

**Ecclesiastes 12: A Call for youth to remember their Creator**

**by**

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**In the**

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**2022-11-04**

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Actuality

The human mind has got the ability to remember things that happened ages ago which would have been buried deep within itself. The things that one is taught at a young age can stay with them until old age. As Proverbs 22:6 says, “train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” Most of the rules and laws, values or principles that humankind is taught at a young age they grow up to follow the same. In some instances as people grow and learn new things they might put aside what they learnt at a young age, even though they cannot completely forget it, at times in the end when there is need they tend to go back to the same rules or values they grew up learning. As in the book of Ecclesiastes, the author came to a time of setting aside the rules and values learnt in childhood, however in the end, the author warns that there is a creator who made everything and whom humankind ought to remember.

When one reads a phrase, sentence, paragraph, page, chapter or book there is an interpretation they attach to it in order to understand its meaning for themselves or their audience. There is a possibility this might affect or not affect the reader at all. However interpretation is affected by a number of factors among which are cultural background and worldview (Ogden 2007:11). In some instances there are difficulties in understanding or interpreting correctly what the author ought to say. This may be due to lack of understanding the background or circumstances under which the text was written. In this case the book of Ecclesiastes has been interpreted differently by many readers who all have quite a perplexing number of things to say about it. Some scholars do not see the book’s importance in the Hebrew Bible or where it fits among other biblical books. Other arguments are regarding its main theme or its thesis. Whatever arguments risen because of the book, the main concept in this study is to take into consideration what *Qohelet* speaks about and try to implement it into a context of today.

The author of Ecclesiastes speaks of his experiences on this earth. With regard to experiences, Von Rad (1993:3) says that no one would be able to live even for a single day without incurring appreciable harm if he could not be guided by wide practical experience. Life experience teaches us all to be aware of what is happening around us. However for humankind, experience comes through learning from others or from the mistakes they make as they go about everyday living. This in turn helps us know when to apply our resources, and to distinguish normal from abnormal (Von Rad 1993:3). The author of Ecclesiastes is heeding us on what the path of life might bring our way. The experience the author has when writing the book was from the mistakes made throughout life. In what he says, one ought to figure out what to make of the wisdom he shares.

In the excerpt used for this research, titled it is a call for youth to remember their creator. This is a call that does not just erupt from nowhere in the biblical scriptures. Throughout the Bible one reads that God revealed himself to humankind in different ways. Among these are through the Bible and through created things. What has to be noted is that even though people all have different religions, they all call out to God though some do so through mediums. This call to remember is for one to go back to the beginning and realise who the true God and creator is, and what he intended for humankind from the beginning. The wisdom that the author shares in the book and in the excerpt is of dire importance in the lives of young people today.

Wisdom is when one realises that they need help from outside and not from within themselves (Doukhan 2007:36). Wisdom can be represented by that ability to perform tasks, being a fair judge or how one lives your life. The Old Testament categorises wisdom as of God and of the world. In different contexts the kind of wisdom one has is seen and interpreted differently. In the world godly wisdom can be seen as foolishness and vice versa. There are people who are seen or perceived to be wiser than others like Solomon (1 Kgs 4:29-34), people came from different places to listen to his wisdom and wise rulings (1Kgs 10:1-13; 10:24). Question is: can the wisdom found in the book of Ecclesiastes be used to encourage the young people to remember their creator? This study is the quest to answer this question to some extent.

To remember in the English dictionary is defined as to recall from one's memory, to have an image in one's memory, or to memorize; to put something into memory. In the



biblical sense to remember means “to name, remember, mention, take to court, profess, make known, praise” (Brown et al 1979:271). This is meant to invoke a change of behaviour in the life of one who remembers. This is seen as being wise in the sense that the one that chooses to remember lets go of folly. The truth about biblical wisdom is that it governs people’s everyday way of life. This will make everyday living more meaningful as one will live according to what God intended man to live by. As Paul says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right” (2 Tim 3:16; ESV). Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990:28) say, past thinkers are in agreement that the concept of wisdom has three major dimensions of meaning. “It can be seen as a cognitive process, or peculiar way of obtaining and processing information; as a virtue, or socially valued pattern of behaviour; and as a good, or personally desirable state or condition.”

By definition wisdom has been defined in many ways, first as “the ability to direct one’s mind toward a full understanding of human life and toward its moral fulfilment. Wisdom is thus a special capacity, necessary for full human living. It can be acquired through education and the application of the mind” (Comfort & Elwell 2001:1304). Second as “a quality of mind distinguishing the wise man, by virtue of which he is skilled and able to live well; and both succeed and counsel success, also a quality in itself apart from man, above and beyond man, existing ideally with God and imparting form of creation” (Blank 1962:852). Wisdom is “a wide range of desires, behaviours, skills, and beliefs” (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:24).

“To understand wisdom fully and correctly probably requires more wisdom than any of us have” (Sternberg 1990:3). Of wisdom the Hebrew Bible says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7 ESV). It can be acquired, “an intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (Prov 18:15); it is a gift of God, “for the Lord gives wisdom, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Prov 2:6). When Solomon asked for wisdom, God said to him, “behold I give you a wise and discerning mind” (1Kgs 3:12) And “for to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to the one who pleases God” (Eccl 2:26). The wisdom literature (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes) have a lot to say regarding wisdom. However, this study will focus on a

few exempts from Ecclesiastes. James speaks of true wisdom that comes from God and earthly, unspiritual and demonic wisdom (foolishness). He continues to say, “if you are wise and understand God’s ways, prove it by living an honourable life, doing good works with humility that comes from wisdom” (Jam 3:13; NLT). From the wisdom of Ecclesiastes there are any timeless principles that can be drawn and be adopted by the contemporary readers of the Hebrew Bible.

The narrator of the book of Ecclesiastes tells *a story of his quest to find satisfaction in life* and many times he looks at the fleetingness of man’s ability to grasp the full meaning of life events. The life that man lives as he chases all that it has to offer like pleasure, wealth, labour, justice and wisdom has no pay off in the end. The meaning these life accomplishments give is only relative, therefore man can only accept his portion which is what God allows one to accomplish in this life (Enns 2008:129). He uses metaphors, images and similes so as to bring it much closer to the reader. The narrator concludes that certain paths that people choose to take in life lead to emptiness. He asks quite a number of questions about the life we are living and among them “what does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (Eccl 1:3). His recurring theme is “vanity of vanities, says the preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Eccl 1:2). Vanity of vanities is “used with its figurative connotation of that which is weak, ephemeral, transitory” (Douglas & Tenney 2011:1506). Though he concludes that all is vanity, “*Qohelet* based his patterns of life firmly upon reverence for God and observance of the divine precepts. His basic proposition of wisdom, therefore is that life in its manifold aspects is entirely devoid of meaning without God” (Harrison 1969:1083). Therefore as one is on the quest to find satisfaction, one ought to keep in mind that there is no satisfaction apart from God. It is with this concept in mind that the author calls for young people to remember God as their creator in the days of their youth. The call to remember the creator is not just for their own benefit, it will also benefit the future generations who are going to learn from them.

The book of Ecclesiastes is like a manual for everyday living even though it has presented a plethora of difficulties on interpretation in its individual passages, unity of thought, textual criticism, language and syntax (McCabe 1996:85). It has negative utterances on life, and more positive ones commending enjoyment of life. “*Qohelet* examines experience and discovers nothing will survive death’s arbitrary blow. He then proceeds to report this discovery of life’s absurdity, and to advise young men on

the best option in the light of stark reality” (Crenshaw 1987:28). From the language he uses, to the expressions, people can see that the author has had to look at life from different angles before penning down his experiences.

The focus of this study is on exegetically engaging the experiences of the writer during his/her time. At the backdrop of the author we are going to consider the aspects of life of the youth today. The lives of young people today are influenced more by what other people around them think than what they determine for themselves. This makes some to quickly want to change their way of life. Young people are left with the mindset of living for here and now, and the future will be seen when it comes. Some have also lost the true meaning of life. Hard work is not as recognized as much and in all this, some people ask what is the true purpose of life?

The book of Ecclesiastes “speaks directly to a contemporary society seeking desperately for meaning in life while involved in the often-reckless pursuit of material and personal success” (Schultz 2012:579). Bruce (1952:145) asks, “If God has not spoken, what is life? ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity’ (Eccl 1:2b). God ought to speak upon our lives to show His people the right path and direction, when He does not speak people often follow their own path which leads to vanity. The youth of today are heavily influenced by freedom of religion. The world today presents a number of religions and some of them teach different values from the ones the Bible teaches. There are a number of cults emerging from everywhere and some of them encourage self-centeredness. In this post-modern era there is also a rise in the number of satanic worship which has values that are completely opposite to the Christian values. With everything that is going on around the world, Ecclesiastes calls for young people to remember their creator as they still have a whole life before them to change the worldview affecting a number of them.

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes is different from the wisdom of Proverbs, what Ecclesiastes refers to as wisdom, Proverbs refers to it as folly. The wisdom of *Qohelet* shows that it was dependant on reason, observation and experience alone. *Qohelet*'s wisdom does not begin with the fear of the Lord as seen in Proverbs. It is however a contrast, *Qohelet* continually speaks in the first person indicating self-dependence rather than depending or looking to God for life's perplexing meaning. It is more likely

that “*Qohelet* equated wisdom with head knowledge and his ability to discern meaning in life” (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:199,207).

Traditionally the book has been ascribed to Solomonic authorship due to the statement, “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Eccl 1:1). Several allusions in the book are appropriate to Solomonic authorship, such as the author’s wisdom (Eccl 1:16), his interest in proverbs (Eccl 12:9 cf; 1Ki 4:32), and his building projects (Eccl 2:4-11) (Douglas & Tenney 2011:384). Estes (2005:272) writes “there is internal evidence consistent with Solomon as author although it falls short of indubitable proof.” Chapters one and two shows intentions of Solomonic authorship (Eccl 1:1), the wisdom the author possesses (Eccl 1:16), pleasure (Eccl 2:3), extensive building activities (2:4-6), and a lot of wealth (Eaton 1983:23). Throughout “the rest of the book, the recurrent themes of wisdom and the fear of God, and the frequent use of maxims (Eccl 10:8-18) invite comparisons to Proverbs” (Estes 2005:272). However Horne (2003:74) writes,

“Scholars conclude that linguistically, socio-culturally, and theologically the book reflects a much later time period than the age of the Solomonic empire. The linguistic characteristics of the book point to a time when Aramaic was a dominant language. This would be a time after the Persian empire came to dominate the Palestinian world, sometime after the sixth century BC, establishing the earliest possible date for the book’s origin.”

The book of Ecclesiastes “resonates deeply with many people today, and it shows that life is complex and perplexing, and finding a wise way to understand and live this perplexity is no easy task” (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:188). Biblical wisdom is grounded in tradition, it ought to be passed on from one generation to another. Bartholomew & O’Dowd (2011:28) writes, “those who dare to venture out on their own, apart from the counsel of the family, community and church, stray away from the wisdom into folly and thus away from God’s orderly design for humanity and into the interests of selfish desire.” The book of Ecclesiastes describes a teacher with a desire to show his students that making relative judgements is a significant part of life. “In other words, the meaning of life is not found in the macro-assumptions one holds, but in the way one manages life’s micro-significances. The little things count the most to make life full and meaningful” (Horne 2003:377).

## **1.2 Problem statement**

Everyday life has its own demands and expectations. From the moment people wake up to the time they go to sleep, they are faced with a number of decisions they have to make difficult or easy. One's decisions are based on the level of education, life experience; hence life wisdom. To begin with, everyone is passionate about being successful in whatever endeavours they are partaking in. This includes the young and the old. A newspaper article by Seeth and Mapumulo (2016:1) states that young people are distracted by their difficult circumstances, with the statistics showing that millions of South African youth are living below the breadline. 70% of the 20 million youth are more likely to be victims of assault, robbery and property theft than adults. With unemployment on the rise and quite a huge percentage of youth-headed households though there is a decrease of less than 1% since 2009. Lee (2005:131) says, "an individual's commitment has a dramatic and far-reaching impact in the social arena, it is what preserves the good order of creation that is constantly under threat."

In addition, the life of young people today is more influenced by celebrities, influencers, social media and what other people think of them. The bigger problem is that social media is full of negative life issues and this has got a negative impact on how they view themselves and how the youth view life in general. This leaves the youth with the impression they need to do all possible to get status among their peers and in society. At the rate which everything in life is escalating every day, it seems that a positive impact is lagging way behind the negative. Maiko (2007:49) follows Coble saying "if the Church could capture the attention of youth and direct their surging energies toward good ends within their churches and toward fulfilment of protestant goals, they would not only hold the young person in the church but also cultivate a generation of dedicated Christian workers". According to Lee (2005:125) *Qohelet's* intentions in the book of Ecclesiastes is to encourage people to leave behind what brings harm to their lives and to choose that which helps them with living a happy and meaningful life.

Furthermore, many of the teenagers in South Africa today come from broken families, where there is a lack of positive energy and are made to feel worthless. Many of them grow up without a sense of direction or belonging and will be easily pressured into doing what their peers are doing. Some of them grow up without good morals or principles being instilled in them. In their quest to find out who they are, what is their purpose in life, and their dreams, they are trying to change the life they have always known but they get caught up with the wrong company. "South Africa has the one of

the highest rates of fatherlessness in the world. According to the 2017 Statistics SA General Household Survey, a shocking 61.8% of children under the age of 18 live without their father” (Shiloh 2019:1).

The other key challenges the youth experience are stability within their homes: fatherless generation, self-identity, self-confidence, good role models, accountability, purity, true understanding of God’s love and a sense of belonging. Young people are lost because they don’t know where they are coming from or where they are going. Another issue affecting young people is defiance. According to the research done by the daily vox (2020:1), young people tend to ignore the wisdom they are given by their elders, instead they prefer to do things their own way.

Adolescence “is a crossroads marked by overwhelming change, numerous questions and a search for answers and they are not sure which direction to take” (Mueller 2006:81). The world presents the youth with confusing messages and options and usually they follow the most attractive which is why sometimes they end up with the wrong group of people circles. When they see most of their peers moving in a certain direction they then assume, “that must be the way” (Mueller 2006:81). The youth do not usually make the best decisions for a meaningful and happy life.

Having considered the afore mentioned issues, the problem statement is: **How may an understanding of the aspects of wisdom of Ecclesiastes 12:1-2; 13-14 be implemented in everyday life for people on the quest to remember their creator and find the meaning of life?**

### **1.3 Aims and objectives**

#### **1.3.1 Aim**

The aim of this study is; to exegete Ecclesiastes 12 so as to understand the wisdom of the author and see how the wisdom can be used in everyday life.

#### **1.3.2 Objectives**

The objectives of the study are as follows

- Literature review on
  - Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiastes 12

- Consider the actuality in-depth;
  - Definition of wisdom;
  - Scholarly discussion concerning Ecclesiastes and its wisdom;
  - To examine the nature of modern day life of young people and their perception of life;
- To do a diachronic analysis of Ecclesiastes;
  - To identify characteristics of the historical background;
  - To carefully consider the influence of the wisdom found in the book;
  - To consider the debate on the authorship and date of authorship
- To do a synchronic analysis of Ecclesiastes 12;
  - Analysis of chapter 12:1-2;
  - Analysis of chapter 12:13-14;
- To determine the theological implications of the wisdom found in Ecclesiastes;
  - To understand the principles adhered to by the author;
  - To observe the implications of such principles both then and now;
  - To examine the wisdom portrayed by the Preacher for then and now;
  - To examine the principles found in the book
- Synthesis
  - To consider the principles understood;
  - To identify ways of implementing them;
  - To consider the shortcomings and recommendations going forward;
  - Critically evaluate the hypothesis;

#### **1.4 Research methodology**

The research methodology proposed for this study is a detailed exegetical and literature study of Ecclesiastes 12 and referral of other texts from Ecclesiastes to extrapolate the fundamental principles to be formulated from the book. Gorman (2009:15-17) extensively describes this process and also gives three basic approaches which are synchronic, diachronic and existential. In this study there will be an overlap of the synchronic and diachronic as the historical and socio-political contexts in which the texts come to life and in the kind of literature the texts are.

Exegesis is defined as “the skilful application of sound hermeneutical principles to the biblical text in the original language with a view to understanding and declaring the author's intended meaning both to the immediate and subsequent audiences” (Grassmick 1974:7). It can also be defined as the careful analysis of a text, a close reading, an investigation, asking questions about religious or theological dimensions of the text and not being afraid to ask difficult questions and discovering something new from the text (Gorman 2009:10-11). From the Greek word *exegeomai* meaning “to lead out”, when applied to a text the term exegesis denotes “to read out” (Hayes 1971:5). Exegesis is an on-going process as new things can be revealed from the text every single time one reads it.

Diachronic exegesis includes considering the historical background of the author, the context during which the text was written and the transmission of the text. Textual analysis and evaluating different translations and the text genre determine a meaning closest to the text. Proper exegesis will help the reader to understand what the text actually means and this will ensure that a valid interpretation is done. The process of exegesis is there to help in understanding the foundations which are hidden underneath the crypt of the text, therefore finding the origins of our text is of dire importance, otherwise one will only comprehend the surface structure (Groenewald 2007:1018).

During the process of exegesis one might easily be drawn into doing *eisegesis*, therefore precaution has to be taken not to read the biblical text with critical judgment and letting the scripture speak for itself (Hayes 1971:17). Carson (1984:12) mentions a few exegetical fallacies<sup>1</sup> which one has to be careful of and to avoid during the process of exegesis though at times it is inevitable.

First in the exegesis process is the initial consideration of the text. In this step reading the text several times to interpret it better and recording observations are important (Gorman 2009:64). Comparing different translations and which word order they use in the original language are reflected. A personal translation will also be offered to be better acquainted with the text and context as well as word order and text structure.



Literary, cultic and rhetorical context is considered as well as the wisdom of the time in which Qohelet was exposed to and understood in its context before applying it to the contemporary context. A detailed textual analysis of key statements and a structural analysis will be done to analyse the patterns and to consider the meaning of the text as it is used in sentence construction.

Hermeneutical reflection is also done to rightly and accurately discern the meaning and significance of the text as we apply it to our contemporary context and considering its relevance. The approach of the study is mainly qualitative. Qualitative research is about asking what, how, when and where. It helps provide insight and the development of ideas to understand opinions or motivations of different concepts. Quantitative research is about statistical collection of data.

## **1.5 Hypothesis**

Ecclesiastes 12 is a contrast of a young and an old life. It compares the life that one live when they are young to the one they will live when they are old. In however concludes with the life that one has to live in fear of God. These two comparisons, however are great lessons that, if learnt and instilled today, the now and future of young people will be changed for the better.

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1. exegetical fallacies – word study, grammatical, logical, pre-suppositional and historical

## **1.6 Chapter division**

### **Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is the research outline of this study. The rationale will be considered at much more depth with a broad definition of the title with scholarly discussion and own approach. The current problems with the young people in general and in South Africa will be considered before practical guidelines can be extrapolated from the book of Ecclesiastes. The chapter addresses the following elements: actuality, problem statement, the aim and objectives, methodology, chapter division, terminology and orthography. The hypothesis formulates the contribution of this research.

## **Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This is a consideration, summary and review of literature to be used in this study. These include but not limited to *Elements of biblical exegesis: A basic guide for students* by Michael Gorman. Other books and articles which contribute to the study are to be considered. These are arguments and ideas by the authors of the books or articles without adding new contributions. Here a consideration of the research on Ecclesiastes 12 and wisdom is done to see where this study fits in.

## **Chapter 3 DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS**

Having outlined the problems and painted a clearer picture of where this study ought to go, this chapter starts the diachronic study of the book of Ecclesiastes. Attention is given to the historical and cultic background and author audience of the book. The meaning and context of wisdom is considered as well as the contextual analysis (*Sitzim Leben*).

## **Chapter 4 SYNCHRONIC ANALYSIS**

After being acquainted with the background of the author and context of the book of Ecclesiastes, an exegetical study of the book begins. The literary and rhetorical analysis is done to understand the way language was used in their context. A detailed structural analysis is offered. This will complement all the necessary background to understand and do a correct hermeneutics. This chapter focuses on the exegesis of selected texts of Ecclesiastes 12:1-2; 13-14.

## **Chapter 5 THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This chapter is dedicated to the work of theological application. In summation of what the preacher (*Qoheleṯ*) says the theological implication on his/her audience and timeless principles on the contemporary audience are considered, since the exegetical study is to identify practical theological guidelines for the youth's life's problems and apply the knowledge and wisdom of the preacher (*Qoheleṯ*) to young people today. The insufficiency of human endeavours and the emptiness of life under the sun without God are addressed as we consider the sovereignty of God and life's values.

## **Chapter 6 CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter is a summation of findings as well as the effectiveness of the practical guidelines identified in the previous chapter. The research problem, aim and objectives, methodology and hypothesis will be succinctly described. Limitations of this project are considered as well as the recommendations for future study.

## **1.7 Terminology and Orthography**

### 1.7.1 Terminology

Outlined below are a few examples of terminology, more are added as the study continues;

Exegesis – skilful exposition of the biblical text;

Preacher – *Qohelet* (son of David, king in Jerusalem);

Qualitative research is about asking what, how, when and where.

Quantitative research is about statistical collection of data.

*Qohelet* – preacher (son of David, king in Jerusalem);

Vanity – nothingness, futility;

Vanity of vanities – most futile thing;

Genre – a particular subject or style of literature

Persona – the aspect of someone's character

Sitz in Leben – setting / place of life

Pre-exilic – before the exile

Post-exilic – after the exile

Mishnah – authoritative collection of exegetical material

Midraishim – ancient commentary on the part of Hebrew scriptures

Talmud – Jewish civil and ceremonial law

Peshita – Syriac version of the Bible

Rab Kahana – collection of midrashic literature

Targum – an ancient Aramaic phrase of the Hebrew Bible

Meggilot – scrolls

Contemptus mundi – contempt of the world

Carpe diem – seize the day

### 1.7.2 Orthography

An English Standard Version of the Bible will be used unless otherwise indicated

*Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)* will be used for the Hebrew text, unless otherwise indicated

#### Abbreviations

BHS	Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia
ESV	English Standard Version
NLT	New Living Translation
ECCL	Ecclesiastes
PROV	Proverbs
KGS	Kings
TIM	Timothy
JAM	James
O.T	Old Testament
EZR	Ezra
NEH	Nehemiah
LXX	Septuagint
B.C	Before Christ
C.f	Confer
1KI	1 Kings
4Q	Qumran Cave 4
A.D	Anno Domini or after death
B.C.E	before the common era / current error
Vulgate	Latin version of the Bible

NT	New Testament
NLT	New Living Translation

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Ecclesiastes is “one of literature’s earliest encounters between faith and reason: the author struggles to believe that life is meaningful despite his experience of the world” (Dor-Shav 2008:211). Throughout the book the author recounts the events of his life and one of the main topics in the book is “everything is meaningless” (Eccl 1:2).

