Creation Themes in Qoheleth

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In one sense, it is not radical to suggest a connection between the book of Qoheleth and creation. Wisdom literature in general as reflecting creation theology has been commonly noted; for instance, in the work of Walther Zimmerli,[1] Leo G. Purdue,[2] and Roland E. Murphy.[3] Yet creation thought, on first glance, seems more naturally, or at least more easily, applicable to the books of Proverbs and Job. As the book of Qoheleth differs in many ways from proverbial wisdom thought, so its connection to creation theology necessarily differs and it needs to be considered separately. Qoheleth does not reflect the same assumptions about an ordered universe and a human being's ability to discern and prosper within that order. It is for this reason that Purdue finds this book "a more modern understanding of nature's seemingly operating according to its own inflexible laws, devoid of any divine involvement."[4]

My purpose in this essay is to examine how the book of Qoheleth utilizes the creation thought of Gen 1-3. I find this to be a topic that begs for fuller analysis. Though connections between portions of Qoheleth and the primeval stories have been assumed, the commentators and interpreters who, briefly and only in passing, note such a link,

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[1] "The Place and the Limit of Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament," in *Studies in Israelite Wisdom* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw; New York: KTAV, 1976), 314-26.
[2] *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 193-242.
[3] *Ecclesiastes* (WBC 23A; Dallas: Word, 1992), 152; "Wisdom and Creation," *JBL* 104 (1985): 3-11.
[4] Purdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 210

offer little to no explication.[5] Although I do not want the force of my argument to depend upon dating or an explicit line of connection, temporally speaking, Qoheleth's use of this material is quite possible. Genesis 2:4b-3:24 is, of course, considered part of the Yahwist tradition, dated to the tenth or ninth centuries, and Gen 1:1-2:4a is Priestly, dated pre-exilic or exilic. As the vocabulary of the book of Qoheleth places it late, no earlier than the Persian period, its author(s) could quite likely have been familiar with this earlier material in some form. Even if, as Seow suggests, a direct connection cannot be proven, the rhetorical effect of the work leads to questions of creation and creator.[6]

Murphy speaks of two aspects of creation thought, as beginnings and as an arena of experience. With regard to the second category, he states

> We are considering creation here as continuous and ongoing, providing the fundamental parameters within which humans live and die. In comparison with the prophetic experience, which is unique and then shared with the community, or the liturgical experience, which recalls and re-presents primarily the saving acts of history, the dialogue with creation may be termed the "wisdom experience." It lives in the present and reacts to the variety of creation, experience of which a human being is a part. The wisdom experience is not something necessarily apart from a faith experience. In the concrete it involves an attitude to God that can be described as faith.[7]

Murphy's focus lies upon Proverbs, Job, and Sirach, and not Qoheleth. However, we also see Qoheleth using such a "wisdom experience," the arena of life. Yet Qoheleth also

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[5] Cf. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lxvii, 35, 37, 58, 113, 120; C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18C; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 55, 264, 351, 353, 367, 382; Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 91, 119, 130, 177, 268, 273; Graham Ogden, *Qoheleth* (Readings; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 43, 51, 91, 96, 153, 206; James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 25; Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes* (New York: Schocken, 1951), 43. The only exceptions I have so far discovered are Charles C. Forman, "Koheleth's Use of Genesis," *JSS* 5 (1960): 256-263, and William H. U. Anderson, "The Curse of Work in Qoheleth: An Exposé of Genesis 3:17-19 in Ecclesiastes," *EQ* 70 (1998): 99-113.

[6] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 55. Seow speaks more particularly about Qoh 1, but I think that his remark applies just as well to the entire book.

[7] Murphy, "Wisdom and Creation," 6.

does so by means of Murphy's first category, by drawing from the Bible's stories of beginnings.

This essay will consist of three concerns. First, I will examine how Qoheleth reflects general creation thought. Second, I will consider echoes of both the creation stories of Gen 1-3 in the book and how Qoheleth reuses these ideas. And third, I will propose that the figure of Qoheleth reflects many of the aspects of the character of Eve in Gen 2-3.

