image, and portrays God as the one who created human beings, as well as the one who made human beings upright. The translation of Ecclesiastes 11:5 and 12:1 revealed that God made everything. He is the one who created human beings.

Based on the author's translation and understanding of Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, God's image is portrayed as the provider. The passage portrays God's providential image as the provider of food, drink, and joy to humans. The basic human needs are all provided by God and he provides them, as well as take them away to whom he pleases.

5.3.4 Summary

There seem to be much agreement between the historical development of understanding of the message of the Book of Ecclesiastes with regard to all the possible human relationships with God's creative and providential images, and the author's.

There is agreement in the understanding that God is in control of all human activities; God created humans; God provides the endless cycle of human life, wisdom, folly, work, and pleasure; humans cannot change what God has done; God provides

judgement for the good and the wicked; and God lives in heaven, while humans live on earth. God is holy and eternal, while humans are finite and depraved; God is the provider of the span of human life on earth; God gives human wealth; and God gives human beings health to enjoy the fruits of their labour. God is the provider of both prosperity and adversity to human beings; God created human beings; God made humans upright; God approves the enjoyment of food and wine; God gives the days that humans enjoy in this world; and God gives all the basic human needs as gift to mankind to enjoy.

The author additionally presented in this section a fresh perspective on the understanding of what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicated with regard to human relationships with God's images. According to the findings of this study, when the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes communicated that human beings should fear God, it is based on a lot of factors, and in all the cases for the benefit of humans. It is therefore necessary to present these factors, as well as the benefits, so that people can take advantage of them in their daily life.

According to the Book of Ecclesiastes, to human beings who are pleasing before God's face, God gives wisdom, knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and amassing wealth to give to the good before God. However, the destiny of both the good and the sinner are all in God's hands, so that *Qoheleth* does not necessarily mean the good or bad in terms of expression of a moral connotation, rather to the one who God like and the one he dislikes. In other words, the control of these things, just like enjoyment of food, and drink are outside human control.

The task of enjoying pleasures does not mean that God approves any action, but within the larger context of Ecclesiastes it is clear that *Qoheleth* places pleasure within the "Will-of-God", whatever this might be. When *Qoheleth* advised that humans should fear God, this fear is an awareness of one's dependence on God's provision and dependence on his mercy. God wants humans to enjoy his basic provisions, because he is the only provider. Ecclesiastes list the basic things that humans take for granted, as a gift of God. It is as basic as eating and drinking, as basic as having clothes and to love. As in all his *carpe diem* passages he stressed

also the gift to work. Every opportunity life offers must be grasped. All basic human needs are provided by God and should be celebrated and enjoyed as gifts from his hand. Human beings must live out of God's hand, constantly aware of the fact that He is the provider, but remains aloof and finally incomprehensible. Therefore, the book is pessimistic.

CHAPTER 6

Concluding remarks

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present concluding remarks regarding the findings of the research, the relevance of the findings, and critical issues that may require further study.

The major question this study sought to answer was: what does the Book of Ecclesiastes communicate concerning the images of God?

In addressing this problem, and given that different views exist and considering the controversy as the author approached the Book of Ecclesiastes, the following questions were asked:

- How does the Book of Ecclesiastes merit its place in the canon of the Bible?
- What literary genre is the Book of Ecclesiastes?
- What does the Book of Ecclesiastes communicate regarding images of God and all the possible human relationship(s) with God's images?

Through the application of the historical/literary exegetical approach to the Book of Ecclesiastes, it was possible to determine some of the images of God that are portrayed in the book, as well as what they mean in terms of the relationship(s) between God and human beings.

The aim of this study was to understand what the Book of Ecclesiastes communicated concerning the images of God. In an attempt to determine the basic characteristics of the images of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes, the author attempted to find answers to human relationship(s) with God's images. An attempt was also made to achieve the overarching aim of this study through the presentation of different kinds of possible relationships between God and human beings; based on the understanding of the images of God in the book of Ecclesiastes.

The aims here are threefold: 1) to re-emphasise the findings of the research, 2) to recognise the relevance of those findings, and 3) to acknowledge critical issues that presented difficulties during the research that may require further research.

6.2 Findings of the research and relevance of the research

It was understood through this research effort that God created human beings, and is the sole provider of all human activities, as well as all the basic human needs.

It was also understood that the Jewish as well as Protestant Bible consider the Book of Ecclesiastes as canonical and as part of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

Also as understood through this research effort, the Book of Ecclesiastes belongs to the theological wisdom stream and is the radical type of wisdom which developed, when the tragic disorder of national life in Israel required the sages to question their traditional beliefs. The Book of Ecclesiastes is understood to question the advantage of wisdom in life, in avoiding death or in experiencing joy. The Book of Ecclesiastes is characterised by endless repetition in a world where the fate of all human beings are predetermined by God.

The purpose of the Book of Ecclesiastes, based on the different views, is primarily to prepare the audience and to apply knowledge and insight in understanding the human relationship with God's images communicated in the book. This is to look beyond the limited human standpoint, from which everything seems pessimistic, and to realise that real meaning can be found when humans look to God for meaning.

Early recipients, received the Book of Ecclesiastes positively but not without disagreements. The development of the reception of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the canon of the Old Testament revealed arguments concerning editorial glosses, whether the book was written by one author, and whether the prologue (1:1-11) and the epilogue (12:8-14) were frames that were added by a later redactor. Over the

many years of its existence, the Book of Ecclesiastes received wide-ranging acceptance and it remains part of the Jewish and the Christian canons.

The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes was considered a sage. Many scholars view the sages as a professional group comparable to the priests and the prophets. Unlike the prophets who received direct revelation from God, and the priests who followed the rituals given to Moses at Mount Sinai, the sages had two different sources of information: careful observation of the natural world and human behaviour; as well as wisdom traditions passed down from one sage to another.

There are dissimilar views among scholars concerning the question of the authorship and dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes. A few scholars still hold that Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes and as such date the book pre-exilic during Solomon's time. Many scholars disagree that Solomon cannot be the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes based on strong linguistic evidence, that the book was written in post-exilic Hebrew long after Solomon has died. The arguments for post-exilic dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes however, seems to outweigh the support for pre-exilic dating. The proponents of post-exilic dating reports that the Hebrew of the Book of Ecclesiastes is more modern than the Hebrew of Solomon's time and also that there are traces or influences on the Hebrew of the Book of Ecclesiastes by both Aramaic and Persian languages. There are also dissimilar views with regard to the post-exilic dating of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Some scholars favour a date between the 2nd and 3rd century BC, some specifically favour a date in the Persian period, and others in the Hellenistic period. Nevertheless, the Book of Ecclesiastes was in some form or other dependent or influenced by the wisdom of the Ancient Near East.

6.3 Critical issues that may require further research

Accepted that Solomon cannot be the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes based on linguistic evidence and cultural influence, the question that remains to be answered therefore, is an attempt to discover who the author really was. However, the message written is more important than who wrote it.

Also this study was delimited to only two images of God; however the Book of Ecclesiastes does seem to reveal traces of many other images of God, and all the possible human relationships to those images. Therefore, it will require further research by the author or other researchers to discover what these images are, and what possible relationships they have with human beings.

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