Through the experiences of *Qohelet*, I am going to look at what other authors see in the book of Ecclesiastes on a journey to establish that the book can be used to help young people today to live better and wiser under any given circumstances. Given the above, the aim of this chapter is to do a literature review on Ecclesiastes beginning with the whole book, mainly focusing on chapter 12.

### 2.1.1 Ecclesiastes the book

Ecclesiastes has many topics including death, politics, wisdom and folly among others. Within the many topics found within the book, “Ecclesiastes is concerned with imparting wisdom and knowledge to the people of God and teaching them to fear God<sup>1</sup>” (ESV). The book has been interpreted differently from before its addition into the biblical canon. By the fourth century it was read allegorically, and it remained allegorical until the Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> century BCE). After allegory was source-critical interpretation later abandoned as the twentieth century progressed. The book was then interpreted as a unity, except the epilogue which is deemed to be a later addition. In recent decades Ecclesiastes has been read with the epilogue being the key to interpreting the book correctly (Bartholomew 2005:324-325). Despite all the debate regarding the book, it is part of the Biblical canon and ‘All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness’ 2Tim 3:16. The book has got two main voices that speak, the narrator who introduces and closes the book and *Qohelet* who speaks for the most part.

### 2.1.2. Purpose of the book

Like all the other biblical books, Ecclesiastes serves a purpose in the wisdom literature. Though it is a book about the author’s experiences, it is those experiences that can be used today to avoid the mistakes encountered by the author. Enns (2008:121) says, “discovering the meaning and purpose of Ecclesiastes is likely going to be a back and forth journey between overarching concepts and smaller exegetical details, balancing the forest and the trees”. The book of Ecclesiastes paints a picture of a sovereign God who controls everything in the world. Second, *Qohelet*’s teachings highlight the meaninglessness of life apart from fearing and obeying the sovereign God. And lastly, “the book provides wisdom and counsel for future generations rooted

in the things *Qohelet* learned throughout life's pursuit of meaning" (Longman 2010:174). The purpose of Ecclesiastes was "to convince men of the uselessness of any world view which does not rise above the horizon of man himself" (Archer 1994:525). *Qohelet* was a seeker of truth, who sought to find out the truth about man's fate in the world he was placed in by God. Though *Qohelet* was clearly familiar with wisdom, he aimed to test the truth of wisdom sayings against his own personal experience in Jerusalem third century BC. Even though *Qohelet* was not a teacher he played the role of presenting certain fundamental problems compelling his readers to "apply their critical faculties to them, assisting them with his own comments but not wishing to impose his own opinions dogmatically" (Whybray 1989:23).

*Qohelet* looks at life from two viewpoints. The first is of a natural man who looks at life with the eyes of an unconverted man. *Qohelet* tackles all life's problems leaving God out of the picture and this leads him to the conclusion that 'All is vanity.' The second viewpoint is a man who looks at life through the eyes of a man who knows God. He sees meaning in life, but only through worshipping and serving God. Part of Ecclesiastes' purpose is to stir us to ask the question how can we know God? (Whybray 1989:23).

*Qohelet's* closing discourse has got two motifs which are; "the power of wisdom and its vulnerability, both are aspects of human wisdom which co-exist in tension" (Ogden 1987:183). *Qohelet* wrote this knowing of the potential that his audience had of hoarding wealth and using it for oppression and injustice. *Qohelet* sought to give his readers an approach to life "that would avoid the consequences of greed on the one hand and the dissipation of folly on the other," putting them in a place where they had the best of wealth and wisdom (Bullock 1988:214). Part of the purpose of Ecclesiastes is "to demonstrate that a comprehensible biblical worldview must account for all of life, even those portions that most resist typical categories" (Estes 2005:281).

### 2.1.3. Frame narration

There is said to be noticeable inconsistencies in the book of Ecclesiastes. There have been discussions going back to Rabbinic times regarding the message of the book and the meaning of some of the verses. The book is amenable to conflicting interpretations. There are questions like, "is the author incoherent, insightful, or confused? Is he a stark realist or merely faithless? Is he orthodox or heterodox? Is he

an optimist or a pessimist?” Is the final message of the book ‘be like *Qohelet*, the wise man or *Qohelet* is wrong, so do not fall into this trap’ (Enns 2008:121). Above all else humankind’s purpose of the book will be determined by how they handle the book with all of its perplexing details. When reading Ecclesiastes it is advised not to reach conclusions with one verse as the author usually says something that brings those conclusions to ashes (Enns 2008:121).

“Qohelet’s autobiography is framed by a narrator’s voice” and the narrator refers to Qohelet in the third person (Fox 2004:xiii). “Understanding the macrostructure of Ecclesiastes is vital for discerning the message of the book as a whole” (Enns 2008:124). Ecclesiastes begins with the voice of the narrator (1:1-11), then from Ecclesiastes 1:12-12:7 it is *Qohelet* speaking and in the conclusion the narrator returns (Eccl 12:8-14). The frame narrator evaluates *Qohelet*’s words in Ecclesiastes 1:2 and repeats verbatim in Ecclesiastes 12:8, ‘vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.’ The frame narrator introduces what everyone is about to hear. The presence of third-person frame and first-person middle raises alarm on whether there are one or two authors or whether is it one person responsible for the first-person discourse and another person for adding the frame. This can be traced back to early critical studies where such thoughts were dominant. The other issue is whether *Qohelet* is a fictional character or the frame narrator’s own alter ego. The frame narrator tells the story about the Qohelet who is the chief character in the book. The frame narrator teaches through the reported speech of Qohelet (Kamano 2002:5).

#### 2.1.4. Theological themes

Ecclesiastes has got a number of theological themes which are intertwined and sometimes difficult to isolate. Though when you are reading it seems like new ideas come out of nowhere, there is a number of theological themes that present themselves. The most recognizable is, ‘meaninglessness’ or ‘vanity’ and these two are attempts to translate *hebel*. Its literal sense is ‘vapour’, meaning, vain, worthless. In Ecclesiastes these meanings do not really fit as *Qohelet* is not saying life is meaningless, he means that there is no pay off for what one does. A more fitting translation of *hebel* is absurd, referring to wealth, pleasure, labour, justice, wisdom, or in *Qohelet*’s own words ‘everything’ (Enns 2008:128). Hess (2016:477) notes that



hebel means, “there is no real meaning behind creation, and one’s effort and work contribute nothing because everything continues as it was, there is nothing new and those who have gone before are forgotten as, someday will be everyone alive today and in the future.”

The recurring words; what profit is there and none at all as used by *Qohelet* means no matter how hard one works there is no surplus because all die 3:18-21. We are all destined to die and death puts us all on the same level. Thus, “everything is absurd, because there is no payoff for anything we do” (Enns 2008:129). As *Qohelet* puts it, “for what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beast is the same; as one dies; so dies the other... All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return” (Eccl 3:19). Death cancels everything and whatever we possessed before we die, we leave it behind for others to enjoy. What we have in life is our day to day activities occupying our time (Enns 2008:128-129).

#### 2.1.5 History of Interpretation

Ecclesiastes is seen as an enigmatic book, but it is a very compelling book. Pre-Reformation and Christian readings had little consensus regarding the interpretation in the twenty first century. There were issues regarding reading the book and among them were tensions or contradictions within the book. One such contradiction was that *Qohelet* says life is meaningless but in his crucial instances he said enjoy life (Eccl 2:24-36; 3:12-14,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10). The second contradiction was that *Qohelet* saw laughter as negative in Ecclesiastes 2:2; 7:3, but then sees it as positive in Ecclesiastes 8:15. There were a number of questions regarding the tensions in the book which were. “Are these tensions to be reconciled, and if so how? Should the tensions be allowed to stand? Are they indications of multiple authors, or at least more than 1 voice? Perhaps they are quotations on the other hand and maybe one theme is subservient than the other? (Longman 2008:141). These are all points that have been argued over the years. The other debate was concerning how teaching Ecclesiastes conflicts with the rest of the canon as read in 11:9 in comparative to Numbers 15:39. These are what led to the debate on interpretation of the book. However, “the biggest difficulty is to provide the book with a coherent reading that accounts for all the varied emphasis and apparent tensions” (Longman 2008:142).

However many interpreters concluded that the book can be read properly with one theme being more subservient than the others.

#### 2.1.5.1 From the beginning to New Testament

From the beginning to the New Testament most scholars were of the consensus that Ecclesiastes is post-exilic though they debated between Hellenistic and Persian period with a few still arguing for a pre-exilic date. There is no mention of the book in other Old Testament books and if there was it would have helped with interpretation of the book. Its composition is likely before Sirach 180 BC and the Wisdom of Solomon in the first century AD (Longman 2008:141).

“The earliest manuscript of the book of Ecclesiastes is from the Qumran (4QQoh<sup>a</sup>) published by J Muilenburg in 1954 and dated 175-150 BC while the only other witness to the book at Qumran (4QQoh<sup>b</sup>) is dated sometime between the middle of the first century B to sometime in the first century AD (Ulrich). 4QQoh<sup>a</sup> thus provides a latest point for the composition of the book, but these texts do not inform us about the book’s interpretation” (Longman 2008:141).

The New Testament cites Ecclesiastes 7:20 in Romans 3:10 and Romans 8:20 where Paul talks about the Greek equivalent of *hebel* and in Romans 8:18-25 Paul interprets under the sun as describing a world of sin and his interpretation gives the earliest hint on interpretation of Ecclesiastes ever recorded.

#### 2.1.5.2 Early and Medieval interpretation

In the early and medieval interpretation was the Jewish interpretation and the Christian interpretation. This was recorded in the Mishnah, various midrashim and the Talmuds. These have varied interpretive strategies and they also reveal whether the book “makes the hands unclean” or should be “stored away.” Books which made hands unclean were, “authoritative and holy, whose use was surrounded by rituals of washing hands and care, whereas to store away a book was to get rid of it, consign it to oblivion” (Longman 2008:142). There was a debate in Early Jewish sources.

“In the third chapter of the Mishnah (Sabbat), Rabbi Tanhum of Nave is quoted as saying, ‘O Solomon, where is your wisdom, where is your intelligence? Not only did your words contradict the words of your father David, they even contradict themselves. The Talmud cites contradiction between Ecclesiastes 2:2; 7:3 and 8:15. Rabbi Simeon ben Menasia says, ‘the Song of Songs makes the hands unclean because it was spoken by

the Holy Spirit. Ecclesiastes does not make the hands unclean because it is Solomon's wisdom" (Longman 2008:142).

The *Peshita* of *RabKahana* stated that sages wanted Ecclesiastes to be stored away because some of the words found in the book were said to be heresy. Jerome affirmed this and pointed out that it was included because of Ecclesiastes 12:13-14. The beginning and the end of the book is what made the Jewish scholars to accept it as part of the scripture. Though they questioned Ecclesiastes, it was never rejected by the mainstream Jewish community and the question they asked was, "why is he book canonical?" (Longman III 2008:142; cf Hess 2016:480).

"The *Targum* of Ecclesiastes AD six hundred provides an excellent insight into a major Early Jewish interpretive approach. First the *Targum* makes a strong identification of *Qohelet* with Solomon" (Longman III 2008:142). This is agreed upon in Jewish and Christian interpretation until the reformation. The *Targum* identified *Qohelet* as Solomon and that paved way for many Jewish and Christian religious communities to accept the book that sounded kilter among other books. Some medieval Jewish manuscripts adds Ecclesiastes to the *Megilloth* and these five books are associated with the five major Jewish festivals and Ecclesiastes is associated with the Feast of Tabernacles because of Ecclesiastes 3:1 there is a time for everything. Among later medieval Jewish interpreters *Rashbam* was the first to see the fame narrator in the book in (Eccl 1:1-2; 12:8) which is widely held today. Zohar in the thirteenth century asserts the view that in his contradictions and tensions, *Qohelet* was quoting his unbelieving opponents to refute them and this is now also found in the modern commentaries (Longman III 2008:142).

#### 2.1.5.3 Christian interpretation

The Christian interpretation begins in the New Testament but there is not much written before Origen in third century AD. There was little doubt regarding the canonical status of the book. There is no existing evidence that the early church doubted Ecclesiastes and the book was seen as Holy Scripture. Origen was in support of Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes as he thought the book was written to reveal the folly embedded in human wisdom and that it led the author to the love of Christ in Song of Songs (Hess 2016:480). Origen does not have a full commentary but he had influence on his students as one of them (Gregory Thaumaturgos) identifies *Qohelet* as king

Solomon. Gregory was one of the earliest known interpreters of Ecclesiastes and Jerome (AD 347-420) had more influence. Though influenced by rabbinic interpretation he took the Christian direction. Jerome's major influence was the view that the book teaches its readers to despise the world and its attractions and he used it to provoke Blesilla who was an aristocratic woman to despise the world. His interpretation of the book was the standard interpretation used until the Reformation (Hess 2016:480). It was because of him that the book was taken as advocating for an ascetic perspective and promoting the monastic lifestyle. Jerome agreed with *Qohelet* on the view that life under the sun is meaningless, therefore he encouraged despising the world as he translated *hebel* as *vanitas* which led to the English, vanity of vanities (Longman III 2008:143).

Bonaventura wrote a commentary in AD 1253-1257, and he did not reject the *contemptus mundi* approach, but answered that this view cast aspersions on God. His response was that the world is not inherently contemptible, but in comparison to God, it is nothing. He expanded the teaching of Ecclesiastes to make it relevant to new sciences which related to the study of the natural world which emerged in the thirteenth century AD (Longman III 2008:143).

#### 2.1.5.4. The Modern period

The Modern period saw the rise of Martin Luther and the Reformers. Martin Luther vehemently objects the *contemptus mundi* because it denigrated God who created the world. He rejected the monastic lifestyle as he did not believe that vanity "related to the world as much as it did to humanity or in his translation, the vanity of the human heart that is never content with the gifts of God that are present but rather thinks of them as negligible" (Longman III 2008:144). Luther read Ecclesiastes politically and family oriented and human existence in the context of creation order. Solomon was seen as a political figure concerned about social life. Luther used Ecclesiastes in empirical sciences and attendant philosophy and saw the book as helpful in his debate with Erasmus over free will. Luther did not eradicate the *contemptus mundi* approach, he provided a robust alternative to it (Treier 2014:296). In the table talk Luther is said to have been the first to question Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes. He thought that it was written by Sirach at the time of the Maccabees though there was no

evidence of Luther saying this found. With Luther out Grotius then became the first to doubt *Qohelet* being Solomon based on the late Hebrew words found in the text. It is from this point that the Solomonic authorship consensus ended though some scholars today still defend Solomon as the author (Longman III 2008:144).

There was the rise of the historical-critical approach in the late eighteenth century. It was used to question the text and tradition so as to determine truth of a matter. There were intense questions and concerns regarding “authorship, historical setting, composition history, genre, ancient Near Eastern background, social setting and much more” (Longman III 2008:144). Julius Wellhausen might not be the originator of historical criticism but his prolegomena to the history of Israel (1885) is seen as the point if a turn in OT scholarly study. The first concern was source criticism of the Pentateuch and second was reconstruction of Israelite history and religion. Though at first it mainly focused on historical books and prophets, wisdom literature was not included for a while. “By the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries historical criticism was used to solve exegetical issues in Ecclesiastes as well as to reconstruct its compositional history” (Longman III 2008:145).

The most difficult exegetical issue was the contradictions found within the book. Source criticism is what brought forward the notion of many writers in Ecclesiastes which was argued to be at least nine hands later reduced to three by Barton and Pöschel said four and this continues today as some scholars appeal to multiple sources with others saying the epilogue was a later addition. Some scholars argue that the epilogue is someone else’s writing but they are not concerned about one or two writers but the book is seen as a unity. Source-criticism developed in the nineteenth century and this led to form criticism which looked at genre in the diachronic form as part of identifying the original shape of the biblical books. In the Old Testament studies Hermann Gunkel applied this to Genesis and the Psalms. The traditional diachronic form of form criticism “had little impact on Ecclesiastes’ interpretation. They birthed the now called comparative and contextual method for Old Testament studies (Longman III 2008:145 cf Hess 2016:481).

The Modernity’s Faustian Toil is parallel to Ecclesiastes in that both Faust and *Qohelet* could not attain happiness in the world they both thought was meaningless and Faust’s

mood is seen to be in many ways to *Qohelet*. However in other ways they were different, the story of Faust continues after death whereas Ecclesiastes, “ends on a somber note of stoical resignation” (Treier 2014:297).

#### 2.1.5.5 Postmodern readings

Postmodern readings came to be in the 1960s'. There was existentialist philosophy in the 1960s' which did not believe there was a meaning in Ecclesiastes to be found out there. They took the preacher to be a great existentialist of his time because of the scepticism found in the book. Tillich was an existentialist whereas Jacques Derrida was a deconstructionist, they both “threw a doubtful light on finding meaning in life and literature. Existentialism led to angst whereas deconstructionism led to joy”(Longman III 2008:146). Both schools of thought did not expect to get meaning of the world from the text or the author, therefore they lived by their own rules. They live by the term, “read against the grain,” as they did not interpret text according to the original meaning (Longman III 2008:146).

#### 2.1.5.6. Late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries

In the late twentieth and early first century questions regarding the authorship and date arose again. Up until the Reformation the broad consensus was that Qohelet is Solomon. Today most interpreters do not agree on the Solomonic authorship. They see the connection as a literary fiction and a few put the book in the pre-exilic period. The majority of scholars see Ecclesiastes as an anonymous book. After passing a period where scholars there were many writers, a few scholars thought the book had a complicated redactional history because of the body and the frame of the book, genre and Ancient Near Eastern background. *Genre* is now an important part of contemporary interpretation. The interest was the result of form criticism by Gunkel and synchronic literary studies. Ecclesiastes is seen as autobiographical especially in 1:12-12:7 though it is not *resgestae* type. The dominant type of *genre* in the book is reflection, and some proverbs, anecdotes and more. The discovery of the Ancient Near Eastern cultures and literature in the nineteenth century led to scholars exploiting it to enrich their understanding of biblical texts. They identified similarities in the Ancient Near Eastern literature and Ecclesiastes with Siduri and the Epic of

Gilgamesh. Lately scholars are debating the relevance of the similarities between *Qohelet's* autobiography and biographies from Egypt and Mesopotamia (Longman III 2008:147).

Ecclesiastes is deemed to be a complex book. Contemporary scholars have raised the issue of the relationship between the book's body and the refrain. Early Christians and Jews simply ignored these issues. Some scholars say though the statements made by *Qohelet* "though on the surface they seem out of step with the Old Testament tradition, in reality the book fits in to its overall message" (Longman III 2008:148). There are some scholars still arguing on the translation of hebel as some say it should be translated as transient, absurd or enigmatic rather than meaningless. The other concerning aspect of the message of *Qohelet* is the statement meaningless, everything is meaningless against the *carpediem* statements. Up until today there is no consensus that has been reached as per translation of the book and this might continue like that for years to come. This simply shows that Ecclesiastes' presence in the canon "is a reminder that life itself is complex and not amenable to simple answers" (Longman III 2008:148).

#### 2.1.6. Ancient Near Eastern background

There is not a single text that exists on its own without outside influence from surrounding cultures, languages, religious persuasion or economic and political factors. Surrounding cultures are the most influential texts to any literature. Though ancient cultures might have been of influence to the modern culture, modern culture can in no way influence ancient culture. Though there were not as advanced in technology as the modern world is now, the ancient Near East knew their neighbours and their cultures. Klingbeil looks at Palestine and the four surrounding cardinals (Klingbeil 2008:132).

##### 2.1.6.1 Comparative studies

In the study of the history of Palestine there are comparative studies which were done and these have advantages and limitations. Comparative methods of research have been around for a long time. More than a century ago archaeologists of the ancient Near East "looked at comparative data of the material culture of the surrounding culture in order to establish dating sequences and understand the typological

developments of certain pottery form or architecture” (Klingbeil 2008:133). Biblical studies have changed over time from parallelomania to parallelophobia. Historical criticism is being used to compare surrounding cultures’ data, influence on one another to provide better historical studies (*Sitz im Leben*). Typological comparison is used for cultures that are far apart with little to no contact.

Typological comparison “presupposes some type of a common religious conscience in humanity and is often employed in anthropological or social research and it lends itself in the proverbial apples and oranges heavily relying on external models” (Klingbeil 2008:133). In historical comparison there is not always enough information to provide clear lines of “development or dependence and can be quite subjective when it comes to evaluating cultural, religious or historical interaction” (Klingbeil 2008:133). The compare and contrast method gives both similarities and differences.

#### 2.1.6.2 Looking to the east: Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia is in the East and there are conceptual similarities that have been discovered in Mesopotamian literature that are similar to Ecclesiastes. These similarities are between the Epic of Gilgamesh tablet III to Ecclesiastes 1:14,17; 2:11; 4:4. On tablet X the speech of Siduri is said to be similar to Ecclesiastes 7:7-9. These similarities are however seen as far-fetched as there is no specific connection made in history (Klingbeil 2008:133). Duncan argues that there are more than just a few sentences that are similar, there are substantive affinities between the two and it seems like the Epic of Gilgamesh was deeply etched in Qohelet’s head (Duncan 2017:21). Ecclesiastes has similarities of genre with the Akkadian royal. Both have “I am” which is first reference with instructions as seen in Ecclesiastes 6:10-14. A third similarity found is that of pessimism in Ecclesiastes and the Mesopotamian literature is the Counsels of Pessimist and the Dialogue of Pessimism. Both schools of pessimism like Ecclesiastes see life as futile even though Ecclesiastes is seen as not completely pessimistic. Ecclesiastes rather looks at how human wisdom leads to failure as it has limitations. There are 2 *loci* in Israelite wisdom which are scribal schools and folk wisdom. This is also seen in the Mesopotamian wisdom (Klingbeil 2008:133-134; cf Anderson 2014:168).