General Creation Thought and Imagery

The book of Qoheleth presents a more general view of God than a deity with specific characteristics or attributes. The term אֱלֹהִים, not יהוה, is used exclusively throughout the work. And in general, the focus of the book is more upon anthropology than upon theology. Only once is creation terminology explicitly used, when God is referred to as creator ("your creator," בּוֹרְאֶיךָ; 12:1).[8] Otherwise, God is spoken of as the one who gives (נתן) (1:13; 2:24-26; 3:10, 11; 5:17-18 [Eng. 18-19]; 6:2; 8:15; 12:7; also 9:9) or the one who makes (עשׂה) (3:11, 14; 7:14, 29), and the natural order as the work of God (מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים) (8:17; 11:5). The most explicit description of God's creative activity is in ch. 3, directly following the well-known poem of occasions (3:1-8). It stresses not so much a physical universe, however, but presents a deity who is creating time and situations instead.

> I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the

[8] Translating בּוֹרְאֶיךָ as a singular rather than the plural; cf. the varied discussions in Seow (*Ecclesiastes*, 351-52), Murphy (*Ecclesiastes*, 113), Crenshaw (*Ecclesiastes*, 184-85), Purdue (*Wisdom and Creation*, 233), and Longman (*Ecclesiastes*, 264, 267-68), who comment on the term itself and on the theological oddity of referring to God by this title.

> beginning to the end. . . [I]t is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done all this, so that all should stand in awe before him. (3:10-11, 13-14)[9]

The gist of creation comes through, even if it is not explicitly articulated. Despite all the talk of death throughout the book, Qoheleth comes down as affirming life, for "a living dog is better than a dead lion." (9:4). Suicidal death, an ending of life, is never presented as a solution to all the complexities and contradictions that are experienced. Life—the basic element that is the object of God's creative activity—tends to be presented, ultimately, as a good thing.

The preface to the book is also replete with creation imagery (1:2-11).

> Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,
> vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
> What do people gain from all the toil
> at which they toil under the sun?
> A generation goes, and a generation comes,
> but the earth remains forever.
> The sun rises and the sun goes down,
> and hurries to the place where it rises.
> The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north;
> round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.
> All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full;
> to the place where the streams flow, there they continue to flow.
> All things are wearisome; more than one can express;
> the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing.
> What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done;
> there is nothing new under the sun.
> Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"?
> It has already been, in the ages before us.
> The people of long ago are not remembered,
> nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after them.

The location of action is the earth. Natural entities that affect this earth are listed and described: sun, wind, streams, ocean. We see a picture of a structured universe; all of

[9] This and most quotations are from the NRSV.

these objects and actions are in their proper places, following proper sequences. There is concern about human creation, generations gone and upcoming, and for human efforts. Yet the final answer is the direct opposite of that of creation. In creation, everything is new (that, indeed, is the whole point). Here, nothing is new.

Within the Institute's concern for new creation, attention must be given to the vision at 12:1-7. The book of Qoheleth is frequently engaged with questions of newness, time, and eternity (cf. 1:10-11; 2:16; 3:11, 14-15; 4:16; 6:6, 10-12; 7:8-10; 10:14), and this poem likewise reflects this general concern with time and the future. At the book's conclusion, the author anticipates the end times.

> Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain; in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly; when the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because all must go to their eternal home, and the mourners will go about the streets; before the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.

Creation language is again used: sun, light, moon, darkness, clouds, rain, dust, trees, breath. But it is a reversal of the original creation. Human labor ceases, plants die, the celestial lights are extinguished. This visions gives the sense of a video of the creation process, but instead running in reverse mode. It paints a picture of the final collapse of creation, a "picture of dissolution, not of immortality."[10]

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[10] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 120.