#### 2.1.6.3. Looking to the north: Syria



In the North was Syria, though it is seen as not important, Syrian influence became more important after the discoveries of ancient “Ugarit, Ebla, Alalakh, Emar, Qatna, Kamid el-Loz, Qadesh, Telbrak together with important Phoenician towns of Sidon and Tyre” (Klingbeil 2008:135). Similarities in religious practices were seen between Syria and Israel which include festival calendars and the anointing of priests among others. Scholars also looked into possible similarities in intellectual or literary influence. First they saw similarities in Canaanite-Phoenician orthography, morphology and syntax in Ecclesiastes which was later refuted. Persian period texts were seen as a Phoenician influence on Ecclesiastes especially the phrase under the sun which they saw as being linked to the Phoenician solar religion. The *carpediem* motif in Ecclesiastes is also said to be similar to Ahiqar (a Persian text). Though some scholars are doubtful about the similarities at first the texts from the late Bronze Age Emar had the further possible links. This similarity is seen in Ecclesiastes 1:9 and the Emarite polytheistic religious outlook (Eccl 3:14-15).

“*Qohelet* also appears to challenge traditional beliefs systems and is involved in existential experiments (Eccl 1:12-14; 17-18; 2:1-23), this is also said to be documented in Emar” (Klingbeil 2008:135-36). The possible similarities to Syrian parallels should not be overlooked because it is important and there are wisdom concepts found in Ecclesiastes are echoed throughout an extended period of time which suggest there might be ancient Near Eastern wisdom that influenced corrections or alternatives (Klingbeil 2008:136). Phoenician influence is seen in the language of Ecclesiastes, these include, syntax, morphology, spelling and vocabulary. This has given rise to the debate of the dating of the book with some scholars assign the date of authorship to a comparatively late period (Harrison 2004:1075).

#### 2.1.6.4. Looking to the west: Greece and Aegean

Greece and Aegean became important in studying Ecclesiastes intellectual background because of the wide ranging development in the dating and biblical texts. Greece did not just appear in the Israelite circles in the Hellenistic period evidence shows prior interaction. “Some of the evidence for the Hellenistic influence on Ecclesiastes includes reflection of Greek philosophy in the way the book argues its case and has been linked to the Hellenistic diatribe” (Klingbeil 2008:136). There is no evidence that Greek philosophy influenced the writing of Ecclesiastes, though it may

share some of the same concerns (Routledge 2016:363). Other studies question the link between Ecclesiastes and Greek philosophy hence an argument for general reflection of Hellenistic thought in Ecclesiastes. Some of the similarities seen are the governing terminology, administrative structures and tax system is in Ecclesiastes 4:1; 5:8-9 though this is not seen as a compelling similarity. There seems to be no scholarly consensus on Greek influence for Ecclesiastes (Klingbeil 2008:137 cf Harrison 2004:1075).

#### 2.1.6.5. Looking to the south: Egypt

In the south of Israel was Egypt. “Egyptian influence in the conceptual and textual world of Ecclesiastes have been argued repeatedly, albeit not unanimously” (Klingbeil 2008:136). The Middle Kingdom and the Dispute between a Man and his Ba are the Egyptian literature that are said to have similar dialogic style to Ecclesiastes (1:16; 2:1-15; 3:17-18) as well as the *carpe diem* motif in (Eccl 2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:17; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:7-8). There is a huge gap between Ecclesiastes and the middle Kingdom text which should be noted when making a theological connection between the two. Another Middle Kingdom text, the Eloquent Peasant has got a similar argument to the above mentioned even though there are a few similarities to Ecclesiastes which include frame narrative and motifs of partiality (Klingbeil 2008:137 cf Anderson 2014:165). The Song from the Tomb of King Intef dated in the 1600 B.C.E calls on the guests to surrender themselves to pleasure in light of death being inevitable similar to Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:7 (Anderson 2014:166).

Another Egyptian parallel is the Complaints of Khakheperre-snob a Middle Kingdom text. Like Ecclesiastes it emphasizes a searching heart (Eccl 1:13, 17; 8:16; 9:1), nothingness of memory (Eccl 1:11), and learning from past experiences (Eccl 1:12-2:26; 7:23-39; 8:16-17). The topic of death is also found in the Egyptian biographies as the ways established to confront death are no longer effective. The data used in the comparison is not from the same period as Ecclesiastes and scholars suggest that, these texts will compel additional future research (Klingbeil 2008:137). The Instruction of Amenemhet is another Egyptian text from ca. 2000 B.C.E. with royal court *sitz im leben* like Ecclesiastes. The close parallels are “the lonely and unseemly nature of politics and human nature *vis-a-vis* the idealism of the system” (Anderson 2014:163).

The ancient Near Eastern background search in regards with Ecclesiastes brought up surprising links to other texts from Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia with texts from way before the time of Ecclesiastes composition. Though they are not relevant for historical comparative, they aid in the typological comparative approach. In terms of western influence, “It seems as if the scholarly lines are sharply drawn between those who posit a clear Hellenistic background for the book and those who reject this thesis” (Klingbeil 2008:138). Hellenistic influence is heavily determined by the dating used for Ecclesiastes (Klingbeil 2008:138).

## **2.2. Literature analysis**

### **2.2.1 Political wisdom**

Goh (2016:31) looks at the book of Ecclesiastes on the political view point as observed by the author during his quest. Regarding the political wisdom found in Ecclesiastes, Goh (2016:31) paints *Qoheleth* as a political figure who is deeply concerned about social life. The paper focuses on *Qohelet's* wisdom as being both prescriptive and reflective. Goh (2016:31) says, “*Qohelet* advises on courtly behaviour, shares his perspective on political leadership, and suggests ways to deal with wickedness that exists within the power structure of society.” The book seems to have been written during a time where “there was centralized bureaucratic structures and stratified state administrators” (Goh 2016:32). From the writing, *Qoheleth* is not part of the government establishment as he identifies himself with those that fall under the rulership of this government (Goh 2016:32).

The political wisdom that *Qoheleth* focuses on here Goh (2016:33) groups it into two types: which are instructions and admonitions on courtly behaviour (Eccl 5:8-9; 8:2-9; 10:4-7; 10:16-20) and reflections on socio-political reality (Eccl 3:16-17; 4:1-3; 4:13-16; 9:13-16). “The former type of political wisdom is prescriptive and more direct, whereas the latter is descriptive and indirect. Both types of political wisdom are didactic in essence” (Goh 2016:34). The writer shows that sages were concerned with political realities, in the way he articulates about politics. Goh continues to say about political oppression which is a reality today not only in Malaysia where she lives but is seen in other countries as well. There is a lot of wickedness in the judicial systems just as Ecclesiastes 3:16-17 suggested. “*Qohelet's* evaluation of human activities in such

socio-political realities points us toward the critical engagement of society” (Goh 2016:45). *Qohelet* paints a clear picture of a corrupt power system. However, this is one of life’s realities and one ought to embrace certain attitudes for their survival, “live wisely and be God-fearing despite facing oppressions, injustices, and abuses of political power” (Goh 2016:47).

Their judicial system was corrupt and there was no one who could provide justice for the ones deserving of it. Though this paper focuses on the justice system in Malaysia, it is the same in most African countries even in South Africa. There is oppression of the poor who cannot afford to call out on the corrupt. The power structure in many countries does not really care about the citizen’s needs and empowerment. The judicial systems are more biased to those whom they should be providing justice and this hugely affects the general public. Such political structures affect the lives of those living now, as well as the future of the young people. They also affect the quality of life of the countries citizens and it is one of the things that the young people of today have to navigate through.

### 2.2.2. Ecclesiastes, fleeting and timeless

In his attempt to find meaning, *Qohelet* ended up seeing that human undertakings all lead to fleetingness. Dor-Shav (2008:211) takes Ecclesiastes on the fleeting and timeless view point, as he looks at how the author searches for meaning, wisdom “from a perspective of a life replete with fortune and opportunity”. The life of the author was one of unrepentant indulgence: “He tempted himself with wine, entertained himself with male and female performers, and amassed untold treasures and hundreds of wives and concubines” (Dor-Shav 2008:211). He reiterates how Ecclesiastes is not a book about what God wants from us but, what we want for ourselves. From the onset it appears as if *Qohelet*’s search is doomed and he despairs about life’s meaning from the second chapter (Eccl 2:17-19). *Qohelet* sees life as being vain and loathes the idea of working only for others to enjoy your riches when you die. However he also sees it right for men to enjoy life while they still can (Dor-Shav 2008:211).

*Qohelet* was not the only one concerned about the meaning of death or quest for eternal life, throughout history other people have. There have been monuments built to establish rulers’ immortality. There were the pyramids of Egypt, and the “grave

goods.” Christians and Moslems believe in afterlife where one will live happily, while other religions of India and the Far East offer the idea of reincarnation. Ecclesiastes’ central message is *hebel* translated *vanity* understood as meaningless or futile. Dor-Shav connects the *hebel* of Ecclesiastes with Abel’s name in Genesis, thereby connecting the two books. “In light of *Qohelet*’s preoccupation with death, his reference to Abel is striking. Abel is the first human being to die” (Dor-Shav 2008:215). Looking at Abel, he was the first human being to offer a sacrifice that was accepted by God. However, the story of Abel teaches the opposite, - “the possibility of salvation despite the fleeting nature of life” (Dor-Shav 2008:216). The tragic nature of how Abel’s life was interrupted teaches us that, “in turning one’s life into an offering, one is not dependent on any life circumstance, or on any achievements in the material world”(Dor-Shav 2008:217). In his quest to understand the meaning of death and life, *Qohelet* seeks to confront his audience with the immortality of men (Dor-Shav 2008:218).

Dor-Shav tends to focus more on the history of people searching for meaning in life and how they ended up preparing for death because they see life as fleeting and timeless. He however looks on the history and does not give much thought on the contemporary issues regarding the meaning of life and death. He does a great job with looking at the different religions and how they see and prepare for death. The central theme of Ecclesiastes is the vanity of life under the sun and death. Dor-Shav connects Genesis and Ecclesiastes showing the effects that death has had on mankind from the beginning and also the connectedness of scripture.

### 2.2.3. Pursuit of happiness

Apart from searching for meaning, *Qohelet* also sought for happiness. In his pursuit of happiness, *Qohelet* says, “And I recommend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under sun” (Eccl 8:15). Peterson (2017:71) writes about how the pursuit of happiness in Ecclesiastes is a dead end street, which is the truth in today’s life as well. He begins by saying when God spoke to Job in a whirlwind; he told him that he is the one who created everything that exists on this earth. Here God tells Job of a time when the stars sang and the sons of God shouted for joy (Job 38:4-7). As far back as one’s imagination can go, the stars sang for God,

meaning there was joy from the beginning and if you look far ahead into heaven there will be joy and singing (Rev 4:1-11). “The story of our faith, our very existence, begins and ends with joy,” since from the beginning God was surrounded with joy (Peterson 2017:71). Our life in between has got joy as well (Ps 46:4; John 15:11). Looking into the twenty centuries of Christianity you see many Christians exhibiting joy, though there have been plenty sad Christians, it is the happy ones that gives others hope (Peterson 2017:71).

How does it happen that in the pursuit of pleasure many people get into trouble and their pursuit of happiness ends with sadness. “For it is certainly true that a great deal of the misery we survey seems to have been initiated in the pursuit of pleasure whether through drugs, or the ecstasies of sex and gluttonies of consumption” (Peterson 2017:71). If pleasure was is a gift from God, why do we always end up in trouble when we try to enjoy as much as we can? The preacher helps us with answers to the above question. He goes about life collecting all the garbage and getting rid of it. “He gets rid of those things in life that may have been once good in themselves, we paid a lot for them on one whim or another, but actually diverted us from a life of faith in God” (Peterson 2017:71). However it is up to us as individuals to go about our lives seeing this garbage and not taking it back into our lives.

Reading the Ecclesiastes helps encourage us to go about our life cleaning it up, “of the illusions and sentimentalisms that clutter our days as we follow Christ in faith” (Peterson 2017:72). One area of our lives that needs help is the pursuit of pleasure. You cannot experience God without experiencing joy, and we cannot separate joy from the one who gives it. No wonder one ends up with something boring, dull and meaningless. *Qohelet* does not tell us the good or the wrong to enjoy life, however we live in a moral world and ought to make moral decisions ourselves, choosing right or wrong, choosing God and denying evil. However, “*Qohelet* has more to do with discriminating between the real and the illusory, the authentic and the false, the actual and the fantastic” (Peterson 2017:72).

*Qohelet's* real question is, what is real? His result is that everything that we centre on in our pursuit of pleasure is hot air. He does not have a list of good or bad pleasure, but his view is, all joy is a gift of God. Our task as individuals is to find a way to enjoy the joy. “Joys are profuse and various, but the capacity to enjoy them is questionable”

(Peterson 2017:72). *Qohelet* knows that our impulses and likings were fashioned to bring us into the presence of God, but this could be diverted by boredom and cynicism. Joys' intent is to lead us into wholeness, but the ways we use leads to malaise. *Qohelet* makes his point by drawing from the life of one who enjoyed life's pleasures foolishly. In Ecclesiastes 2:4-19 you see *Qohelet* speaks of all the depths he divulged into while in pursuit of pleasure. He did everything humanly possible to find pleasure in his life. He had wealth, great houses and vineyards, many herds of animals and many servants and he thought he was in complete control of pleasure. It is from this that we ought to see how to live in the world as we pursue happiness, joy or wealth.

What *Qohelet* sought to control ended up controlling him, "he was swept into an orgy of indulgence, the world of pleasure that he has depersonalized so he could control it, now depersonalized him" (Peterson 2017:73). He idolized pleasure which ended up having a life of its own, he is now being controlled by what he meant to control and he is now being completely controlled by gonadic determinism. *Qohelet* has shown that no matter how much wisdom we have, if you only use it for worldly pleasure, you are a fool.

In his quest *Qohelet* made mistakes which can be summarised into two statements. First, "you must not pursue pleasure". Pleasure is a gift not a goal, therefore we must not make it our priority to pursue pleasure at all costs. There are a number of things in the world that can be used for pleasure. However, one needs to remember that the foundation of human appetite should be God. In the pursuit of pleasure people end up idolizing pleasure and this is what *Qohelet* is warning us about. Second, you cannot purchase pleasure." No matter how much money one has, they can never purchase pleasure. Joy only comes from God and we can neither create nor earn it, we cannot buy joy, it can only be received (Peterson 2017:74).

Peterson shows that the pursuit of happiness is a dead end street, and this is true of life today. Most people who go in the pursuit of happiness end up in the wrong places. The best place one can get joy is in God, with him as the foundation of our joy. He says we live in a moral world. However, a person's moral compass is guided by how they were raised and the things that are important to them in life. The problem with our moral world though is that what one sees as a moral issue another person does not,

this can only be done if we all had the same moral guidance. Young people today are more focused on pursuing the happiness that life has to offer, hence they end up on the dead end because they are pursuing happiness in the wrong way. The world today is full of people who regret the way they lived, and in some circumstances it will be too late for them to correct their mistakes. However they still have a chance to repent and change their lives now. This is what *Qohelet* is warning the young people against, hence the encouragement to remember their creator in the days of their youth.

#### 2.2.4. Ecclesiastes an enigmatic book

O'Donnell (2021:87) portrays Ecclesiastes as an enigmatic book. In his introduction he notes that Ecclesiastes is a tough book read because even in commentaries they point out that no one has ever been able to master it, and all have failed to solve its enigma. He gives three points under which Ecclesiastes has to be read. "Put simply, the best way to read Ecclesiastes, as noted in the introduction, is as (1) God's wisdom literature (2) with a unified message (3) that makes better sense in light of the crucified, risen, and returning Christ." (O'Donnell 2021:87).

O'Donnell portrays Ecclesiastes and describes it a like a thousand piece puzzle scattered everywhere. This puzzle has gray pieces and a shiny white centre. "Yet like a Rembrandt, in which darkness and light play off each other and blend together in seemingly inexplicable ways, those gray pieces of Ecclesiastes do eventually connect with אלהים, who is at the centre of the picture and is bright in all his incompressible glory and wisdom" (O'Donnell 2021:92). He says, however with discipline and a quiet heart, you can pick up the pieces slowly, humbly and prayerfully piece them together and a clear picture will emerge (O'Donnell 2021:94).

Though it is seen as an enigmatic book, it shows who we are as human beings on our own and what our quest would be like if we are not living for the one who made us. It is true that Christians could read the book with Christ in mind as we see at the end where the narrator speaks about the coming judgment and that we need to fear God. As O'Donnell says we are like pieces of a puzzle scattered everywhere, but with God who is the light in the centre we can come together and by discipline and a quiet heart.



## 2.3. Chapter 12

Ecclesiastes 12 come at the backdrop of 11:8-10, “rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all things God will bring you into judgment.”

Pinker (2015:204) views Ecclesiastes 12 “as an expression of *Qohelet*’s deep apprehensions of the challenges that faced his people”. *Qohelet* urges the people “to keep records, though it is wearisome; be aware that secrets would be leaked; fear God; and, obey His commandments, these are his essentials for survival” (Pinker 2015:204). He concurs there are scholars still arguing about the epilogue being the work of either one or two epilogists “each beginning his epilogue with the keyword ויִוְתַר (vv. 9-11 and vv. 12-14)” (Pinker 2015:206). The first focusing on professional and nature of teaching, while the second one focuses on the intellectual process as being endless and exhausting, gives important advice and warning on the certainty of judgement day. There are two questions that come up as one reads the epilogue. First, “what is the purpose?” and second, “what is the function within the book as a whole?” (Pinker 2015:232). Is the epilogue originally part of the book or a post-script or a corrective appendix added into the book? Pinker (2015:232) is of the perspective that the epilogue is “a postscript, which summarizes some realistic concerns of *Qohelet* that were obliquely referred to in the book”.

“The Epilogue does not say anything conclusive about *Qohelet*’s philosophical views on the advantage of living, the utility of wisdom, or the rewards of toil. Rather, it highlights that which he has most of all at heart, at that particular time. Its function is not the “welfare” of the book but the welfare of the readers. *Qohelet*’s motivation for the Epilogue was fear of the effects of Hellenism and the Ptolemaic administration on Judea” (Pinker 2015:232).

### 2.3.1 Allegories in Ecclesiastes

Tantlevskij (2019:49) takes in consideration the allegories found in chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes. Tantlevskij (2019:49) comes to the conclusion that the expression ‘the

almond tree blossomed' is an allegory of men's birth and early years. The locust allegory is an indication of mature years of human life. The allegory of breaking the silver code symbolizes the earthly demise.

The author of Ecclesiastes concludes his work with some allegories. In the final part he contrasted the joy of young age with the sadness of old age with depressing metaphors. He has got a number of allegories that Tantlevskij (2019:50) analyses, these are, 'the almond tree' which begins to bloom second half of January in Judea. These are the first fruit trees of the country known as a "harbinger of the revival, 'the awakening of spring.' He says the description does not fit the allegory of old age because the almond flowers are white and pink and could hardly be used as a description for grey hair. Also to be noted is the fact that the almond tree blossoms until mid March and the fruit mature until September. This is where the proverb, "My son, be not in a hurry, like the almond-tree whose blossom is the first to appear, but whose fruit is the last to be eaten" (Tantlevskij 2019:50). Therefore this cannot be used as an allegory for the proximity of one's demise, rather as a stage of maturation and manhood. The almond tree have the shape of a cup and in (12:6a-b) a person correlated to different vessels. Thus there is assumption the phrase contains "allegory of a man's birth, awakening to life and his young, joyous bright years" (Tantlevskij 2019:50).

The locust, is a migratory phrase of the grasshopper found in the Near East. The locusts reproduce in May-June and the mating process prohibits the female from moving thereby preventing repeated mating and the eggs are only laid in the second half of summer. The phrase, "the grasshopper drags itself along' can be interpreted as an indication of the mature productive years of human life. Some authors argue that the locust referred to here is not an insect, it rather is a variety of plants as defined in the English language. There are plants that have pods which takes the resemblance of the insect. Many "interpreters in antiquity assumed locust to be legumes" (Tantlevskij 2019:52). In Ecclesiastes the locust has been traditionally and figuratively used to refer to one's manhood. The carob tree has got fruits that resemble the locust and they start ripening in May and are harvested in the rainy season. Thus, the phrase the locust became loaded could also be interpreted as an indication of a mature, fruitful period of human life.

The allegory of the breaking silver code can be used to understand the break in connection between the spirit and the flesh. Ecclesiastes “adduces the allegories of death expressed through the broken vessels, symbolizing the human body” (Tantlevskij 2019:53). The context that the allusion to “the human spirit implicitly present in these allegories as well, symbolized by olive oil and water, not directly implied but contextually implied” (Tantlevskij 2019:53). The second and third allegorical images, the spring and the well, veritable symbols of life and in 12:7b eternal life. The symbol of ceramic vessel, return to the earth as it was, that is going back to its fountain.

The allegory of the golden bowl as seen in Zech 4:2-3, the term bowl refers to the receptacle of olive oil for the lamps. The golden bowl will crack can presuppose implicitly not only the death of the body but its contents also. So, it turns out that in “all three allegories the solid irrevocably broken walls of the vessels symbolize the human body, and the supposed moving contents of them the fountains of life (water) and light (oil) the human immortal spirit, returning to its Creator” (Tantlevskij 2019:55).

Tantlevskij does not agree with the allegory that the almond tree is a metaphor for old age but for birth and the young years. However he goes on to explain that the almond fruit takes a long time to ripen which was the allegory could be used to mean old age. Though he says the almond flowers are pink and white, before one’s hair becomes fully white it is two colours and that also symbolises old age. I agree with authors who see this passage as referring to old age and death.

### 2.3.2. Death an impetus for life

Davis (1991:298) penned down Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 on death, an impetus to life. He begins by saying the author of Ecclesiastes described his search for meaning in life which however became an exercise of futility. The more he searched for meaning was the more he realized that life is unfair, human wisdom is woefully, insufficient and death continually laughed in his face. He furthermore realized that of injustice, ignorance and death, death was the most devastating. Death has a voracious appetite and strikes without warning breaking hopes and dreams. Thus death "can make a man hate life, not because he wants to die, but because it renders life so futile" (Davis 1991:298).

Davis (1991:300) gives six principles on death and life. First, all die- no matter what we all die though being human has advantages over being an animal, wise or foolish, the equalizer is death. Second, death has certain advantages over life (Eccl 4:1-3; 7:1-2'26). There are no snares or suffering in death, whereas in life there is constant oppression. Therefore there is a sense of escape in death. Third, death cannot be evaded, but it is best not to act foolishly and to rush it (Eccl 3:2; 6:6; 7:7; 8:8). He says though humans have a desire to control death, "to a limited extent they are able to forestall it." However, death is controlled by God and *Qohelet* does not encourage the shortening of life intentional or unintentional. Fourth, studying death can help one live life fully. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning. With such a reality one is forced to face the reality of death which is where everyone is headed. "By advocating the study of death, *Qohelet* challenged readers to face life in light of their mortality, also encouraging them to consider their fate early in life (Eccl 12:1) while there is still time to make a difference in how they live" (Davis 1991:300). Fifth, life has got advantages over death. It is better to live than to die because when you are alive there is hope to find meaning to life. Sixth, living for this life is meaningless. Riches are only of this world and acquiring many riches do not guarantee satisfaction in this life. No one can take their riches to the next life, so do not trust in them.

In regards to Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 some scholars' say it speaks about physiological changes, others say a funeral, and still others say a ruined house, and Davis concurs that it speaks about old age and age. This passage speaks of God as the originator of life. Despite the inequality of death, God is still the only creator of the living and the dead. God is there at the beginning and the end of life meaning he surely is there throughout all of the days one lives. Therefore God can give meaning to life and help mankind make sense of death. From verse one he says, remember your creator meaning live life to the fullest because it is short with an uncertain future and the only certainty is death (Davis 1991:312).

Humankind ought to remember God in the early years of life for the sake of revolutionizing their lives and coming into conformity with God's eternal and sovereign plan. Verses 2 to 5 speak of the aging and dying process and these verses reveal the signs for the forewarning of old age and how it becomes a reality. Verse 6 to 8 displays the last act of life which is death being played out. There is nothing timid about death

and when it come you cannot escape it and when one dies, the body and spirit go back to where they came from. *Qohelet* urges people to live life to the fullest, but also be mindful of life's transitory nature and irreversible death. Ultimately humankind is reminded to remember his creator while they are young, fear him and keep his commandments (Davis 1991:312-318).

Based on the study that Davis did, there are a few conclusions he came to regarding the life and death phenomenon. "Turn to God whilst there is still time," no one knows when their demise will fall, so better prepare before it comes. One cannot see signs of impending doom to make sure they live a successful life, thus, live a successful life now and live for a proper reward after death. Work for heavenly and not earthly riches, we will all leave behind whatever treasure we accumulate in life. You can never be fully prepared for death and it will definitely come without fail. There is life after death so live life not just for today, but for the future (Davis 1991:318).

People are now living for the here and now life and this is what is influencing the youth today. All think life is for living and live it to the fullest while you still have time. Though *Ecclesiastes* is still seen as an enigmatic book, it tells the truth about mankind and how they choose to live life, because at the end they are still going to die. Death really is an impetus for life, people want to do whatever they can before they die. Others work so as to live a legacy for their children when they die. Davis looks at the negative of what people do because death is a stimulating factor in all that people do. There are people doing good before they die, though there is more only living for today.

### 2.3.3. The 'fear of God' in *Ecclesiastes*

The fear of God is used in different ways by *Qohelet* and the frame narrator. The phrase fear of God appears seven times in *Ecclesiastes*. In the Biblical canon to fear God or the fear of God is found in the wisdom literature, the Torah, historical books and in the prophets. However the book mostly associated with the fear of God is *Proverbs* and here it has a purpose of imparting wisdom to its readers with the beginning being the fear of Yahweh. The fear of Yahweh is a virtue that brings one into a place of submission and dependence upon God. The fear of God leads one to proper humility that shuns away pride and letting one learn from God. This fear is encouraged by sages and it is not an unhealthy dread. In the *Psalms* the phrase

appears more than forty times in a positive sense. “The fear of God is connected to salvation and refuge rather than wisdom and enlightenment as it is in Proverbs, but that points to a difference in the use and not in the nature of the concept” (Longman III 2015:13).

In Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 *Qohelet* says ‘fear God who keeps humans from discerning the proper time.’ In Ecclesiastes it is first mentioned in (3:14) when taken out of context it can be taken positively to mean only God can accomplish what he intends to and no one can stop him and his actions last forever and his actions makes people fear him because he can thwart them. In this scenario, it is a fear that makes one to run away from God. In this text *Qohelet* begins by talking about a time for everything and ends with God making everything appropriate in its own time where mankind cannot discern it. This was a frustrating realization to *Qohelet* when timing is everything for a sage. His frustration led him to say man should eat, drink and find enjoyment while he still has time for he does not know when that will be taken away. Thus, when he talks about everything God does last forever, he is referring to his making everything appropriate in its time” (Longman III 2015:15).

In Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, *Qohelet* says ‘fear the distant and dangerous God.’ *Qohelet* is searching for meaning under the sun through his own investigation without including revelation. *Qohelet* speaks about God in a distant manner. His most “sustained reflection on God in (Eccl 5:17) confirms the impression that his relationship with God is distant at best” (Longman III 2015:16). He says interact with God at a minimum because he is in heaven and we are on earth, there is a great distance between us. If one makes a vow they should honour it otherwise you will make the distant deity angry. The fear mentioned here is one of being afraid of God and keeping a healthy distance from him (Longman III 2015:16). In Ecclesiastes 7:15-18, he says fear the God who is unfair. In his observation of life under the sun, *Qohelet* observed as the righteous die and the wicked living for long. This showed a lack of justice on earth. On the lack of justice he says do not be too wise and do not be too foolish which is somehow suggesting a middle way between wisdom and folly. Therefore, the one who fear God will follow them both (Longman III 2015:17).

In Ecclesiastes 8:10-15 he says, “fear God who does not punish the wicked.” Here *Qohelet* finds that the wicked people will be honoured when they die. He sees this as

a way of encouraging people to be wicked because there is no punishment. His next statement seems contradictory in (Eccl 8:12b-13) when he says those who fear God it shall be well with them whereas it shall not be well for the wicked. However, it is his theology here that contradicts his experience but his experience overwhelms his theology.

In Ecclesiastes 12:8-14, it is now the frame narrator speaking again and he says, “fear God, obey his commandments, and live in the light of the coming judgement.” Here the frame narrator is urging his son to fear God. He speaks of *Qohelet* being a wise man and about his experiences as a way to show his son that, “an under the sun perspective on life leads to *Qohelet’s* sad conclusion” (Longman III 2015:20). The frame narrator is using the phrase in a different way than *Qohelet*. Here the phrase is used “in conjunction with the further injunction to obedience, specifically obedience to the law and living in the light of the future judgment of God” (Longman III 2015:20). And it is here that we find the use of the phrase the same as in Proverbs. The frame narrator encourages his son to keep a good relationship with God characterised by submission and keeping of his law. And he is to live his life knowing God will judge the good and the bad and that when one lives a life of submission and reverence, there is no longer restrictions to an under the sun life view (Longman III 2015:20-21).

## **2.4 Synthesis**

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter’s main focus is looking at the book of Ecclesiastes so as to help the young people now to live better lives with more wisdom. “The fear of God . . . is not only the beginning of wisdom; it is also the beginning of a purposeful life” (Eaton 1983:48). *Qohelet’s* wisdom was sometimes his presupposition to judge everything positive or negative. Dell (2020:128) states:

“The conclusion of the book, however, does not put the frame narrator against *Qohelet*, but rather places *Qohelet’s* flesh-and-blood struggles into their larger and theologically ultimate context and perspective. *Qohelet* was indeed was in his observations, but the frame narrator encourages his readers to view those observations in view of a broader perspective”

*Qohelet* made observations about a number of things in Ecclesiastes mentioned above including politics, time, happiness, death life and the fear of God among others. Having considered the other topics in the book of Ecclesiastes, the existing literature looks at Ecclesiastes from different angles from where this research focuses. Though

different all the topics covered in this research in one way or another helps to understand Ecclesiastes better and will aid in further research for this paper as they affect the life of youth every day. Politics, death and life, the pursuit of happiness are on top of the list of things that affect young people every day. There however are a few commentaries that see Ecclesiastes as a book that reflects on issues affecting the youth today. They see Ecclesiastes as a book written with the future in mind and can be used to resolve current issues as young people are struggling with the same things that *Qohelet* struggled with.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DIACHRONIC ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Traditionalists have always pointed to Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes, however in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries refuting voices regarding Solomonic authorship began to appear. It then became more common in the eighteenth and nineteenth century among critics as well as evangelical Old Testament scholars and among them was Hengstenberg, Delitzsch and Moses Stuart (Rogland 2021:103). The main purpose of this chapter is to focus on the diachronic analysis of Ecclesiastes beginning with authorship and linguistic background.

#### **3.2. Authorship and linguistic background**

Ecclesiastes is seen as the most mysterious book of the Old Testament, “scholars still do not agree about its provenance, language, literary genre, unity, or overall message” (Kugel 1996:258). There are a number of arguments when it comes to the authorship of Ecclesiastes, with suggestions from Solomon, sages, and many other writers or editors. This has led to indications that the book of Ecclesiastes is contradictory. “History of research regarding the contradictions and therefore the authorship of the text has been guided largely by historical-critical questions with the same forays into literal-critical methods” (Koosed 2006:2).

Ecclesiastes opens with the following statement, “the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” Ecclesiastes 1:1. The book is “the words of *Qohelet*, a descriptive title. He is also called a wise man in Ecclesiastes 12:9 and by looking at other biblical texts (cf Ezr 2:55,57; Neh 7:59) suggests that it is an office or a teacher who gathered people together to teach them (Estes 2005:271). There was no immediate son of David who was king, except Solomon. Harrison (2004:1073)

suggests that the interpretation of the word *kahal* is where interpretation of the author of Ecclesiastes heavily lies. If *kahal* is interpreted as king, then Qoheleth would appear to be a substitute for Solomon. However if *kahal* is translated as “counsellor,” then *Qohelet* would be the author who decides to remain anonymous and did not impersonate Solomon. Instead the author “presented an excursus upon the futility of existence, a theme that may well have occupied the mind of the historic Solomon towards the close of his life” (Harrison 2004:1073).

The name of the book in the Hebrew Bible is *Qohelet*, קהלת. It relates to the term קהל meaning “assembly” and therefore its Greek name *Εκκλησιαστος* meaning “assembly man” rendering it the translation “the Preacher or Speaker” in some other translations. Some scholars believe *Qohelet* is a title or office, “a supposition supported by the use of this term with the definite article in Ecclesiastes 12:8, and possibly 7:27, while other scholars believe that is it a proper name or nickname of an actual figure or as wisdom personified, a walking assembly of wise sayings” (Kugel 1996:258).

The English title of the book “Ecclesiastes” was adopted from the Vulgate and originally from the LXX *εκκλησιαστος*. In Hebrew the title read “The Words of *Qoheleth*, the son of David, king in Jerusalem,” or simply “*Qohelet*” (Harrison 2004:1072). The term Qoheleth does not appear anywhere else in the Bible apart from the seven times it appears in Ecclesiastes. “It is possible that it is the feminine singular *Qal* active participle of the verb (קהל), which perhaps carries the basic meaning of “assembling.” The relationship to the masculine noun (קהל), “assembly,” appears to have influenced the LXX designation, which means “one who participates in a popular assembly.” Jerome interpreted this in Latin by the use of the term *concionator*, or “speaker before an assembly,” and it was from this that the English concept of “Preacher” was derived (Harrison 2004:1072).

The linguistic characteristics of the book are Aramaic dominance, pointing to a time after the Persian Empire came to dominate the Palestinian world around sixth century B.C (Horne 2003:375). The book’s language point to a time when Aramaic had a huge influence on spoken Hebrew, therefore chances are that the book was written in Hebrew but the author was familiar with Aramaic and probably used it every day (Harrison 1969:1078). Several linguistic indicators in Ecclesiastes suggest a post-exilic date. This is due to the increased use of the vowels which was developed in

exilic and post-exilic periods. The words “*pardes* meaning ‘garden’ (Eccl 2:5) and *pitgam* meaning ‘sentence’ (Eccl 8:11) suggest Persian influenced Hebrew. Persian loan words only exist in books that are demonstrably post exilic which are Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles and Esther (Enns 2008:123-24). Despite there being doubt on the linguistic background, traditionalists are sticking with Solomon as author.

### **3.3 Traditional view on Solomonic authorship**

Traditionally there was a general consensus that Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon. A conclusion reached due to the opening statement, “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Eccl 1:1). A few allusions in the book are appropriate to Solomonic authorship, such as the author’s wisdom Ecclesiastes 1:16, his interest in proverbs Eccl 12:9 cf; 1Ki 4:32, and his building projects Ecclesiastes 2:4-11 (Douglas & Tenney 2011:384). Estes (2005:272) writes that “there is internal evidence consistent with Solomon as author although it falls short of indubitable proof.” Chapters one and two shows intentions of Solomonic authorship Ecclesiastes 1:1, the wisdom the author possesses (Eccl 1:16), pleasure (Eccl 2:3), extensive building activities (Eccl 2:4-6), and a lot of wealth (Eaton 1983:23). Throughout “the rest of the book, the recurrent themes of wisdom and the fear of God, and the frequent use of maxims Ecclesiastes 10:8-18 invite comparisons to Proverbs” (Estes 2005:272).

The author of the book does not indicate a real name, but uses a pseudonym and is referred to as *Qohelet* also translated as the ‘Preacher’. As the author is presented as the king in Jerusalem many minds run to Solomon as the obvious author. This is known as the “Solomonic guise” which is a part of a royal fiction that gives the book both an allusive and ambiguous character” (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:193). Traditionalists seem to think that “*Qohelet* is a nickname for Solomon since the root of the name is found in 1 Kings 8 when Solomon gathers the people at the dedication of the temple....he also identifies himself as the son of David” (Dillard & Longman III 1994:248).

Traditionalists believe that because of the above mentioned statements, Ecclesiastes was written by none other than Solomon. This is also due to Solomon’s rapport on wisdom. Since Solomon fell into apostasy there was not much known about his repentance. Therefore traditionalists also assume that Ecclesiastes is used to fill out the story of his life. The fact that “so much profound and godly wisdom originates with

a man who eventually apostatized is too much for some, and so early tradition rose that Ecclesiastes is the writing of repentant and old Solomon, showing the evils of his apostasy” (Dillard & Longman III 1994:248). The statement about leaders being corrupt (Eccl 3:16; 5:8) shows that the author does not have authority to make these injustices right (Estes 2005:272). Though the evidence provided by the book is not totally pointing to Solomonic authorship, it kind of establishes a basis for putting the Solomonic authorship of the book into consideration (Estes 2005:273). The book does not explicitly name Solomon as its author, leading to many scholars disputing Solomonic authorship. Despite the adherence to Solomonic authorship, there are arguments against Solomonic authorship,

### **3.4 Arguments against Solomonic authorship**

A number of authors do not agree with the Solomonic authorship. They raise a few arguments among which are the language and style. The book has received a fair share of critical reviews by scholars (Dillard & Longman III 1994:248). There is no consistency of Solomonic authorship in Ecclesiastes as seen in 1:1,12 where Solomon is assumed to be the author and in Ecclesiastes 12:9, where the narrator describes the author as a teacher, and professional sage, not a king. As seen in Ecclesiastes 1:2-2:26, the royal imagery *persona* never occurs again throughout the book. There is no explicit claim to Solomonic authorship in Ecclesiastes, and Harrison suggests that if the book was really to be presented as a work of Solomon, instead of using Qoheleth the author would have used Solomon directly as was done with other pseudepigraphic literature (Harrison 2004:1074).

The interpretation of king in this text shows that the writer was no longer in this regal office, which never applied to Solomon at any time. There is no Solomonic claim in the book as seen in Song 1:1 and Proverbs 1:1 (Eaton 1994:609). Ecclesiastes 1:3-12:8 consists of a central core of first person accounts. These texts are “surrounded by third person reflection upon the content and/or the person offering these accounts (Eccl 1:1,2; 12:8,9-14).” The different voices used in the book are one of the main reasons for the hypothesis regarding authorship (Horne 2003:371). Some scholars indicate that there are contradictions in the book. However, Horne (2003:372) suggests that the contradictions in the book are a reflection of “a real world the sage is seeking to explain

and the truth sought out stands as the only contradictory claims about reality are considered at face value and not merely glossed over.”

Ecclesiastes is not seen as a literary unit; among them is Voltz who held on to the thought that there were theological interpolations made by a later editor or scribe. Other scholars say Ecclesiastes is a literary unit but it contains internal contradictions and that it was edited by someone else (Harrison 2004:1079-80). In 1898 one author divided the book into nine different sources allude the basic document to a philosopher under Greek influence and then a later supplement by a Sadducean Epicurean and a Jew who interpolated the sections on divine judgement. He was convinced that at least three people wrote the epilogue. However scholars did not agree to this view saying such a small work like Ecclesiastes could not have been written by so many people (Harrison 2004:1080). There are scholars that ascribe to the idea that Qoheleth is not someone's name but a pseudonym that was used for reasons still unknown to readers (Enns 2008:123). Williams (1987:276), writes:

“The title is a feminine participle, a form of this root that occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament. The odd use of the feminine gender, together with the fact that the term is associated with Solomon (though without naming him), suggests the author wanted his work to be recognized as part of Israel's Wisdom tradition but not taken literally as the wisdom of Solomon”

Scholars indicated that the book of Ecclesiastes is a literary work or work of different *personas*. Representing this school of thought Williams (1987:279) writes that the *personas* in Ecclesiastes are three: The first *persona* being the narrator presenting *Qohelet* the second, *Qohelet* as the one with the narrating voice; and the third, *Qohelet* the experiencing subject. Habtu (2006:1770) writes, many scholars are convinced that Ecclesiastes is a work of many writers or editors. Some even dare to indicate 9 writers or editors. They allude some sections to *Qohelet*, others to a pious man and others to a wise man with *Qohelet* being the main writer who is responsible for the pessimistic or rebellious overtones. The pious man comes in with his orthodox interpolations to impede the unorthodox view of *Qohelet*. And last, but not least, the wise man that comes in as per tradition with maxims and proverbs. However, there are scholars who ascribe it to the work of one author. Linguistically, social-culturally and theologically

“the book reflects a much later time period than the age of the Solomonic Empire.” This is a conclusion scholars came to after considering extra-biblical documents as well as historical and cultural characteristics of the late post-exilic period (Horne 2003:374). This probes searching into the historical background to be more informed

### **3.5 Historical Background**

Horne (2003:373) advocates that all biblical books have external influences of other traditions, as also seen in Ecclesiastes. It is quite obvious “there are parallels both in *genre* and content with materials from non-Jewish traditions... The question of the authorship of Ecclesiastes is intertwined with debates over its date and historical setting” (Estes 2005:273). The title of the book was adopted from the Vulgate and originally from the LXX. In Hebrew the title reads “the words of Qohelet” (Harrison 2004:1074). Similarities to Ecclesiastes are evident in Mesopotamian texts, “Dialogue of Pessimism”, and the Gilgamesh Epic, in Egyptian texts “the instruction of Hordeef” and “The instruction for king Merika-re” (Horne 2003:374).

Klingbeil (2008:133) writes, “Statements in the Epic of Gilgamesh easily find counterparts in verses from Ecclesiastes.” Ecclesiastes is a close parallel to the Epic of Gilgamesh on a few things, Dolanksy 2021:1:

“Gilgamesh advises Enkidu that mankind can number his days. Whatever he may achieve, it is only wind. He also persuaded Enkidu that two are stronger than one. Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 seems to be a direct quote of Siduri’s advice to Gilgamesh on how to deal with his existential angst: When the gods created mankind, they appointed death for mankind, kept life eternal in their own hands. So Gilgamesh let your stomach be full, day and night enjoy yourself in every way,....let your wife enjoy herself in your lap”

The Epic of Gilgamesh seems to have “a parallel example which allows us to trace a direct literary dependence of *Qohelet* on an extra-biblical source” (Samet 2016:376). Grimme noticed remarkable similarities between Ecclesiastes and the Epic of Gilgamesh where the mysterious alewife Siduri responds when Gilgamesh told her about his journey

“You Gilgamesh, let your belly be full; Keep enjoying yourself day and night. Every day make merry, Dance and play day and night! Let your cloth

be clean. Let your head be washed, may you be bathed in water! Gaze on the little one who holds your hand! Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace! Such is the destiny [of mortal man]" (Samet 2016:376)

The parallel is found in Ecclesiastes 9:7-9

"Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Always let your garments be white; let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun"

This similarity is one of three that are assumed to be parallels of Ecclesiastes and the Epic of Gilgamesh. However there are about three known scripts on the Epic of Gilgamesh and it is not known which exact one the author used or read before he wrote the book. However in light of the above, Samet (2016:389) notes, "extra-biblical sources can teach us a great deal about the biblical world, including its historical setting, but the issue of dating should be dealt with using a more reliable methodology."

### 3.5.1 Date of authorship

Similarly, the date of authorship is based on comparisons to the historical context which was mainly the culture and historical context of the post-exilic period (Horne 2003:372). The feature of "grammar, syntax and vocabulary are not paralleled elsewhere in the Old Testament" (Kugel 1996:259). There are a number of hypotheses regarding the language in which the book of Ecclesiastes was written. They range from the book being written in a poor Aramaic translation, to the language being close to Phoenician which in itself is a dialect close to Hebrew. However scholars rejected these hypotheses and most agree that the language is a late brand of the Hebrew with other Northern languages as other post-exilic writings (Kugel 1996:259).