Unlike prophetic eschatological statements that envision an ideal time in the future, Qoheleth envisions a universal demise of all things until finally they return to a pre-created state (v. 7). It is not a prophetic type of "new creation" as much as it is a reversion back to the sole existence of the divine creator. Chaos is not the state prior to creation, as it is in Gen 1:2, but the final result. Here the state of nonexistence follows, not precedes, the creation of the universe. Yet Timothy K. Beal hints even still at the possibility of new creation coming from this dissolution of the old:

> Qoheleth's last words offer no simple vision of "the end" as such. Rather, they envision the end as *edge*, threshold—an ending/beginning, between uncreation and creation, chaosmogony and cosmogony. Qoheleth's last words give us a glimpse of wisdom's speaking subject on the edge: on the edge of a chaotic desert, the edge of the wasteland, which is the place of a possible new relation to the other, a new creation, a new justice—excessive, beyond law and order, unnameable.[11]

Reflections of the First Creation Story (Genesis 1:1-2:4a)

In various ways, the book of Qoheleth reflects the first of Genesis' two creation accounts.

Sun and wind. Qoheleth utilizes key terms and phrases, which it repeats frequently throughout the course of the work. Two of these phrases point back to the first creation story through their terminology. The expression "under the sun" occurs twenty-nine times throughout the book. The sun reflects the emphasis upon light in Gen 1, both the general light as opposed to darkness (vv. 3-5) and the particular creation of the celestial body, the sun (vv. 14-18). Genesis' concern is both spatial (light as separate from darkness, the sun residing in the dome of the sky) and temporal (to allow there to be day, as separate from night). Qoheleth uses the phrase "under the sun" also in a spatial sense.

It refers to every place where there is light, the general world where human beings live, and thus it reflects the universality of human experience.

The primordial wind (Gen 1:2) is also reflected in Qoheleth. In a couple of instances, the book echoes the blowing, moving aspect of the creation wind (1:6; 11:4). But the expression "chasing after wind" (רְעוּת/רַעְיוֹן רוּחַ) is more frequent (1:14, 17; 2:11, 17; 4:6, 16; 6:9; also 5:15 [Eng. 16] is used similarly although the verb differs). This phrase is often used in conjunction with Qoheleth's favorite term, הֶבֶל. All of these uses reflect an aspect of futility, whether it be the circuits on which wind blows around and around again, trying to predict the weather, or to chase (or feed on) wind. Therefore, the wind of Gen 1, prefacing God's purposeful activity of creating the universe, is reflected in Qoheleth instead as blowing—still over the face of the earth (1:6)—but now without purpose and with little hope.

Other natural imagery. Qoheleth's various images of darkness also echo more especially the first creation account. The image of darkness is used to express emotional and physical illness (5:16 [Eng. 17]), foolishness (2:13, 14), and death (6:4; 11:8). In Gen 1:2-5, 18, however, darkness is simply night. Certainly this image is used more figuratively in Qoheleth and at odds with its creation role, especially in reflecting the absence of life rather than forming part of the canvas upon which life itself will be painted. The vegetation imagery (the actions of planting and weeding, and trees falling) of 3:2 and 11:3 also echo that of creation, but it is at 2:4-8 where one sees the most clear

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[11] "C(ha)osmopolis: Qoheleth's Last Words," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 290-304 (304).

similarity.[12] The statements there of making gardens and owning livestock reflect the command placed upon human beings to take responsibility for all plants and animals (Gen 1:26, 28-29). (Though in the second creation account trees and a garden setting also play key roles, it is only in the first story that animals are included in humanity's realm of possession and the theme of ownership is more greatly emphasized. The view of vegetation in Gen 3:18 is recalcitrant and thorny, far from Qoheleth's lushly fruitful gardens.) Most particularly, the language used for Qoheleth's trees as being fruit trees ("a tree of *every fruit*," עֵץ כָּל-פֶּרִי) echoes Genesis' language ("a *fruit* tree bearing *fruit* which has its seed in it," עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁר זַרְעוֹ-בוֹ, at 1:11; and "*every* tree which has the *fruit* tree seeding seed in it," כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְרִי-עֵץ זֹרֵעַ זָרַע, at 1:29). Yet, of course, there is no sanction in either creation account for Qoheleth's owning of other human beings or the acquisition of treasures.