The book of Ecclesiastes in its interpretive history "has been characterised as being hedonistic Ecclesiastes 2:24, fatalistic 3:16-22 and it presents a pessimistic view of life apart from God" (Douglas & Tenney 2011:384). Solomon in tenth century B.C, near Eastern wisdom, writings in Sumer, Babylon and Egypt parallel with Ecclesiastes. The post-exilic date of authorship is indicated by the similarities to Aramaic, but this could also be linked to Phoenicia and Syria maintained by Solomon during his reign

(Harrison 1969:1075). The most common date of authorship among scholars is the third century B.C (Estes 2005:273). The economic and social background of the book, call for a later date of authorship. The book “reflects a time of misery Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 and decline for Israel Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, when injustice and violence were rampant Ecclesiastes 4:1-3, and normal incentives for living appeared absent Ecclesiastes 7:1 (Harrison 1969:1075). Scholars assign Ecclesiastes to a post exilic date but there are differences as to the exact date of authorship. “Ecclesiastes appears to have been well known to the author of Ecclesiasticus, who compiled his work prior to the Maccabean period proper, and the several fragments of Qoheleth found in 4Q and dated in the late second century B.C., makes a period of composition later than the third century B.C. (Harrison 1969:1077). The content in the book alludes to the commercial industry of the time and all the other daily pursuits (Kugel 1996:259).

The most held position regarding the date of authorship for Ecclesiastes is during the Hellenistic period, during Ptolemies control. This puts the date of authorship in the third century B.C. On the other hand those who are of the consensus that Solomon wrote the book dates the book the tenth Century B.C (940 B.C), during the last years of Solomon when he had repented after his apostasy (Dillard & Longman 1994:248; cf Douglas & Tenney 2011:384). Besides its own culture, Israel was influenced by the culture and history of its neighbours,

### 3.5.2 Cultic context

So, Klingbeil (2008:132) says, no text is written without a worldview, background or influences from “culture, language, education, religious persuasion, economic factors and political influence..., or other literary productions from surrounding cultures”. Ecclesiastes “presupposes a way of looking at the world that was characteristic of ancient Israelite wisdom literature, and to a great extent, of all ancient Near Eastern Wisdom literature” (Williams 1987:263). There are similarities in ancient wisdom, religion or traditions which points to similarities in wisdom traditions or shared sources (Klingbeil 2008:133).

From ancient world studies, one can discover that every culture has its own literature, worship, politics, languages and customs. However, a closer look shows you that these are most likely to have parallels with neighbouring countries. Like it is with all the countries, it was so with ancient Israel and her neighbours. Israel and her



neighbours had their customs influencing one another, “particularly in their study of wisdom.” However Israel’s wisdom was different as “it was inspired by Yahweh’s unique identity as the one Creator and ruler of all reality” (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:32).

In the Ancient Near Eastern world gods, kings, creation and wisdom “were woven together into a single fabric.” In this Near Eastern world they had symbols which signified a reality way larger than its concrete meaning. Egypt had strong ties between the natural and the religious world order. They believed that everything moved back and forth through substances. They believed one can be a god, or a mountain. They also had *Ra* as the god of the sun, father of lesser gods and god of justice. In Egypt *Ma’at* was lady wisdom a similarity to biblical wisdom in Proverbs. Egyptians also had hymns they sang to their gods, to Pharaoh, the sun and Nile (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:38). Their style of writing was called “pessimism literature” and Ecclesiastes is the only biblical book close to that writing style which is a Mesopotamian and Egyptian tradition which dates to at least 2000 B.C. However on light of the pessimism found in Ecclesiastes, it is pessimism with a difference. All the other pessimist writings seem to conclude that suicide is the only answer to life problems. On the other hand, “Ecclesiastes holds forth the possibility of joy, faith and assurance of God’s goodness” (Eaton 1994:609).

Mesopotamia had three gods who emerged out of chaos; that is the absence of an emphatic concern regarding creation. These three gods were, “Anu, the most supreme god of the sky, Enlil, the god of the storm, and Enki, the god of water and creativity” (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:40). There are similarities found in Ecclesiastes and the Epic of Gilgamesh. The Epic of Gilgamesh also speaks about death and the days of man being numbered. It also speaks about eating and being merry during ones’ life (Eccl 8:15). There are similar thoughts to *Siduri* panting to the transient nature of humanity and showing a *carpe diem* motif (Klingbeil 2008:134).

Syrian history and Ugaritic religious practice seem to have reflected more closely to Israelite power structures, and a number of common religious practices “including importance of prescriptive and descriptive ritual texts, festival calendars, seven-day periods, high priestly anointing rites” (Klingbeil 2008:135). The frequent use of the phrase under the sun has been understood as a hint to Phoenician solar religion

(*Azize*), which may have been used in a polemical sense against known (non-Israelite) theological concepts- “a tendency found in other biblical material as well” (Klingbeil 2008:135). Regarding Greece and the Aegean there is conflict around Hellenistic influence on Ecclesiastes. Those who date Ecclesiastes in the third century B.C believe in Hellenistic influence, whereas those who date it earlier do not consider Hellenistic influence as it is a postexilic influence (Klingbeil 2008:135). Besides the linguistic background, the worldview of the period in which the book was written has to be taken into consideration.

### **3.6 Synthesis**

In summation, the book of Ecclesiastes still remains the most enigmatic book among scholars. Though the traditionalists still hold on to the idea that Solomon is the author, a large number of scholars, from the time of Luther have questioned Solomonic authorship. These scholars hang onto the notion that Solomon just serves as a literary representation of the embodiment of wisdom (Douglas & Tenney 2011:384). Though the author is not exactly known, *Qohelet* reflects on the great question that does occupy thinkers of every generation: the meaning of life, the unfairness of fate, the inevitability of death...” (Estes 2005:273; c.f Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:188).

The date of authorship for Ecclesiastes still debated among scholars. Estes (2005:276) shies away from suggesting any specific date in light of the linguistic and historical evidence. He continues to say “the general ethos of the time that it reflects certainly is discernible, but to be more precise than that is to move into speculation that cannot be substantiated by specific data.” However, as mentioned above, the most likely date of authorship for Ecclesiastes is post-exilic around the third century.

Last of all, instead of focusing on the internal inconsistencies found in the book, there is need to realise that “the contradictions in Ecclesiastes are the key to discerning the message” (Enns 2008:121). The inclusion of Ecclesiastes in the biblical canon in spite of the complexities surrounding the book, ultimately “serves as a reminder that life itself is complex and not amenable to simple answers” (Longman III 2008:148).

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SYNCHRONIC ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

Both the Hebrew and Christian faith have always provided a certain margin that a man's faith has to be within. Although "the Hebrew-Christian tradition has required faith of its adherents, it has recognized that life and faith have their high and low altitudes, and sometimes out of doubt and scepticism faith is born and nourished" (Bullock 1988:210). Dell (2013:11), "Ecclesiastes is regarded as wisdom at its limit in the way it provides a critique of the wisdom tradition," despite this notion the majority of scholars classify the book as wisdom literature. Though it is said to be the work of

a wise man the epilogue of Ecclesiastes can clearly show that at the end of it, man needs God to lead a fulfilling life. The research methodology proposed for this study is a detailed exegetical and literature study of Ecclesiastes 12:1-2 and 13-14 and referral of other texts from Ecclesiastes to extrapolate the fundamental principles to be formulated from the book. Gorman (2009:15-17) extensively describes this process and also gives three basic approaches which are synchronic, diachronic and existential. In this study there will be an overlap of the synchronic and diachronic as the historical and socio-political contexts in which the texts come to life and in the kind of literature the texts are. This research is going to follow the six elements of exegesis as outlined by Gorman which are; survey, contextual analysis, formal analysis, detailed analysis of the text, synthesis and finally reflection: theological interpretation (Gorman 2009:177-178).

#### 4.1.1 Ecclesiastes 12:1-2, 13-14, Hebrew

אוֹזְכֹר, אֶת-בוֹרְאֵיךָ, בְּיָמֶיךָ, בְּחוֹרְתֶיךָ: עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָבֹאוּ, יָמֵי הַרְעָה, וְהִגִּיעוּ שָׁנִים, אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אִין-לִי בָהֶם חֶפֶץ.

בְּעַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִחַשְׁדָּה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, וְהָאוֹר, וְהַיָּרֵחַ, וְהַכּוֹכָבִים; וְשָׁבוּ הָעָבִים, אַחֲרֵי הַגֶּשֶׁם.

יִגְדַּבְּרָה, הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע: אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים יִרְאֵהוּ וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר, כִּי-זֶה כָּל-הָאָדָם.

יִדְבְּרֵנִי, אֶת-כָּל-מַעֲשֵׂהָ, הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֹא בְּמִשְׁפָּט, עַל כָּל-נֹעֲלָם: אִם-טוֹב, וְאִם-רָע. ש

#### 4.1.2 Translation

1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them";

<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain,

<sup>13</sup> The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

<sup>14</sup> For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

## **4.2. Survey and contextual analysis**

The book of Ecclesiastes is placed among the five scrolls (*Megilloth*) in the Hebrew tradition. In the Bible it is placed with wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs). Scholars who attribute Ecclesiastes as written by Solomon are of the notion that Ecclesiastes got into the biblical canon because of its tie to Solomon. The scepticism and contradictions found in the book were the reasons for its difficulty into being added into the biblical canon (Lasor et al 1982:586). Other scholars say it is the final sentences of the book that made it easier for its addition in the canon. The most accurate date of authorship is post-exilic because of a few Persian words found in the book and some Aramaic words which show influence of Aramaic on the Hebrew forms (McKenzie & Kaltner 2007:320,323). Ecclesiastes is to be used as scripture along with the other biblical books and “its authoritative role lies in its function within the larger context” (Childs 1979:588). Ecclesiastes plays a critical role in the wisdom literature and it is not to be seen as an independent book. Though scholars remain divided on the theological contribution of the book it functions as a critical corrective, just like James is in the New Testament (Childs 1979:588).

## **4.3. Genre**

The *genre* of Ecclesiastes is also debated as scholars categorise it differently, though it is unanimously included in the category of wisdom literature. Ecclesiastes has been categorised as pessimism literature, and as an Akkadian *genre* identified as fictional royal autobiography (Wright 1991:1147). The book is generally comprised of prose and poetry. There are proverbs, instructions, example stories and reflection (Shepherd 2008:263). I stand with the notion that the book is wisdom literature despite all the other different categories. Proverbs is “a collection of short wisdom sayings, Psalms a collection of songs, Ecclesiastes is a collection of a variety of literary types such as

poetry, narrative, proverbial sayings, and brief meditations” (Arnold & Beyer 1999:327).

#### **4.4. Unity of the book**

There are questions regarding the unity of the book of Ecclesiastes. The book has got unique content, “it takes the form of reflection, confessions, maxims, and meditations of various kinds, almost always put in autobiographical form” (Soggin 1989:462). The unity of Ecclesiastes is not one that is easy to analyze. There have been arguments regarding the unity of Ecclesiastes, “in the latter half of the twentieth century the consensus moved toward affirming its unity, although the great exception remains, the epilogue generally seen as an addition of a later editor or editors” (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:189). The book is divided into three parts, a short prologue (1:1-11), long monologue (1:12-12:8) and a brief epilogue (12:8-14) (Dillard & Longman III 1994:250). Ecclesiastes is to be read as a literary whole by identifying the main voices and explore their relationships. Therefore, by following the main voices that *Qohelet* is introduced by a narrator in 1:1-11 and the epilogue in 12:8-14 (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:189). Though some scholars have seen Ecclesiastes as a collection of different fragments, these fragments were reconstructed as an organic unity with a marked artistic and logical sense” (Soggin 1989:463).

As seen in the book of Proverbs, *Qohelet* often quotes proverbs which was probably composed by the author himself. Williams (1987:278) suggests that *Qohelet’s* style and outlook may have been influenced by Hellenistic culture of the third century B.C. to a certain extent and the author’s outlook on immortality of the soul resembles that of the Greek. The author also “uses poetic parallelism, even when writing rhythmic prose rather than verse.” *Qohelet* also quotes proverbs in his writing which he could probably have been self composed, as in Ecclesiastes 1:15,18, “what is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted... for in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow” (Williams 1987:277). In Ecclesiastes, “whole stretches of the book are written in aphoristic style, and *Qohelet* thematizes wisdom from several angles” (Grillo 2016:195). The wisdom found the book is experiential, as it is written through *Qohelet’s* experience.

#### **4.5 Form/ structure and setting**

Ecclesiastes 12:1-2 is part of 11:7 to 12:1-8 which is seen as a literary unit. Of this literary unit Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 is seen as a speech, or address concerning life and death directed to the youth. It is part of a poem and is an instruction to the youth which urges them to enjoy life and ends with old age and death. The passage begins with an imperative and develops with three before clauses in verses 1, 2 and 6. The language of verse 2 to 6 is symbolical as he uses different metaphors to describe the reality of old age and death. In Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 is seen as an addition to the book by some scholars, whereas other scholars say it is a part of the book and no editor or sage added it later. It is referred to as the epilogue of the book. Verse 13-14 is a command to fear the Lord (Murphy 1992:114,124).

#### **4.6. Detailed analysis**

This is a careful scrutiny of “every word, phrase, allusion, grammar point, and syntactical feature in the text” (Gorman 2009:101).

##### **4.6.1 Introduction**

After narrating his experiences, the preacher closes his sermon with what is likely to be his best impressions, powerful enough and lasting upon his hearers passed down to those listening so they can decipher the meaning of life. Throughout the book *Qohelet* admonishes his readers to enjoy life and be content with themselves as a way of getting meaning for life, which he himself failed to get on his own endeavours (Enns 2008:127). The main theme that is seen in the book is that life is “הבל, (*hebel*) meaning vapour, breath, vanity” (Brown 2014:210), and this is used thirty-eight times in the book. In Ecclesiastes *hebel* refers to “anything that is superficial, ephemeral, insubstantial, incomprehensible, enigmatic, inconsistent, or contradictory” (Estes 2005:281).

In 7:13-22 *Qohelet*'s results on the vanity of life surfaces strongly and leads him to a reflection in 7:23-29 which he looks back on his journey. While seeking wisdom he met dame folly and the irony of his journey comes into full view at this point. In Ecclesiastes 7:13, he relates what is wrong with the world, saying that God has made it crooked, but by Ecclesiastes 7:29 the problem is revealed to be not God, but humankind (Bartholomew & O'Dowd 2011:190).

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 has been interpreted in three ways by scholars, that is, allegorically, literally and symbolically. Allegory takes *Qohelet* to be “describing a house or village, but the objects and activities represent old age. A symbolic reading sees something larger depicted through the literal portrayal of death.” A literal reading accepts the metaphorical nature of this section but suggest that death and not just old age is primarily in focus (Bartholomew 2009:346-347).

Ecclesiastes 12:8-14 has been seen as a later addition to the book, done by an epilogist or by a glossator. Most scholars do not concur that this was initially part of the book especially verse 13-14 where the author speaks about the fear of God, obeying his commandments and the future judgment. It is said to have been added so the book could be a part of the biblical canon.

#### 4.6.2 A call to remember

*Remember also your creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them (ESV).*

Throughout the book *Qohelet* is an advocate for embracing the joys of life while there is still time to do so. From chapter 11:9, he turns to a young man reminding him that he has short time on earth, but because he is still young he should take the opportunity to enjoy life and make the most of the time he still has. This he speaks in view of old age and death which he goes on to look at in 12:2-7. Before the call for a commitment to the creator *Qohelet* urges the young men to pursue joy and allow his heart to do good (Eccl 11:9-10). The young man is urged to follow his heart and eyes and make the most of it. This was seen as an advocating to hedonism since *Qohelet* is encouraging the young man to follow the desires of his heart. While telling the young man to enjoy his life, *Qohelet* does not shy away from telling him that this will not go without judgment. The young man will be held accountable for his actions. Though being encouraged to enjoy the young man is also warned that there are boundaries to be followed. Having warned the young man, *Qohelet* moves on to tell him that now is the time to remember the creator before the dark days come. *Qohelet* calls for a decision and commitment, and at the heart of this commitment is not anticipating to know or have all information on God’s plans, or expecting a happy life without any problems (Keddie 2002:310).



The call to remember comes with the creator as the object. The creator who is to be remembered is- בּוֹרְאֵיךְ “shape, fashion, create, always of divine activity with account to individual in Eccl 12:1” (Brown et al 1979:135). Plural form “indicated by the *yod*, can be explained as a plural of majesty” (Crenshaw 1987:184). It also suggested that this could be an emendation to words that would make allusion to one’s wife or the grave (Wright 1991:1194). זָכַר meaning to name, remember, mention, take to court, profess, make known, praise” (Brown et al 1979:271). The root is *zakar* to remember with the human subject is a remembrance has got a change that affects present feeling or provokes thought or experience (Davies 1962:344 cf Eising 1980:69). *Qohelet* is not blinding leading the young man, but opening his eyes so he can see that there is a God who made him and expects him to live meaningfully (Provan 2001:212).

On the call to remember, *Qohelet* is urging the youth that they need to remember their creator while they still have the time to do so. *Qohelet* sees young age as a time of light and old age as a time of darkness. The young man is being admonished to remember his creator while still young because, he still has got a bit of time to make the most of young age. The passage starts without any metaphorical statements as a way of being clear to the reader on what is to follow. The fun and energy of youth fades into a lack of enthusiasm for life. The author gives a time frame of when it is best to remember the creator. *Qohelet* sees youth בְּחֹרֵתֶיךָ youth is an abstract noun, it is referred to as a time of beyond infancy, before the prime age, a time when one is filled with vigour and opportunity” (Blank 1962:925).- it is a preposition applied to *time*.

“יָמֶיךָ meaning day, daylight, the time of daylight from sunrise to sunset as opposite of night” (DeVries 1962:783 cf Brown et al). The days here refers to the years the youth have before old age catches up on them. This is a general statement, but as people grow older there are traces of old age in everyone even though it differs from individual to individual. The young man is told to remember the creator while they still have time because young age does not last forever (Wright 1991:1192).

*Qohelet* abandons the human worldview of life under the sun, instead he broadens the worldview to include God, who is above the sun and above all man. After having tried to prove that one can live life without God, the author has finally come to the realization that it is impossible to do so (Estes 2005:373). In his inclusion of God, he is still making the youth’s job to remember the creator and they are created by God and are his. This

helps to put into perspective how one is supposed to look at life every day. Remembering one's creator in the time of one's youth, is especially important "since old age and death are the supreme frustration and vanity that we experience" (Wright 1991:1192). This is an important appeal to the youth that while death and old age is not upon them yet, to remember God everyday and to live a life in a relationship with him. He urges the young people to honour, seek and enjoy God while they are still young and still have the strength and vigour that comes with young age which fades as you grow older.

*Zakar* (to remember) calls for reflection on *etboreka* (creator). Ogden (1987:17) looks at remembering as an attempt to link the past and the future, while Murphy (1992:117) says remembering is not about visiting the past it is more of paying attention to the end when the spirit goes back to where it came from. However Philips & Hastings (2019:329) says the correct interpretation of remembering is not about recalling the past, but more about the youth not taking the Lord out of their mind at all. It means that the Lord is tattooed in their mind forever so they never forget him at any instance. It is so easy for youth to forget or neglect God and focus on themselves and the now of life, however they are encouraged to keep him on the forefront of everything and all that they do in their lives. *Zakar* is used in Deuteronomy the same way it is in Ecclesiastes, with the meaning "let your whole perspective on life be informed by the view that God is creator of everything. This is precisely what has been missing in *Qohelet's* epistemology, it has all been rooted in himself" (Bartholomew & O'Dowd 2011:204). Youth ought to let God inform their whole perspective of life and not just bits and pieces where they feel stuck and need help. Remember "refers to allowing the notion of God as creator to shape one's view of life and one's handling of life's enigmas now" (Bartholomew 2009:345). The days of youth or old age all belong to God and are not ours, for God created us and we are his created beings.

Creator is the first name of God we see in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 1:1). God is the one who created everything and without him was not anything made that was made, and in him was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:3-4). God as creator is the author and preserver of life and all the enjoyments accompanying life (Poole 1975:304). The title "creator is well chosen, reminding us from earlier passages in the book that He alone sees the pattern of existence as whole" (Kidner 1976:100). Scholars have translated *boreka* differently because they say translating it as creator

is an abrupt appearance in the book of Ecclesiastes as it not translated as us anywhere else in the book. The “plural form is what raises their concern. Some argue that *boreka* should read ‘your pit’ referring to the grave. While other scholars say, it is ill fitting to translate *boreka* as your creator, thereby proposing translating it to ‘your well’ symbolising one’s wife or ‘your pit.’ Another translation possibility is ‘your vigour or your well being.’ Thus *Qohelet* is calling readers to meditate on death during youth” (Longman III 1998:267). Therefore, though many scholars do not agree with the translation of creator, “the theology of God as creator is fundamental to traditional wisdom, and it is implicit in the *carpe diem* passages throughout Ecclesiastes” (Bartholomew 2009:346).

Crenshaw (1987:185) says someone like *Qohelet* probably suggested one’s greatest pleasure, the wife, and ultimate destiny, the grave. He continues to say, “more probably, *Qohelet* urges young people to reflect on the joys of female companionship before old age and death render one incapable of sensual pleasure.” However looking at the text it is highly unlikely *Qohelet* was referring to a wife as he had reached a turning point in his message to focus more on God being the centre of one’s life if they ought to truly enjoy life. Also looking at the text *Qohelet* had reached a point in his teaching where he was urging the young people not to focus on the pleasures of life and finding meaning, but rather on the one who created us and meant for humankind to be in awe of him. Heaster (2018:161) is of the notion that *Qohelet* is saying even if you remember your creator when you are young, it is not going to help when you get older. Even though you believe in the creator death is still a reality for everyone and you will still hate life when you grow older. This puts the appeal to remember the creator to being sceptical as believing in a creator will not save one from death. However what he forgets is that everyone is going to face the earthly death, but those who believe will not die the second death.