Naming. Bypassing the second creation account's version of the human's naming of other creatures (Gen 2:20, 23; 3:20), Qoheleth exhibits dependence upon the first story's presentation of God's action of naming (Gen 1:5, 8, 10). Qoheleth comments how "[w]hatever has come to be has already been named" (6:10), suggesting that, like the day, night, sky, and earth, everything has already been created and made known. Giving something a name calls it into existence. Such naming implies control, the control that the deity has over human events, or, in theological terminology, the sovereignty of God. Purdue notes how

> "Naming" is a common expression for the act of creation in the ancient Near East (e.g., Isa. 40:26). Involved in this act is the notion that the name embodies the character and nature of what is created. God has named humanity (*'adam*), says

[12] Purdue more fully sees the seven works of Qoh 2:1-26 as implying to the book's audience the seven days of creation (*Wisdom and Creation*, 214-15). This possibility is suggestive, but I am not wholly convinced that Qoheleth's statement is clearly enough divisible to assure such a comparison.

> Qoheleth—that is, God has created them and determined their nature, subjecting them to critical scrutiny and understanding by the wise (cf. Gen. 1:5, 8, 10, etc.) Human nature and function are open to the assessment and understanding of the wise. The characteristic feature that Qoheleth chooses to emphasize is weakness vis-à-vis God; humans (*'adam*) cannot argue with one who is stronger than they—God. . . Qoheleth is emphasizing the radical sovereignty of God, who rules the world and determines the destinies of human beings.[13]

Good. Forms of the term טוֹב occurs fifty-one times throughout the book of Qoheleth. This very frequent repetition cannot but help us to recall the similar repetition of טוֹב in Gen 1, as God repeatedly pronounces everything that God has made as "good" (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Like that of the first creation account, goodness in Qoheleth is a quality that follows from *action*; it is not merely a stative quality. And like God, Qoheleth tends to sit back and *observe* what it good; knowledge of the goodness of items comes through seeing. The sense of completeness and sufficiency stressed in 3:14-15 likewise resembles the sense of finality and completeness after the events of creation (Gen 2:1-4a).

Yet Qoheleth's good is not absolute but relative. What is determined to be good is just as impermanent as everything else under the sun. "The cosmos . . . is not a just order deriving from the righteousness of God. Nature's daily occurrences of sunrise and sunset, the blowing of the wind, and the flowing of streams did not reveal a moral order or a divine purpose, eliciting the response of wonder, awe, and praise. Instead, the movement is nature is monotonous, unending repetition."[14] Goodness does not amount to an absolute sense of righteousness or justice; in contrast, Qoheleth's ethics are that of *carpe diem*. Rather than being objectively good, everything instead merely "beautiful" or "appropriate" (יָפֶה); rather than being eternally suitable, it is instead merely suitable "in

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[13] *Wisdom and Creation*, 226-27. Cf. also Murphy's (*Ecclesiastes*, 58) and Longman's (*Ecclesiastes*, 176-

its time" (בְּעִתּוֹ) (3:11, also cf. 5:17 [Eng. 18]).[15] Theological categories have been replaced by aesthetic categories.[16] Although there is some sense of God's approving (9:7) along with making suitable, the emphasis with regard to the concept of goodness lies clearly in the realm of human anthropology. Moral reasoning is presented as human knowing and doing, not as divine decree. What is good is not the created order itself, but what human beings do *within* that order. It is not divine actions and the results of those actions that are deemed good, as in the first creation account. After all, God creates weal but also woe (7:14). Instead, God's action is taken as a given—it is morally neutral—and the correct choice of human action is what warrants approbation.

Theology. Qoheleth's God resembles the distant, aloof deity of the first creation account much more closely than the intimate, meddling deity of the second account. God does not converse with the human creatures, but instead "God is in heaven, and you upon the earth" (5:1 [Eng. 2]). Removed from the created realm, God is a *deus absconditus*. As Seow notes, though this God is presented in the book as quite active and not having completely withdrawn from the universe after creating it, this God is far more transcendent than immanent.[17] Though there is—supposedly—a divine order to things, from a human perspective this order can only be seen as crooked (1:15; 7:13). Any ability to discern any order to the chaos, in the end, will not make a difference in anyone's life, and any such attempt proves, in Forman's term, "singularly depressing."[18]

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77) comments regarding this issue.