Before is used of time, *in not*, i.e. *outside of*<sup>1</sup>. *not* denying objectively. The phrase “*ad aser lo* occurs here and in 12:2,6 is related to the Mishnaic *adsello*” (Crenshaw

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<sup>1</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [\*The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius.\*](#) Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

1987:185). The young man is being encouraged to remember while the days are still good. *Qohelet* reminds the young men that old age will be full of troubles hence, he refers to them as the evil days with evil meaning distressing, calamitous (Eaton 1983:148). The evil days are referred to as a time of physically, morally bad and the undesirable and frustrating things that happen towards the end of one's life in. These may include diseases that come one after another, not being physically able to do all you could do in young age and all the changes that happen in the human body as we age (Grider 2009:455).

The contrast made between the evil days and the years, it seems that the days of youth will pass-by so quickly, while the old age seems like they will last forever. Years used as a division of time; esp. of duration of life<sup>2</sup>. "This was based on the annual cycle movement of the sun, moon, and stars, planting and harvesting" (Claisse-Walford 2000:1403). Once you reach a certain age of youth, old age will start drawing in bit by bit until one is fully referred to as old. The evil days are full of many life challenges, are days in no pleasure will be found meaning, "I find nothing in them that corresponds with my will and purpose" (Robinson 2007:859). This means they do not find any gratification with their life anymore and there ultimately is nothing that delights the anymore. There is no longer satisfaction with life as it used to be before. Proverbs 10:5 reads, "he who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame." "There is an ambiguity about the translation of this phrase, depending on how one interprets the suffix bahem" (Seow 1997:352). I is a pronoun. Have –is a preposition. No pleasure-  $\gamma\eta\eta$  root is *hps* with etymology obscure as it is a relatively late word and limited to west Semitic. There are a number of meanings attributed to this word from protection, a joyous affirmative desire, have pleasure in the northwest Semitic. In Ecclesiastes transaction or project was most preferable to pleasure. This is because evil days one cannot accomplish any projects (Botterweck 1986:93).

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<sup>2</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius.](#) Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

*Qohelet* talks to the young men, but his message is can be used for both the young man and young woman. *Qohelet* is urging the people to do the right thing. God has given them good gifts to enjoy and they need to enjoy them the right way. The people are to live “in the right consciousness of death and the preciousness of life” (Treier 2011:223). The people need to live with an active where the object shapes the subject. The message of *Qohelet* though addressed to a young man affects all age groups. People are not supposed to dwell on the past, or the coming demise as if there is no opportunity for change (Treier 2011:223). The people ought to revere God, and give him the honor he deserves. All that God created is good and meaningful, but people did not receive God for who he really is (Provan 2001:220). Coming to the Lord early in life allows one to have pure living and the traps of the world will not capture you. There are a number of things in the world that can trap a young person and being trapped in the carnal of youth damages them mentally, emotionally and spiritually. While some youth may think they are having fun it comes with the price of brokenness. It however is not wise to tuck away God in a neat place until you need him later in life (Phillips and Hastings 2019:330).

This call to remember implies action from the readers to remember for the sake of significantly changing their lives and living in conformity with God’s eternal plan. It is not just for the sake of remembering that there is a creator (Estes 2005:373). It is “a warning against mindless self-indulgence and profligacy during the days of one’s vigour” (Garrett 1993:340). The truth is that men only came into being because of God’s omnipotent and sovereign influence. Therefore we are consecrated to His service. Bridges (1961:284) continues to say, the time that we have for the whole of our lives is not just our time, it is God’s who gives and takes life. Therefore we cannot continue to live on our own terms forgetting the one who gives us life. We ought to give our lives and direct our hopes to the only one who can fulfil our lives and give us true meaning.

Everyone who forgets God falls under his judgment. “It is a commitment to forget the Lord by laying his word and his will to one side. Forgetting the Lord is the other side of living for self” (Keddie 2002:311). To forget the Lord is to be in a state of spiritual death and remembering him is knowing life and having it abundantly. The people that *Qohelet* knew the law of the Lord and the covenant they had with him from the very beginning. They also knew God’s word even though they were ignoring its claims. His

words were directed to the unbelief of God's people. As God's people we need to hear the word of God and those who are oppressed by meaninglessness under the sun and whose life seem to be empty need to remember the only one who can transform their lives from despair and feeling lost and fill them up with meaning and everlasting love (Keddie 2002:311).

As the days of old age are said to be evil days, it is of great importance that we lay up as many graces as we can to sweeten them. Gathering in summer will guard against the old age being evil, instead it will be as it was to Abraham, "a good old age" (Bridges 1961:286). When days of old age come without God, they are indeed evil, of painful weariness and dark foreboding. If one does not lay a solid foundation in youth, "it is an hundred to one odds, that we shall die both poor and wicked" (Bridges 1961:287). However when one calls on the Lord even in their old age, he will indeed hear them and help them through their struggles and he will pardon them from eternal penalty (Phillips & Hastings 2019:330).

The preacher is not trying to scare the reader, but he is making people face the reality of life and encouraging them to anticipate the future and all it brings realistically and be spiritually ready to face what will come. When the days of trouble comes, what is needed is an unshakeable faith in the Saviour, for the outward man crumbles away, but the inward man is being renewed. The faithful "prepares for the future by living out of the future, he lives each day in terms of the unfolding toward him of God's perfect purpose for his future" (Keddie 2002:318). For humankind to be happy, they should not just decide to be cheerful and not focus on discontent. Humankind could not have been made in the image of God, if they were to spend joyous existence without remembering their creator. Someone who can truly rejoice is the one living in their true element of devoting themselves to God and one who returns to the origin and source of their being (Hengstenberg 1998:243). Remembering God as creator is not in contrast with 'let thy heart cheer thee', these go hand in hand because for one to be able to rejoice and put away discontent they should remember their creator (Hengstenberg 1998:244).

*Qohelet's* teaching to the youth was that what keeps them from enjoying God's everyday blessings was being focused on themselves instead of focusing and relying on God completely. Through his experiences he shows that happiness is not about

how much wealth one can accumulate or how well they live. It is all dependant on their obedience and God's will that is achieved in their lives. Though one cannot always have the best of everything they desire to have in life, having God is what brings true meaning to life (Mazzalango 2017:110). The time to remember needs to be imminent before the time runs out.

#### 4.6.3 Before time runs out

*Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain.*

Before speaks of time, *in not*, i.e. *outside of*<sup>3</sup>, and "it suggests moving to another scene beyond the depiction of old age" (Seow 1997:351). It is implied here that once you miss youth, old age comes and then death follows. The sun, the light, the moon and the stars are all marking time: as rising (vb. זָרַח q.v.); setting (vb. בּוֹא); as giving daylight<sup>4</sup> to be darkened by 's judgment<sup>5</sup>. The darkening of the sun is seen as a sign of the end of time (Tsumura 1996:187). This is a common OT imagery that represents the fading capacity of joy (Eaton 1983:148). Light - as diffused in nature, light of day. **2. morning light, dawn, אור הבקר**, light of the morn. **3. light** of the heavenly luminaries; **moonlight&sunlight**<sup>6</sup>. Moon - usually named with sun (a symbol of

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<sup>3</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [\*The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius.\*](#) Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

<sup>4</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [\*The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius.\*](#) Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

<sup>5</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [\*The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius.\*](#) Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

<sup>6</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [\*The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and\*](#)

permanence<sup>7</sup>. Stars –“הַכּוֹכָבִים star, with most likely meaning burning brightly, used to mean the loss of a basic manifestation of the natural order and it is here used to denote old age and life’s winter” (Clements 1995:83).

*Qohelet* uses imagery that is referred to as the unmaking of creation. He describes the culminating of death and uses language that will make the young man see that death is a reality in his future. This is meant to encourage him to remember the creator. He continues on with the allegory of death until verse 8. To be darkened means to become dark and the clouds - properly an *envelope*, i.e. *darkness* (or *density*, 2 Chron. 4:17); specifically a (scud) *cloud*;<sup>8</sup>. “cover the sky and darken the luminaries” (Seow 1997:353). The clouds returning after the rain shows the gloominess of old age and to return means turn back and this seems like it will be the then normal cycle of life.

*Qohelet* here was trying to show the youth that old age after living all your life without God can bring forward bitterness and hopelessness. *Qohelet*’s intention was not to make the youth lose all hope of life, he intended to direct their hope to the one who could walk them in the right direction. From verse 2-5 is metaphorical language interpreted differently by scholars. Some interpret it as old age and death while see it as an eschatological passage as announced by the prophets (Nowell 2013:101 cf Schultz 2012:603). By referring to the days of old age and death, *Qohelet* intended to show humankind that old age and death are inevitable. Therefore before one comes to the end of their life, they need to make a decision to seek wisdom that is greater than this world. Wisdom that can lead them to a place of comfort once death comes. As Wright (1991:1192) says “The rhythm of life is like the rhythm of the year, spring and summer gives place to the clouds of autumn and winter.” As one grows older it is increasingly harder to let of or inhibit troubles and anxieties. Life changes like the seasons of the year. *Qohelet* tells them when they need to make the decision to

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[Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius](#). Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

<sup>7</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius](#). Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

<sup>8</sup> Strong, J. (2020). [כּוֹכָב \(1\)](#). *Strong’s Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*. WORDsearch.



remember the creator. He “clarifies the nature of the days and years that yield no pleasure” (Crenshaw 1987:185).

Youth is seen as a time of dawning light whereas old age is seen as the twilight’s gloom. Youthful days here are contrasted with gloomy cloud-shrouded days, “when all celestial light sources are darkened. This verse is interpreted by some scholars as the day of Lord as announced by the prophets, but a further reading of Eccl 12 indicates the end of one’s life rather than an eschatological meaning (MacArthur 2016:127). Here there is a “partially allegorical portrayal of the debilitating effects of old age, offering a striking contrast to the youthful traits of 11:9-10” (Schultz 2012:603). The metaphor used here shows that the usual daily pattern will be broken as old age comes leading to death. Old age is said to bring with it so many difficulties (Estes 2005:375).

The way he uses the sun shows that *Qohelet* is aware of the time when the “sun will suffer permanent eclipse as one moves closer to the abode of darkness,” as the dimming of the sun affects the stars and the moon (Crenshaw 1987:185). The second ‘*adserlo*’ sets a time frame for remembering; it has to be a hasty decision, before the sun darkens (Ogden 1987:200). In the OT, when adversity was to befall, it is referred to as light darkening and “dark clouds are often used as an image of troubles” (Hengstenberg 1998:245), as seen in Isaiah 5:30, “... and if one looks to the land, behold darkness and distress; and the light is darkened by its clouds.” Old age comes with bodily infirmities, old and blind or one becomes old and lame. Old days come with no pleasure in them, therefore it is better to return to God in our youth and not put it off till we are too old. The return of the clouds after the rain serves as an ominous portent of evil, because usually after the rain clouds disappear and their return is symbolic to an evil day with no escape (Shepherd 2008:357).

A look at someone living in an old age home brought this to life for Keddie (2002:310-319). Such a person has no one left in his life, no home no friends and living in a home with restricted freedom. He could not walk properly anymore, is losing his memory and much of the things he had known and enjoyed was no more. On the other hand, this is rendered as the language of the pending judgment of Yahweh that is to come, and it is like a day of darkness and gloom. The words of *Qohelet* here, is like a recall of what those who are already dead cannot see or experience (Eccl 6:5). The darkening of the sun and the moon is like the diminishing of youthful living (Christianson

2007:226). What one loses physically is a normal under-the-sun cycle of human existence. Therefore people ought to see their life as God's chosen arena of working towards spiritual fruitfulness even beyond physical incapacity. Being cheered and encouraged in old age, has to come from outside personal resources. For example the Scottish climate is used to explain this better as they say, "if you can see the hills, it's going to rain, if you cannot see the hills it's raining" (Keddie 2002:320).

Life is like a sunny day with high expectations that gets shattered by the approach of a storm. Here *Qohelet* uses metaphorical language concerning growing old and dying according to verse 2 to 5. The storm is still in the background and *Qohelet* compares the human body with a house that is slowly deteriorating. "This comparison of the body with a household of slowly deteriorating inhabitants reminds us that as we age, we grow weaker and weaker until we die" (Longman III 2006:328). The days of darkness will be many (Eccl 11:8), but the way to joy in the midst of this darkness (12:2-7) is to remember God as creator" (Bartholomew 2009:346).

#### 4.6.4 The epilogue

The narrator picks up from where *Qohelet* left and draws the book to a close. "The epilogue is a fundamental support of *Qohelet's* observations while at the same time offering a mild corrective" (Enns 2005:126). Here we see *Qohelet's* main theme throughout the book being repeated 'vanity of vanities, all is vanity' (Eccl 12:8). The authors' words are of one who has converted and speaks of the experiences of the vanities of the world and how expecting great thing from this world is but folly. They are the words of a wise man with competent judgement after living his life for his own pleasure and in folly with self-wisdom (Schultz 2012:605). There is a change of voice signals from the first-person to the third-person in chapter 12:8. This is probably to recognize an actual shift in speaker and the epilogist both affirms and critiques *Qohelet's* view and it is not the hypothesis of two glossators (Longman III 1998:274). The "preceding verses Ecclesiastes 12:1-7, offer the book's final and most dramatic illustration of the brevity of life" (Schultz 2012:605).

In verses 13 to 14 the author gives three parts of great significance, "fear God, obey his commands and realize that God will judge us" (Longman III 2006:334). These are greatly significant because they sum up the message of the book. The young man is give a fair warning here after being told to enjoy life to the fullest, that he is not to do

this forgetting there is a creator who put him on this earth for a purpose. These can be summed up as establishing a right relationship with God and it can also be seen as the gospel of justification. Obeying God's commandments is maintaining the relationship in God's way, also known as sanctification. Last remembering God's judgment is a future-oriented or eschatological endeavour (Longman III 2006:334).

#### 4.6.5 Fear God

*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*

The narrator takes over from *Qohelet* and now addresses the closing verses to his son. The narrator acknowledges *Qohelet* as a wise man and goes on to warn him on about the study of many books which will weary the flesh. The end of the matter is a thing about which one speaks<sup>9</sup>. It is a "Closing formula typically placed at the end of a literary corpus" (Seow 1997:390). Can be taken as a nominal sentence (the final word is) or adverbially (by way of a final word). The absence of a definite article before *dabar* is unusual (Murphy 1992:124). *Sop dabar* is used as an emphatic (Longman III 1998:281). All has been heard, can be interpreted as the plural cohortative, let us all hear; it is preferable to translate it as "all is heard" (Murphy 1996:124). Throughout the book *Qohelet's* advice was to live joyfully in reverence of God knowing He will bring everything into judgement.

The son is commanded to fear God and keep his commandments.  $\text{אָרָא}$ ; a Hebrew term meaning "fear, reverence, honour with account to *Elohim*" (Brown et al 1979:431). *stand in awe of*.  $\text{אָרָא}$ ; to fear appears 7 times in Ecclesiastes. In the qal it is translated fear (someone or something). The object of fear here is *Elohim* (Fuhs1990:296). An authoritative word or series of words from God or man expecting obedience on the part of the hearers and readers (Mare 1975:919). This is done in a revering manner by living the way he intended from the beginning. The son is reminded that he has to worship God and be in awe of him and the keeping of the commandments is for all

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<sup>9</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [\*The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius.\*](#) Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

humankind. The father tells his son that the words of *Qohelet* are not primarily for humankind to use to pursue literary and intellectual ends, but to help humankind to live in awe of God (Plantinga-Pauw 2015:209).

*Kol-ha-adam* the Hebrew phrase translated 'for this is the duty of man' is difficult to interpret. Both the LXX and Vg read the traditional Hebrew text, but their rendering is not helpful: 'for this is every man', *kol-ha-adam* means every man, and the juxtaposition with establishes a relationship, such as duty, goal of the like. Others have understood the phrase as 'this is the whole of man' (Murphy 1996:124 cf Navigators 2019:18). The narrator is teaching the son the lessons learnt from *Qohelet*, after having chased everything there was still meaninglessness in *Qohelet's* life. Therefore the greatest pursuit of life should be done in awe of God. The son is being warned not to follow everything that *Qohelet* followed, but rather to follow and chase after the creator to have true meaning and fulfilment. Here all of humankind is included, as it is the duty of everyone to fear God and obey his commandments.

*Kol-ha-adam* translated for this is the duty of man is found thrice in the book of Ecclesiastes 3:13; 5:19; 7:2; and fourteen times in the Old Testament, but do not give any understanding to how it is used in Ecclesiastes. However some authors say when *Qohelet* uses *kol-ha-adam* (for this is the duty of men), he is going back to Genesis (1-2) the creation and death as first encountered in the creation story. The one in Ecclesiastes 12:13 is not to be read on its own but in relation to all the previous occurrences. This is a solution to the issue of humankind in Ecclesiastes. "it seems that *kol-ha-adam* contributes to our understanding of the epilogue as a mild corrective to the teachings of *Qohelet*, by accepting *Qohelet's* observations as wise." It is unlikely that the epilogist is contradicting *Qohelet*. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 puts *Qohelet's* observations in a broader perspective as *kol-ha-adam* is an emphatic phrase here (Enns 2008:128).

When the author speaks about the fear of God, it is not a new concept that he is introducing to the people. The fear of Lord is found in the wisdom literature (Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 1:1;28:8). When the author speaks about the fear of God and obeying his commandments, the focus is shifted from the son and it is seen as the duty of every man. This point to the fact that the obedience of the law applies to everyone and all will be held accountable (Duncan 2017:144). Some modern scholars are of the notion

that *Qohelet* did not believe God revealed his will, so *Qohelet* would not speak of an impending judgement. However, even though man does not know God's total plan he knew enough to be held responsible for his actions (Navigators 2019:19). This is considered *Qohelet's* debate against himself, conflict between what he was taught and his/her observations as all that *Qohelet* are reflections presented in a subjective mode and it was a way of expressing perspective (Duncan 2017:144).

The author summarises the main points made in the book and this summary is especially important since commentators have tried to interpret the book as thoughts of a skeptic. Though the teacher is skeptic at times, to him God is real and has revealed His will to humankind and if not so, humans would not be held liable for what they do. Though humankind does not know the whole plan of God, they however know enough to be liable for their actions as God has revealed Himself to them in a number of ways. Humankind's purpose, actions, secret intentions are all lived in the sight of God and will be brought into light for reward or punishment (Wright 1991:1196-97). The book "ends with an epilogue reasserting both a balanced view of the wisdom and the main point of the book" (Garrett 2009:515). *Qohelet* is about to make his final point, to which everything has been heading; he is saying pay attention and do not get lost now (Keddie 2002:329). Wisdom makes people quicker to listen and slower to speak All has been heard (Eccl 12:13) (Eswine 2014:224).

In Ecclesiastes this fear is closely associated with wise decision making and appropriate behaviour and also "the duration of life and even eternal life, are a part of this vital theme" (Pelt & Kaiser Jr. 1996:531). "Fear the Lord, then, you will do everything well, this is the fear you must have to be saved" (Oden & Wright 2005:284). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov 1:7). The fear one experiences here is not the kind of fear that paralyzes them, it is the fear of one who has been perfected in virtue. Fear God and obey his commandments, "for each person was born for this purpose, that knowing his Creator, he might venerate him with fear, honour and observance of the commandments" (Oden & Wright 2005:284). It is the kind of fear "that puts mankind in their right place and all other fears, hopes and admirations in their place" (Kidner 1976:107).

The fear of God is the realisation of his unchanging power and justice (Eccl 3:14). It delivers from wickedness and self-righteousness (Eccl 7:18) and leads to hatred of sin (Eccl 5:6; 8:12). "Conduct derives from worship. A knowledge of God leads to obedience not vice versa" (Eaton 1983:156). We are not to respond to God as if God is a monster coming to destroy the good in our lives. We ought not to treat God like a criminal we should blackmail for our own safety. The person who does not fear God turns to other things for gain, purpose, explanation and sought after wisdom in the world. "To fear God is set in contrast to the one who enters God's house spouting of dreams and big promises, and these with no follow through" (Eswine 2014:214).

Knowing the Bible does not mean to know God and citing the Bible does not mean communicating God's word. Over the years the Bible has been used in legitimizing things that are wrong, and not supported in the Bible. With phrase 'all has been heard, *Qohelet* was saying, when all is said and done, put God in his place and humankind stand in their rightful place before God. The fear of God denotes that, obedience to God is supposed to be out of love and respect for who he is and what he has done. God loved us first, so humankind ought to return the love he gave them from the beginning (Akin et al 2016:105). After exploring everything there is to life, *Qohelet* realized that all is vanity and lasting value and meaning is only found in a close relationship with God (MacArthur 2016:128).

Our duty as mankind is like that of our neighbour even though we all differ in what we decide to do. However, "no matter who we are, God, his ways, where we are, and all for him, forms the human purpose...consequently fulfilling our whole duty in life, and doing this wisely, disrupts our attempts to go it alone" (Eswine 2014:220). Woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up Eccl 4:11.

"With his message the Preacher is hoping that one who hears his word will believe, convert and leave the unsatisfactory paths that damage life. He hopes to persuade us to recognise that God is the one to whom we must place our trust...In fact even under the sun, with its madness unanswered questions, exceptions, contradictions, and vain striving, the whole purpose or duty of one's life is still God himself" (Eswine 2014:17).

So far all of the Preachers paths came to nothing and he lost himself before he could get within reach of anything eternal and absolute. However this chapter points to what

the author has been missing in all of his searches, God. And here he points to the purpose why mankind was made for, “the Eternal towards whom the eternity in man’s mind was meant to home and gravitate” (Kidner 1796:107). Keddie (2002:331) says, this leads to a number of questions. First, “do you know God? Second, are you keeping his commandments? Third, have you acknowledged your accountability before him? Fourth, will you confess that God is just in all his judgments?” outside of God and reverence of him there is only vanity and meaninglessness. The Preacher hated life and not God, and he does so from a God-centred podium. “like other biblical sages he orients his life and teaching from the vantage point of the fear of the Lord” (Eswine 2014:83).

Reverential respect for God leads to moral integrity maintaining ethical balance while at the same time avoiding the excessive wisdom and self-righteousness and wickedness and folly (Brown 2011:145). Fearing God by keeping his commandments moves him to the centre stage of the whole of living for humankind. A dutiful fear of God is the same as giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what is God’s. Fearing God and being in awe of him means that no fear of divine judgment and no dutiful fear as mentioned above (Perry 2015:155).

#### 4.6.6 God will judge everything

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

The narrator concludes the chapter with the words of *Qohelet*, as he reiterates what is written in Ecclesiastes 11:10 that God will bring everything into judgement. The context was an exhortation for the young man to live fully whilst still capable. This final injunction is used as a reminder of humankind’s finitude and their accountability before God and the boundaries that humanity has. These boundaries complement *Qohelet*’s encouragement to the young men to follow his heart’s desires. This language was used by *Qohelet* to grab the attention of his audience. This was used to epitomize the path of disobedience to God (Duncan 2017:145). The writer meant for his audience to be aware that God will bring everything into the open and he will judge it all accordingly. All that has been done will be revealed and the judgment will make the

low proud and exalt the humble. The judgement is God's glorious restoration of his kingdom and injustice will be exposed whereas suffering will be vindicated.

The concluding verse here shows that, no matter what excuse one has for not walking the path set by God, there are going to be consequences. The judgment of men is bound to be their eternal state. The phrase For God will bring every deed into judgment, a primitive root; to *go* or *come* (in a wide variety of applications):- abide, apply, attain, x be, befall, + besiege. Bring<sup>10</sup> properly the *whole*; hence *all*, *any* or *every* (in the singular only, but often in a plural sense):- (in) all (manner, [ye]), altogether, any (manner), enough, every (one, place, thing), howsoever, as many as, [no-] thing, ought, whatsoever, (the) whole, whoso (-ever).<sup>11</sup> There will be nothing left unrevealed, every deed is an *action* (good or bad); generally a *transaction*; abstract *activity*; by implication a *product*<sup>12</sup>. Into judgment means that properly a *verdict* (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a *sentence* or formal decree (human or [participle] divine *law*, individual or collective), including the act, the place, the suit, the crime, and the penalty; abstract *justice*, including a participle *right*, or *privilege* (statutory or customary)<sup>13</sup>.

The writer is saying that before the judgment seat no stone will be left unturned with every secret thing, meaning that properly the *whole*; hence *all*, *any* or *every*. Every *-the whole of*, to be rendered, however, often in our idiom, to avoid stiffness, *all* or *every*<sup>14</sup>. Secret thing - properly *concealed*, i.e. the *vanishing* point; generally time *out of mind* (past or future), i.e. (practical) *eternity*<sup>15</sup>. The "preposition *al* indicates the basis

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<sup>10</sup> Strong, J. (2020). [בָּאוּ](#). *Strong's Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*. WORDsearch.

<sup>11</sup> Strong, J. (2020). [כָּל, כָּל, כָּל](#). *Strong's Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*. WORDsearch.

<sup>12</sup> Strong, J. (2020). [מַעֲשֵׂה](#). *Strong's Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*. WORDsearch.

<sup>13</sup> Strong, J. (2020). [מִשְׁפָּט](#). *Strong's Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*. WORDsearch.

<sup>14</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius](#). Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

<sup>15</sup> Strong, J. (2020). [עוֹלָם, עוֹלָם](#). *Strong's Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*. WORDsearch.



of divine judgement” (Seow 1997:391). There are good and bad secrets and all will be left out in the open. Whether a secret of *past* time, whether ( $\alpha$ ) in actual fact, or ( $\beta$ ) in an assumed case<sup>16</sup>. Good and bad deeds as well as good and bad thoughts. Good meaning *pleasant, agreeable* to the senses<sup>17</sup>. While bad or evil - *bad* or (as noun) *evil* (natural or moral):- adversity, affliction, bad, calamity, + displeasure (-ure), distress, evil<sup>18</sup>.

*Qohelet* began and ended on a spiritual quest. He began by saying everything is vanity without God and ends with, in the end God will judge everything and everything matters. “The reason why everything matters is because everything in the universe is subject to the final verdict of a righteous God who knows every secret” (Ryken 2010:281). The final words of *Qohelet* are pointed and spiritually ominous. He speaks of the day of reckoning where humankind’s righteousness will be exposed for what exactly it is, filthy, dirty rags (Akin et al 2016:132). *Qohelet* was of the notion that everything happens according to God’s time, he preferred leaving the enigmas of life to God since he could not understand how everything worked (Glenn 2018:525). *Qohelet*’s response to his failed quests for comprehension of the grand scheme has been to propose a way of happiness and meaning that is feasible within the unyielding boundaries placed on mortals” (Duncan 2017:145).

In the book *Qohelet* talks about God’s judgment, but here it is not linked with the law. *Qohelet* never admits that there is justice in the present or future judgment and he also seemed to look for a time where God would judge everyone accordingly and make things right. According to his observations, the wicked prospered while the righteous

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<sup>16</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [\*The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius.\*](#) Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

<sup>17</sup> Whitaker, R., Brown, F., Driver, S. R. (Samuel R., & Briggs, C. A. (Charles A. (1906). [\*The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament: from A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles Briggs, based on the lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius.\*](#) Boston; New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

<sup>18</sup> Strong, J. (2020). [וַי](#). *Strong’s Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*. WORDsearch.

suffered. However the narrator here shows that even though *Qohelet* in his folly never got to understand it, God will indeed make things right through judgment (Longman III 1998:283). To *Qohelet* God is real though he is seen as a sceptic. If he did not believe God revealed his will, he would not speak about an impending judgment. Though humankind does not know God's total plan, they knew enough to be held responsible for his actions (The Navigators 2019:19).

The book ends with the eternal destiny of everyman. The "Preacher's God combines within himself grace (Eccl 2:24f;3:12f; 9:7-9), and judgment. The life of faith is offered, the warning of judgment is held out alongside. Let men rejoice (Eccl 11:9), but let them also remember (Eccl 12:1) and fear (Eccl 12:13)" (Eaton 1983:156). In this the Preacher shows that judgment blesses humankind in the end, everyone will receive judgement according to how they lived. The righteous will be judged righteously and the wicked will be punished for their wickedness. Everyone will finally hear the truth about themselves (Eswine 2014:222). This verse drives home the point with a blow sharp enough to hurt, but practical enough to get us out of the comfort zone. This also takes away all complacency to know nothing goes unnoticed, hence transforming lives and this should encourage humankind to live with the truth that God notices everything and nothing goes unnoticed. *Qohelet* is helping us come to reality about being human in a fallen world (Eswine 2014:12).

The present life with all its inequalities, the adversity which often besets the righteous and the prosperity which the wicked often enjoy, is not the whole of existence. There is a world coming where the righteous will receive divine favour and the wicked the due reward to their deeds. In light of that statement, if God was not there then there would be no judge, no final judgement and hence life would not mean anything and nothing would matter at all (Ryken 2010:273). Even in light of the futile elements of human life, "we are to live in the reality of God's presence and judgment, while we may call something meaningless, we will not truly understand what matters and what doesn't until God reveals that in His judgment of life" (Longman 2010:192).

#### **4.7 Synthesis**

The words of Ecclesiastes are like the goads to the conscience which makes us uncomfortable in our sin and acts as stimulus to the soul to help us turn from our sin

to the right spiritual path. The words of *Qohelet* prod us to remember the creator when we forget about God (Ryken 2010:277). When all is said and done, “pleasure awaits those who have acted in accordance with God’s promises” (Oden & Wright 2005:278). In his search for wisdom, *Qohelet* finds *dame folly*. As Eswine (2014:83) says, “we are prompted by our own ills to contemplate the good things of God; and we cannot seriously aspire to him before we begin to become displeased with ourselves.

The exegesis of Ecclesiastes 12:1-2 and 13-14 helped to understand the wisdom found in the book of Ecclesiastes. Before closely looking at the book of Ecclesiastes one might think it is not helpful at all in today’s life. However a study of the book proved this to be wrong. The book of Ecclesiastes is full of wisdom that can help young people and even older people to live a better life. *Qohelet* made a lot of mistakes and observations as he was on his quest to find meaning in life. Out of his observations is where humankind can learn a lot about everyday life. The mistakes and observations he made are as useful today as they were during his time. Young people made mistakes then and are still making them now. From the book of Ecclesiastes humankind can learn that, God gave us life to enjoy, but they should not enjoy the gifts God gave them, while forgetting the giver of the gifts. The exegesis helped to answer the question that can Ecclesiastes be used to help young people live a better life, and the answer is that yes, it can if the young people are willing to follow the steps that *Qohelet* laid out after his mistakes.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Ecclesiastes presents “a profoundly ambiguous and yet oddly compelling argument, one that rests on *Qohelet’s* own self-portrait, and which demands decisions from readers” (Christianson 2007:18). In the history of its interpretation, Ecclesiastes readers focused more on the person Qohelet and less on the words he speaks (Christianson 2007:19). The book has a scepticism that fits perfectly into the modern world full of disillusioned people, nothing has meaning (Crossely 2002:482). There are scholars who still question if Ecclesiastes is a theological work as the book is seen as a “book about ideas”, and “not a book about God.” “Ecclesiastes does not offer a systematic or sustained exposition about God, even though the author speaks about God in his discourse... and repeatedly examines and expounds on the activity of God” (Lee 2005:124). However in chapter 12, he takes a turn and instead of urging the young men to enjoy and have fun, the speaker is warning him about what will come in the future, if he keeps at that kind of lifestyle. The speaker says the words of *Qohelet*,

“the words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are collected sayings, they are given by one Shepherd” (Eccl 12:11). Having done exegesis on Ecclesiastes 12:1-2 & 13-14, this chapter is dedicated at seeing how our findings can be used in the everyday life of young people.

### 5.1.1 Implications for original readers

The writer of Ecclesiastes like the Hebrew sages recounts the events of his life and the observations he made regarding life and he tells his audience the results and “nature of behavioural patterns that were to be followed for a successful existence” (Harrison 2004:1083). Ecclesiastes is a mirror into the life of *Qohelet*, where he shows that life is complex and perplexing and “finding a wise way to understand and live this perplexity is no easy task” (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:188). The author exhorts the young to enjoy the pleasures of youth, nonetheless keeping consciously responsibility for its employment. His message to the young people was for them to have pure joy, “and the stern law that whatsoever a man sows that shall he reap also, to be kept in mind” (Maclaren 1944:403).

*Qohelet* spoke from a heart taught by long experience and observation and having grown in character under the influences of his observations. The book was meant for their admonition and comfort. From what the author describes on their life, this book was “intended to bring his fellow countryman to regard the wretched lot under which they were groaning in a more favourable light” (Hengstenberg 1998:1). The book teaches them how to enjoy life truly, fear God, turn their hearts to God and seek happiness from the inexhaustible eternal fountains (Hengstenberg 1998:17).

*Qohelet* meant for his audience to truly understand that, “they could not have God without embracing his world, and in the end they could not have the world without embracing God as well as dispel false consciousness about the world and by undermining false dreams and hopes” (Provan 2001:38). *Qohelet* stood by the same wisdom tradition, he gathered and reflected upon the wisdom of his time to arrive at a proper interpretation. *Qohelet* passed the knowledge and truth he considered valuable to his readers. *Qohelet* encouraged reverence and obedience for God (Eccl 12:13-14) as all will be held accountable for their actions. The author offered a great deal of wisdom to his listeners as he told them wisdom is better than folly. *Qohelet* spoke on the background of refusal to accept the divinely ordained boundaries which is the

attempt to become God (Provan 2013:404). Qoheleth is also intending to persuade his hearers they cannot be God, therefore they needed to see the futility of such a human quest, so as to save themselves from a life of futility. All man want to pursue wisdom and wealth, even though the world is beyond human comprehension (Provan 2001:38).

### 5.1.2 Implications for contemporary readers

Ecclesiastes is of relevance today as many people find life to be meaningless, it vividly shows how real that struggle can be. In the life of believers today the struggles faced by *Qoheleth* are quite popular. The book addresses a number of important issues that affect the purposes and issues of fulfilment, these include fame, money achievement and worship among others. "A believer who is deeply in relationship with God will sooner or later face dark nights that are utterly perplexing and in which God seems absent" (Bartholomew & O'Dowd 2011:206). Ecclesiastes "fulfils an unapologetic purpose because it defends the life of faith in a generous God by pointing to the grimness of the alternative (Estes 2005:281). *Qoheleth* paints the most vivid picture of a fallen world and the effects of sin, however knowing that Christ came and died for humankind's sins makes the realities of this world bearable. This is because Christ "is the meaning to all the meaningless *Qoheleth* observes, and the death that he fears takes on a new hope for all who believe in Christ" (Longman 2010:175).

The book of Ecclesiastes has got a specific purpose to challenge the young (Eccl 12:1-7) to reflect on the core issues of life and to choose to live in surrender to Yahweh (Ogden 1987:14-15). Olyott (1983:63) says, "while you have your faculties, use them, but never forgetting him while you do so." "We live in a world where wicked people sometimes get credit for goodness which does not belong to them, and where the good are often maligned and misunderstood" (Olyott 1983:68). The book of *Qoheleth* fits perfectly into a Westernized context where people are focused on toiling after gain and they all try to exercise control over their lives. "the oppression and injustice that the pursuit of gain and advancement all too often produces is just as obvious in our world as in *Qoheleth's*, that joy and fulfilment do not automatically flow from this pursuit" (Provan 2013:405).

We live in a world where people want to strive and exercise control over their lives and this includes oppression and injustice over others sometimes. In the Western world

the pursuit to strive is accompanied by spiritual emptiness and a conviction that the world is comprehensible and malleable to one's own ends. People now know more about less and less and they are not interested in the real facts of the world we live in as *Qohelet* said in Ecclesiastes 12:12. Though *Qohelet* had time, resources and wisdom, his search made him realize that life is an end to itself and not an object for human manipulation. Materialism is one of the greatest barriers between God and humankind and this has got dire consequences on those around them. However one reality in the world is death and it is in one end what drive the rush after gain, "as people try to protect themselves from death and seize everything from life that can be seized before it is taken away" (Provan 2001:40-41).

The youth are affected by secularism, post modernism and western influence and "they are not receiving a true and adequate message on which to base their worldview" (Forsyth 2005:3). Much of what the youth have gleaned and believe is superficial. The challenge is that before one can teach the youth about the message of Ecclesiastes, they need to gain their acceptance or they will reject the teaching (Forsyth 2005:3).

### 5.1.3 Insufficiency of human endeavours

Over the centuries humankind have tried to understand life, and find ways in which they could change it to suit their needs and wants without much success. The main theme of the book is vanity, of vanity, all is vanity, which basically translates to everything is meaningless. The word vanity, *hebel* occurs 37 times, and the Hebrew meaning is something without substance, which quickly passes away, better translated as futility, or meaninglessness.

"The basic theme of *Qohelet* is the ultimate futility of a life based upon earthly ambitions and desires. Any world view that does not rise above the horizon of man himself is doomed to meaninglessness and frustration. To view personal happiness or enjoyment as life's greatest good is sheer folly in view of the transcendence value of God himself as ever against His created universe. Happiness can never be achieved by pursuing after it since such a pursuit involves the absurdity of self-deification" (Archer 1975:189).

*Qohelet* as "a genuine wisdom teacher, has a gift for penetrating observation and for stating things in a profound and challenging manner that spur the listener into deeper thought and reflection" (ESV Study Bible). From the observations made by the writer he concludes that the human experience does not impart purpose and meaning to life.

“He observes the endless cycles of nature (Eccl 1:2-11) and only finds them tedium. They do not offer satisfaction, for the eye never has enough of seeing” (Eccl 1:8) (Douglas & Tenney 2011:384). The specific purpose of Ecclesiastes is to “challenge the young to reflect on the core issues of life and to choose to live in surrender to Yahweh” (Estes 2005:280). The author sought to warn the youth about the life they might want to live. It is said that experience is the best teacher, which can clearly be seen at the end of Ecclesiastes that the author had learned through his experiences. It is through learning that the author is able to warn those who come after him. The youth do not have much life experiences so the only way for them to know what it is like is to listen to those who have walked on the path before. The author sought to destroy people’s confidence in themselves. that is their own efforts, abilities, righteousness, so they can see that faith in God is the only way to find meaning, value and significance to life under the sun (Estes 2005:280).

Though he has been named a sceptic and a pessimist *Qohelet* tried to contribute positively to the relationship between mankind and God. He showed the limits of human understanding and ability. *Qohelet’s* observations showed that “people are limited by the way in which God has determined the events of their lives, they have little power to change the course of history” (Laser et al 1996:506). As human beings can never discover God’s ways, though they can understand God’s sovereignty determines their lives, they cannot understand why and how(Laser et al 1996:506). In the book of Ecclesiastes there are powerful descriptions of life without meaning and without purpose. Every aspect of human experience have been tasted and tested to the full and the result is always the same, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment” (Crossely 2002:490). This clearly shows that humankind was not meant to live life alone without God, hence the pursuit of meaning ended up being meaningless for the author and this is the same result that people who try to live life on their own terms will encounter.

#### 5.1.4 Life under the sun

*Qohelet* came to the conclusion that there is nothing new under the sun after seeing so many injustices happening and no one doing anything about it and life under the sun has no meaning if you do not believe in God. According to him, no generation had made a difference and he saw that there no generation that was going to change this.



In the end he concluded that nothing changes under the sun and the earth remains the same (Kellis 2017:24). The insufficiency of human endeavours leads to the emptiness of life under the sun. The Bible speaks about the meaning of life from the beginning to the end; however Ecclesiastes focuses more on this perennial question (Keddie 2002:20). *Qohelet* took the time to experience and then ask the questions that might have been and still are on many people's minds. He asked questions about the injustice that the righteous face, while the wicked prosper which is exactly what people today are facing. As he asked all this questions and tried to source the answers he kept on coming to the same conclusion which led to the main theme of the book (Estes 2005:281).

Under the sun is a realm of *Qohelet's* experiences and observations which he sees as vapour or meaningless. The phrase 'under the sun' "evokes the judgement of the creator who blighted the whole of his own creation with his curse on account of his rebellious creatures" (Caneday 2011:31). The most prominent theme in Ecclesiastes is that life is meaningless. *Hebel* "focuses on its presentation of life as enigmatic" (Estes 2005:281). *Hebel* portrays the path of life leading to many unanswered questions. It also hovers on the side of human limitation and frustration for lack of knowledge (Estes 2005:282). Nothing new under the sun meant that mankind cannot change anything, only God can. Some of the things that happened before the twenty-first century are happening in the twenty-first century. The world is still the same way that God created it and meant for it to be (Hengstenberg 1998:56).

*Qohelet* looks for meaning in a lot of different areas of life. Life under the sun "is analogous of saying, 'under heaven' or 'on earth', the teacher is restricting his inquiry to what he can see and experience, he makes no appeal to revelation or to God for his knowledge" (Longman III 2006:257). *Qohelet* limited his investigation to the things that he could see, instead of also including the things he could have known through revelation (Longman 2006:257). Though *Qohelet* seems to have restricted his claims about life under the sun, the book says that the spirit will return to God (12:7), it also affirms that God will judge everything (12:14). This shows that even the smallest detail of life under the sun matters to God who will bring everything to scrutiny in the end revealing the true work of each and every individual (Ortlund 2014:289).

#### 5.1.5 Pursuit of knowledge and wealth

God made the world in a way that no one can comprehend or fathom it. Most people are on the pursuit of knowledge and wealth, this however is a futile chase as wisdom cannot enable us to control reality. Though one may attain a lot of wealth, there is no guarantee they can keep it or use it all before they die and this does not lead to joy or fulfilment (Eccl 2:1-11, 17-23; 4:7-8). God created humankind such that they cannot control life and death is a reality that laughs in their face, and mocks humankind's attempt at godlikeness. Death is inevitable for all will die, rich or poor, wise or foolish, it renders life and wealth futile (Eccl 2:17-23). *Qohelet* says death is what should persuade young men to embrace life in the present. Death should also lead us to live for God joyfully and not focus on material things. All our activities under the sun should be undertaken in the fear of God and not what people can humanly achieve (Provan 2013:404-405). "Death is a dominant theme in Ecclesiastes. The spectre of death routinely nullifies whatever positive conclusions *Qoheleth* might draw. There are a number of explicit references to death" (Enns 2008:128).

Wisdom is the most prominent of pursuits, however in a fallen world, "he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" Ecclesiastes 1:18, "whatever wisdom can do for one, it does nothing about the end of life" (Kidner 1976:17). Richards (1987:270) asks the question; "does an application of pure reason lead to despair?". To this he replies reason "involves making deductions about the meaning of life and other ultimate issues, using only information available through observation and experience" (Richards 1987:270). "*Qohelet* is correct in taking to heart the pleasures and rewards of life (Eccl 3:13;5:19) and facing the stern reality of death" (Eccl 7:12). These are central components to the human drama for each Israelite, for "everyone." But more foundational and central is Israelite's fear of God and obedience to God's law" (Enns 2008:128). *Qohelet* shows us that wisdom, "is far more than knowing how to live or knowing a lot of doctrine and facts from the Bible" (Bartholomew & O'Dowd 2011:207). By having so much wealth and power, *Qohelet* took it to mean he had wisdom when he actually was a fool. He equated head knowledge to wisdom.

Secular humankind "has one life to live, a few years to make it in life, he must live according to the canons of humanism that has no more to offer than materialist comfort now, and if you make your mark in history" (Keddie 2002:9). Many people are losing hope for the future and have become personal pessimists. Many are hungry for a happy life and future, though they have no love for God and are living a spiritually

rootless life. *Qohelet* realized that no matter how much one gained, “wealth could not soothe a heart that was troubled by the transience of human life especially when so much else in the world caused him pain” (Bullock 1988:210).