[14] Purdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 239.

[15] Note Crenshaw's discussion on how Qoheleth, in 3:9-22, changes the vocabulary and meaning of Gen 1 (*A Whirlpool of Torment: Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 80-84; also Longman (*Ecclesiastes*, 119) and Purdue (*Wisdom and Creation*, 216-18).

[16] Crenshaw's idea; *Ecclesiastes*, 25.

[17] *Ecclesiastes*, 56

[18] "Koheleth's Use of Genesis," 257.

Reflections of the Second Creation Story (Genesis 2:4b-3:24)

In other various ways, the book of Qoheleth reflects the second of Genesis' two creation accounts.

Natural imagery. The serpent (נָחָשׁ) of Gen 3 comes slithering into Qoheleth's thought (or at least the proverbs that the author chooses to borrow) at 10:8, 10—although this snake bites rather than wheedles. In both books, the reptile, in one sense, gains the upper hand over unwitting homo sapiens. The dust (עָפָר; Gen 3:14), upon which the cursed serpent crawls and which it eats, also reappears in the later work. It is the third curse, against the man, however, that has the greater influence upon the book of Qoheleth. Indeed, one could argue that it is the strongest case for the author directly drawing upon the creation materials. As Adam consists of dust and will return to dust, Qoheleth reasons that "all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again" (3:20). The condition of the individual being, Adam, is now taken as a universal state: all beings—human and beast—share the same dusty composition and fate. This idea is continued at the conclusion of the book, where the final demise is depicted, a further universalization of the concept (12:7). After all human, animal, and plant activity grinds to a halt, this dust will, in the end as in the beginning, settle back down again.

Though the terminology differs between the two books, water imagery is found in both. The pre-creation raining (מטר) and watering (שׁקה) of Gen 2:5-6 is repeated in the rain of full clouds (11:3) and the final earthly rain (12:2; both גֶּשֶׁם) of Qoheleth. Streams (נְחָלִים) flow around and around to the ocean (1:7, twice), just as a river (נָהָר) splits and flows four-fold around all the known territories (Gen 2:10-14). But it is the rare term אֵד,

"mist" or "stream," that I find most allusive (Gen 2:6). This mistiness, this steam, rises up and suffuses the entire surface of the pre-creation earth. Genesis' image of this water-saturated air is so like the ever-present הֶבֶל, the vapor, whiff, wispy breath of ephemerality, that literally lays upon the philosophy of Qoheleth, saturating it through and through.[19]

Wisdom. The second creation account gives recognition to the concept of wisdom and anticipates human desire for it. God literally plants this acknowledgment in the created universe, the garden's "tree of the knowledge (דַּעַת) of good and evil" (Gen 2:9, 17). Qoheleth, of course, is quintessentially occupied with the concept of wisdom. The book speaks of efforts for the gaining of wisdom, for continual observation for the purpose of gaining understanding. The author frequently speaks of occupying the self with the pursuit of understanding, boasting that "I have acquired great wisdom, . . . and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge (דַּעַת)" (1:16-17). The author desperately desires such wisdom, applying the mind to know (ידע) wisdom (8:16) and testing everything by means of wisdom (7:23). But in the end, just like the trees in the original garden, wisdom is determined to be put on earth to tempt but not to be eaten. God gives humans a sense of greater knowledge, but prohibits them from knowing it. People can try to understand all they want, but ultimately their efforts will fail (3:11; 7:14, 24; 8:17). Qoheleth picks up the second creation account's view of this

[19] Beal refers to this הֶבֶל as "the trace of a haunting presence, the vapor trail of the divine." ("C(ha)osmopolis," 303). Though Beal does not make a connection to Genesis, perhaps one can take this concept further and suggest that, before the deity-caused rain appeared, this אֵד is the only misty presence of God yet on the face of the earth. Going a bit further into the second creation account, Forman sees a grammatical connection between Qoheleth's הֶבֶל and the wandering second generation Abel (הֶבֶל) of Gen 4 ("Koheleth's Use of Genesis," 257-58).