The book is believed to be hedonistic because it sees the main purpose of man as eating, drinking and finding satisfaction in his work (Eccl 2:24), however the writer’s recognition that pleasure is not satisfying as well (Eccl 2:1) renders this characterization null and void. The book is also interpreted as fatalistic in its approach to life according to Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 which concludes that man is no better off than an animal, however this is only true when humans are viewed in and of themselves, that is apart from God (Douglas & Tenney 2011:385). Compared to the practical wisdom of Proverbs the speculative wisdom of Ecclesiastes is more of a supplement to practical wisdom as it addresses the enigmatic realities of life (Estes 2005:281). Ecclesiastes and Job show us that wisdom is more than knowing doctrine or Bible verses, wisdom ought to be embodied by humankind so they are able to God’s embodiment in their lives. *Qohelet* thought he was truly wise, but his wisdom turned out to be folly (Bartholomew & O’Dowd 2011:207).

## **5.2 Timeless principles of Ecclesiastes**

Ecclesiastes “serves as an appropriate balance for the practical wisdom of Proverbs.” Though he also found practical wisdom, it was as a result of a reflective path and his wisdom truths were a direct result of his frustrating pursuit of happiness and meaning for life (Bullock 1988:211). A God-centred worldview is essential for finding significance in life” (Estes 2005:280).

### **5.2.1 Need for good moral examples**

The world today has a crisis of adults who are not confident regarding what they say to their children.

“Having lost hold on God, the culture has by degrees lost hold of any larger story that makes sense of our individual and group stories- stories that provide us with shared codes of ethics with role models who enact them. This loss of narrative and direction makes life difficult enough for the adults who have experienced it and no longer know where they are heading or why. It makes the task of instructing the younger people who accompany them on the journey particularly difficult” (Provan 2013:416).

Adults and parents now seem to have an authoritarian attitude which is in turn rejected by young people leaving them with no respect for their parents or adults. The parents and adults end up saying less and less with less and less conviction which ends up with the blind leading the blind. Most parents are now leaving the work of guiding children to professionals (teachers, doctors and psychologists). However these people do not spend much time with the children, it is supposed to be the duty of the parents as the well known proverb says, 'charity begins at home'. Though the professionals might have an impact on their lives, this might not last if it is not instilled in the home. As Proverbs 22:6 reads, "train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." The Hebrew Bible is a book of wisdom that we all need for the journey through life for ourselves and those around us so we can help each other. *Qohelet* suggested that young people should be told that once you are born into the world decay and death are a reality and what those two signify about humankind and about God. Also that God is full of goodness and humankind ought to live in response to this goodness (Provan 2013:416).

### 5.2.2 Life is meaningless without God

The world wants people to believe that wealth, far-reaching power and wisdom are everyone's ultimate goal on earth. *Qohelet* proved this to be a false theory as he possessed all the above yet ended up realising it was all pointless and have no meaning. *Qohelet* departed from an obedient walk with God and sought fulfilment in the things of the world. In the end he found that true joy and contentment can only be found when humankind walks in obedience to God's word, apart from God even the best things that the world may offer all end up empty and vain. Joy and meaning cannot be found in the things of the earth, but in God who created them. In the end *Qohelet* affirms that life without God is meaningless no matter how hard one might try to live a fulfilled life (MacArthur 2016:131). "The path of philosophers is no through road. The meaning of life is not found by observing and recording our experiences. Nor is it discovered by following through our thoughts. God, who alone gives human life its purpose, cannot be known unless he reveals himself" (Olyott 1983:14).

The writer shows he is dependent upon traditional religious beliefs when he made the affirmation that "God made mankind upright, but that the intervention of human fashioning had led to the declension of mankind from pristine grace" (Eccl 7:29)

(Harrison 2004:1083). Ecclesiastes “forbids both secularism meaning living as though the existence of God has no practical usefulness for life in this world, and unrealistic optimism, meaning expecting faith to cancel out life as it really is” (Eaton 1994:610).

“It is important to note that *Qoheleth* based his patterns of life firmly upon reverence for God and observance of the divine precepts. His basic proposition of wisdom therefore, is that life in its manifold aspects is entirely devoid of meaning without God... Consequently this exposition of ways and means for achieving the greatest degree of success in mortal life can hardly be said to be pessimistic, either Buddhist or modern existentialist pessimism. *Qoheleth* was merely presenting a sober-indeed critical-appraisal of life, and against the background of traditional Hebrew faith he pronounced upon the ultimate validity of varying facets of human existence in the light of experience” (Harrison 2004:1083-4).

While *Qohelet's* approach was seen as being more sceptical of life, it shows that this premise came from the belief that God is the ultimate standard that all of life should be interpreted. “The above, laudable standpoint is clearly significant for ages other than the one in which the author himself lived, for it points to the true nature of the *summum bonum*” (Harrison 2004:1084). The negative side of Ecclesiastes is that “it warns us that faith is always a contrast to sight and does not provide us with a short cut fully to understand the ways of God. Positively, it calls us to a life of faith and joy” (Eaton 1994:610).

The nearness of God to the individual soul is the greater truth upon which the author rests at last. God deals with men as individuals and not as nations or classes. He treats them personally accountable for the character they have cultivated and shown (Deanne 1900:320). God as “Creator sets the whole scene,” he created the world in his way with its own inexorable rhythm and we cannot change it to our own liking. Even “as procreators we do no more than activate the mysterious process in which God brings into being a new life” (Kidner 1976:15). *Qohelet's* aim was to help “destroy people’s confidence in their own efforts, their own abilities, their own righteousness, and to direct them to faith in God as the only basis for meaning” (Estes 2005:280).

This is not a topic that *Qohelet* looks at intensively. However when he does, *Qohelet* insists upon the transcendence and sovereignty of God (Murphy 1981:131). “it is God who has prescribed the frustrations we find in life, the treadmill of existence which is pictured at the very outset of the book, that treadmill is God’s appointment” (Kidner 1976:15). God predetermined the life and destiny of man and he also directs the

earthly affairs and his initial plan for men was for them to enjoy the universe he gave to them (Bullock 1988:215).

### 5.2.3 Death and judgment

The treasures of the earth are all but short-lived. People can acquire so much treasure during their time on earth, but when one dies, they all live it to be enjoyed by others. Though there are others who decided to be buried with their treasures and riches, they could never get to use them where they are going. The trinkets and baubles of the world are very attractive to fleshly eyes, but they do not last forever. As humankind we take care of the things we love and are most valuable to us. Therefore in the end humankind ends up focusing on the riches they have here on earth instead of storing their treasure in heaven where they will have it eternally (MacArthur 2016:131). Death is a dominant motif in the book of Ecclesiastes and for *Qohelet* death seemed to have the biggest advantage over everything (Clemens 1994:7). As *Qohelet* assessed and saw that death has got advantage over everything, even now the rich, poor, young and old all die and there is no one who can escape death. Reading through Ecclesiastes one can get the idea that the human project is small, meaning that humankind does not live on the earth for long, even though they tend to live in denial. *Qohelet* hated to idea of human finitude, but he saw that there is no other way out of it. Therefore while there is still time and while humankind is still able they have to enjoy life because they cannot deny or escape their finitude (Strawn 2021:29).

*Qohelet* was seen as obsessed with death as he assessed all life events in terms of death. Though he saw that death did not rectify injustice he affirmed that judgment will be brought by God in due time since there is a time for everything (Takeuchi 2016:309-311). The world teaches that the life we have here on earth is all that matters and we are never going to give an account to anyone or any higher power. Therefore one can live however they please. “this is at the root of the modern cult of self-love and self esteem , as people today make pleasing themselves their sole aim” (MacArthur 2016:131). The Hebrew Bible is very clear about the day of judgement. God is going

to judge everyone according to how they lived and all will be held accountable at the end.

### **5.3 Synthesis**

Every day the media presents the world to people as an illusion that it is malleable and comprehensible. However is it not so, we cannot make a lasting mark, and we cannot find fulfilment by pursuing wisdom and wealth. To replace this illusion we need to understand that God exists and the universe is his gift to us as well as our lives. “We ought to live it out before God, reverencing and obeying him,” for this is the pathway to joy (Provan 2001:41). When God created humankind, he made them so they could be in obedience of him as well as revere him. However humankind fell (Gen 3), and has lived a life of sin since then. In his attempt to make it right God sent Christ to die for us so we can be seen as righteous before him. However despite this attempt humankind still want to live as if they are god themselves. From the experiences of *Qohelet* we have seen that this is inevitable and leads to meaninglessness. Unlike *Qohelet* Christians today “know more about God and his plans for the world and for individuals”, for we have seen how divine justice was brought to the world through Christ (Provan 2001:41).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1. Introduction

The study of the few verses done from the book of Ecclesiastes have been very enlightening. There are a number of things learnt from the book in general and from the passage where the exegesis was done. The book of Ecclesiastes has got a number of catchwords and connective devices that connect and bring together the different thoughts of *Qohelet*. The author “employs rhetorical strategies that play on ambiguity and indeterminacy of meaning to subvert traditional expectations” (Lee 2005:31). Since experience is the greatest teacher, *Qohelet* took what he learnt from his endeavours and passed it on to his audience and the readers. The things that he faced during his time are very much similar to what is being faced in the current world, from corruption, injustices, power struggles among many. Though some people are not interested in the book of Ecclesiastes, reading it can help to understand the world around them and how they can go on about life in the midst of it all. Throughout the book *Qohelet* advocates for the enjoyment of life, which is how he learned that humankind should not focus on it, and later in the book we read that this will not go without consequences. Though God gave us the world and all the gifts in it, humankind is to enjoy within the boundaries set by the one who gave them the enjoyment. As seen in the previous chapter a call to remember is one that comes with individual change as one change their focus from the world to the one who made the world.

#### 6.2. Aims and objectives



The aim of this study is; to exegete Ecclesiastes 12:1-2; 13-14 to try and understand the life that *Qohelet* lived and see how the call for youth to remember their creator can be relevant today as it was then.

### 6.2.1 Introduction

The first chapter of the study had the following objectives, consider the actuality in-depth, definition of wisdom, Scholarly discussion concerning Ecclesiastes and its wisdom, to examine the nature of modern day life of young people and their perception of life. From the objectives listed the study realized that wisdom is grouped as secular and biblical and defined in those categories as well. The book of Ecclesiastes was looked at briefly to understand the scope of it before moving on to literature review. The book speaks of the experiences of *Qohelet* and here they are stated in passing. The issues affecting the youth were addressed and among them was the issue of peer pressure and western influence. These are some of the major things affecting young people today.

### 6.2.2 Literature review

The objective of the literature review was to consider literature on Ecclesiastes as a book and focusing on chapter 12 which is the main chapter in the study. Here the ages focused on the purpose of the book which was seen as wisdom literature, with the experiences of *Qohelet* aiding in today's wisdom on living. The structure of the book was considered were discoveries were made that the book has got a frame narrator in the prologue and epilogue of the book. The theological themes were one of the interesting thing of the book as most scholars agree that it is vanity of vanities. The history of interpretation was done from the beginning to postmodernism and the interpretation of the book has changed with the years, beginning with Solomon being accredited as the author and was later stripped of this title of authorship to the point where it now, that there is no known author. The influence of the ancient Near East was also checked as Israel had neighbour surrounding her who influenced language, literature among other things. The focus then turned to other literature which was focused on certain issues addressed in the book. These included, the book being enigmatic, the politics, timelessness, pursuit of happiness, allegories found in the book, death and the fear of God. This helped to shed more light on the book before moving on to the diachronic analysis.

### 6.2.3 Diachronic analysis

To identify characteristics of the historical background, to carefully consider the influence of the wisdom found in the book, to consider the debate on the authorship and date of authorship. The English title of the book “Ecclesiastes” was adopted from the Vulgate and originally from the LXX εκκλησιαστας. Historical background of the book revealed that there are external influences in the book as well as similarities from literature in the ancient Near Eastern background. The date of authorship is debated on the case of the author and the language of the book. Those who are for Solomonic authorship are of an early date, and those against Solomonic authorship date it late. The authorship of the book has left scholars divided into two groups, one group of traditionalists who still hold onto the Solomonic authorship and the other group that refutes this theory. There have been a number of suggestions regarding the authorship with some scholars going up to nine editors in the book. However this does not change the fact that the book is the biblical canon and it can be used in the wisdom literature.

### 6.2.4 Synchronic analysis

The objective of this chapter was to do a synchronic analysis of Ecclesiastes chapter 12:1-2; 13-14. The analysis included the unity of the book, which is still debated among scholars. Some scholars argue that the book is not a literary unit especially regarding Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 which they deem was added by glossator so the book could be added into the biblical canon. Other scholars argue that there are about 4 editors and others only 2. However this does not affect the message of the book which is to enjoy life, but remember there is a creator who made it all, therefore you should do so within the boundaries that he set. An in depth exegesis Ecclesiastes 12:1-2; 13-14 verses led to the discovery of a number of things found in the book. Though *Qohelet* is said to advocate for pleasure, enjoyment, and eating, this was only part of the quest he was on to find meaning to life. In the end *Qohelet* realized that he had been going about the quest in the wrong way. He used human wisdom to try and understand the world that God created instead of starting with the one who created the world. In the end he realized his mistake and warned the young people that they ought to remember their creator while they are still young, before they run out of time as old age and death are slowly creeping in. After his realization *Qohelet* decided to warn the young people so they do not fall into the same trap that he fell in.

### 6.2.5 Theological reflection

To determine the theological implications of the wisdom found in Ecclesiastes, to understand the principles adhered to by the author. To observe the implications of such principles both then and now, to examine the wisdom portrayed by the Preacher for then and now. Finally to understand the principles found in the book. After the exegesis the implications for original readers revealed that *Qohelet* meant for his audience to understand that they could not live a meaningful life without God. Qohelet passed on the wisdom he had acquired to his audience as he did not want them to repeat his mistakes. For the contemporary reader the message Qohelet intended for his then audience is as relevant to us as it was then. The world is still the same as it was before and for them to make it they need to surrender to God and let him lead them in this life. Human endeavours are not sufficient in this world. Though he has been named a sceptic and a pessimist *Qohelet* tried to contribute positively to the relationship between mankind and God. He showed the limits of human understanding and ability. This clearly shows that humankind was not meant to live life alone without God, hence the pursuit of meaning ended up being meaningless for the author and this is the same result that people who try to live life on their own terms will encounter. Life under the sun is meaningless if you live it without God. The principles found in the book are as follows; there is a huge need for good moral examples. Young people need moral people who they can look up to and follow in their footsteps. Life is meaningless without God, humanity has tried to change the world to fit in their own endeavours but they have not been successful in altering the world created by God. Death and judgement are a reality and no one can hide from them. The way humankind lives will be revealed in the end, when all deeds will be judged whether good or bad.

### 6.2.6 Conclusion

The objectives of this chapter was to consider the principles understood, to identify ways of implementing them, to consider the shortcomings and recommendations going forward, critically evaluate the hypothesis. The principles were taken into consideration on how they can be implemented to help young people to live better lives today. Young people need good moral examples who can help them live better lives. The church needs to play its role in building the lives of young people by

accepting them more in the church so they do not feel left and which in the end makes them want to live the church. The parents also ought to play the biggest role in the lives of their children. Charity begins at home, so the parents need to be adults who do not shy away from teaching, speaking and living the truth.

### **6.3 Summary of findings**

From the study the following findings were discovered. First the book of Ecclesiastes is the most debatable book in the Biblical canon with a few scholars saying the epilogue of the book was a later addition so it could fit into the biblical canon. Scholars are still debating regarding the unity of the book as some still stand with the notion that it is not a literary unit. It is a work of more than two writers. Commentators are still torn on the interpretation on some of the verses found in the book and on the epilogue which they see as an addition by a glossator. However despite the debates on the book, it is the biblical canon for God saw it fit.

From studying the observations made by *Qohelet* as he sought to find meaning in life, humankind can learn that, the path that they take in finding meaning in life is important and has got consequences and eternal effect if people do not realize it before it is too late. *Qohelet* had all the wealth, wisdom and time to experiment with his own wisdom which he later realized was only folly. Since he already went that pathway and discovered that the path chosen by many only leads to vanity, this is a lesson that humankind needs to learn from his mistakes. The path that *Qohelet* took is one that is attractive to many as they seek to find meaning in life, pursue happiness and wealth. Though there clearly is a manual on how to walk the journey of life in Ecclesiastes, many choose to ignore it and fall into the same trap *Qohelet* fell in.

Though it took him time to find the right path to life, *Qohelet* finally found it and warns young people that you might choose to walk in the path that I chose, but know that in the end there are consequences and you have to answer for your actions. Ultimately *Qohelet* reminds the young man to remember the creator while they are still young and are not on the verge of old age and finally death. This warning to remember the creator while still young is one that should not be taken lightly because when old age comes it brings with it many things that include sickness and less vigour compared to when one is young. To remember their creator means they have to put God first and give him his rightful position in their lives. God is the one who created everything,

therefore humankind are not supposed to act as God and take his place. Remembering God also means revering and obeying him and allowing him to help us find meaning in life. Meaning and joy in life cannot be found until humankind learns to walk with God and acknowledge him as the author and finisher of life.

*Qohelet* teaches that the days of youth are when one has got the most strength to work for the Lord and serve his people. The days of old age are compared to the sun, light, the moon and the stars being darkened and clouds returning after the rain. On a rainy day if the clouds come back after a down pour, it means there is another one coming. Therefore this means that in old age there will be never ending downpours if one lived live for themselves without God. For those who have served the Lord their whole lives and are now old, they say they are waiting for their death so they can rest with the Lord. Though they will have aches and pains their end will not be gloomy, because they know they lived it right.

*Qohelet* then goes on to heed the youth that they need to remember their creator while they still have the vigour that comes with young age. When the youth look at life they think they still have time to repent in the future. This may be true in some instances but it is not always the case with others. They let the world take control of their life and by the time they realize their mistake it will be too late. The call to remember the creator is given a time period for one to be able to still do the work required and encourage others while they still can. This warning came with the realities one faces in life which are old age and death.

Death is a reality for humankind and there is no one who can escape it. *Qohelet* teaches that death and judgement is there but we can all be saved from the second death by walking with God before we die the first death. *Qohelet* says, enjoy life, eat, drink and be merry, but in the end remember that we are all going to be judged for all our actions. God will judge everything even those done in secret and even our most secret thoughts will be brought to light. There is nothing that we do which is hidden from God, he sees everything, thus judgment on everything.

#### **6.4. Limitations of study**

Modern Christians “accept Ecclesiastes in principle as part of the canon but ignore it in practice, whole areas of modern church seem to have adopted this strategy in

respect of almost the entire OT in the mistaken belief that there exists something called New Testament Christianity” (Provan 2001:24).

There is a lack of previous studies in the research area, thereby leading to a limited number of resources on the topic. There are a few commentaries which mention how Ecclesiastes can be used today, but they only mention it in passing. The limitation on the scope of discussions compromised by my lack of experience in doing research work compared to experienced scholars. This also made the research samples to be very limited. There are not many samples on the study of Ecclesiastes and young people.

The other major limitation is the issue of broken homes and the fatherless generation and a lack of good role models. Most families in South Africa’s high density suburbs are child headed families who do not have anyone to look up to. In some families that have maybe a single parent, they might not be able to advance this teaching as they possibly never learned about it, or do not believe in it. The other limitation of the study is that it focuses more on the church to instil these changes in the young people. The world at large may not feel the need to encourage such teachings as it has got a different worldview from those that are in the church. In schools it has also become hard for the church or believers to teach this as some schools do not do religious studies and teachers are not allowed to air in their religious views on the students.

## **6.5. Recommendations**

There is need for more studies on Ecclesiastes and young people. The book is rich with wisdom that can help young people avoid so many mistakes they are making today. Most young people are living for today and living to enjoy life in their own way. They are more satisfied by the things of the world and they do not seem to have time for God

The church needs to be more vocal and visible. There are lot of churches but in the churches there is a lack of people who truly embody the word in their lives. The church needs to speak loudly to the young people so that the noise the world makes will not be so loud for them. Most countries, like South Africa claim to be Christian but this is not seen in their way of life and conduct. The church is where young people can learn

more about God and how to live for him, therefore we need to make our churches youth friendly so young people can keep coming back for more.

Parents need to play their role in teaching their children how to live right in this world. Some parents send their kids to church but they do not go themselves. Though they say do as I say not as I do, kids tend to do exactly as their parents do. Therefore there is need for parents to do good so their kids can also do good.

## **6.6 Research problem**

**How may an understanding of *Qohelet's* life observations and experiences be used to help young people on the quest to find meaning in life?**

## **6.7 Methodology**

The research methodology that was used in this study was a detailed exegetical and literature study of Ecclesiastes 12:1-2; 13-14 and referral of other texts from Ecclesiastes to extrapolate the fundamental principles to be formulated from the book. Gorman (2009:15-17) extensively describes this process and also gives three basic approaches which are synchronic, diachronic and existential. In this study there will be an overlap of the synchronic and diachronic as the historical and socio-political contexts in which the texts come to life and in the kind of literature the texts are.

An exegesis of the above mentioned texts began by looking at the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole to first understand the background and the lives of the people to which it was originally written. Ecclesiastes was written by *Qohelet*, but we also hear the voice of a narrator in the prologue and epilogue of the book. The book was written during the post-exilic time which takes away the assumption that Solomon was the likely author of the book as traditionally acclaimed. The aim of this exegesis was to help answer the research question; *How may an understanding of the aspects of the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 12 be implemented in everyday life for people on the quest to find the meaning of life and how they ought to live?*

In order to achieve the desired outcome a qualitative data research was conducted primarily by me using different books and articles on the topic and other topics closely related to it. This method was chosen because there was no need to do a quantitative or to conduct interviews for the study as such information could be obtained through

books and articles. In this study there were no actual ethical considerations to be done as it was a qualitative study.

## **6.8 Hypothesis**

*Ecclesiastes 12 portrays a contrast between a young and an old life. It compares the life that one live when they are young to the one they will live when they are old. It however concludes with the life that one has to live in fear of God. These two comparisons, however are great lessons that, if learnt and instilled today, the now and future of young people will be changed for the better.*

From the study of Ecclesiastes 12:1-2; 13-14, the realization made is that there was comparison of the old and young life. in this comparison the author intended to show the youth that they need to remember their creator while they are still young so they do not live the old like portrayed by the author. The lesson to be learned here is that if people choose to live life as God intended from their youth, they can live a better and changed life.



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