characteristic of God, presenting a deity who does not want human beings to be too wise, to understand too much. Speaking particularly of 3:11, Crenshaw observes that

> the deity teases humans by implanting the unknown and unknowable deeply within their minds. . . A cloud of secrecy envelops divine actions, and no earthly creature can penetrate this cloud, not even so much as to discover anything from A to Z. We aspire, as it were, to permanence and to knowledge, and that longing was placed in us by the creator, but all our aspiration achieves nothing.[20]

Eating. The book of Qoheleth, as does the second creation story, gives a goodly amount of attention to the action of eating. Frequently noted along with enjoying one's work is the admonition that "there is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink" (2:24; also 5:17 [Eng. 18]; 8:15; 9:7). In Gen 2-3, the action of eating leads to wisdom (or at least that is the snake's promise and the woman's hope). In the book of Qoheleth, knowing how to eat (with gusto and pleasure)—indeed, knowing *to* eat—is what evidences that a person is wise. In the face of life's inequities and the world's absurdities—something the first woman has yet to experience—the ability to eat joyfully is itself a gift.

Work. Whereas the human beings in the first creation account have no inkling of the tribulations of working, those in the post-Eden second creation story most certainly do. One of the things they learn is that with new knowledge comes a curse.[21] Work is difficult, painful, frustrating, and often fruitless. Qoheleth takes up the characteristics of this view of labor with remarkable consistency. One must agree, with Anderson, that the author is clearly dependent upon Gen 3.[22] Human effort is all "toil" (עָמָל). It is an

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[20] *Whirlpool of Torment*, 82

[21] There are also a few references to curses in Qoheleth, but I am still trying to determine whether they are similar enough to bear mentioning. The vocabulary differs: ארר for the serpent and the ground (Gen 3:14, 19), but קלל in Qoheleth (7:21-22; 10:20). The situations also differ: God cursing the creation in the former, and warnings to watch one's tongue not to avoid cursing others in the latter.

[22] "The Curse of Work in Qoheleth."

unhappy business (1:13), a vexation (2:23), hateful (2:18), and unsatisfying (6:7). The book of Qoheleth answers the second creation story; it shows how the work, outside the garden, has become a toilsome curse, although now as much mental toil as the physical toil there anticipated. Qoheleth feels the need to remind people to find joy in their work because, clearly, so often they must experience it to be not so. Yet the author frequently acknowledges its very futility (1:3; 2:11, 17-23, 26; 3:10; 4:4, 7-8; 5:16-18 [Eng. 15-17]; 8:17; 12:12).

Death. Like work, Qoheleth's world is one that includes death. In the second creation account, the deity is the one who introduces death, warning that it will be a consequence for eating (Gen 2:17). But death seems even closer when the woman understands that merely even touching will warrant death (Gen 3:3). The serpent counters this idea: it is not death but knowledge that will result (Gen 3:4). Death, therefore, is equated with wisdom; choosing to have wisdom will, in the end, lead to death. (Adam does die [Gen 5:5], but Eve's death is never reported—does she live on, and therefore is the serpent actually correct?) The book of Qoheleth has macabre overtones; death is an everpresent reality.[23] Death looms for individuals, and ultimately for society (12:1-7). Qoheleth's argument is that death comes to all, no matter how much wisdom one has. Wisdom makes no difference and, in contrast to Genesis, even those who choose to remain foolish will die. All, human and animal alike (3:19), will die with nothing (5:14 [Eng. 15]); the moment of death cannot be predicted (8:8); and there is no justice in its timing (or, in the words of Billy Joel, only the good die young; 7:15-18). In

[23] Because of the book's acknowledgement of living always in the face of death, Mark K. George considers Qoheleth a useful work for our post-Holocaust age ("Death as the Beginning of Life in the Book of Ecclesiastes," in *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust* [ed. Tod Linafelt; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], 280-293).

negation of God's dire threat to the humans in the creation story, there *can* be things worse than death: living in an imperfect world (4:2, 7:1), never living at all (4:3, 6:3), and being caught by Woman Folly (7:26). Sometimes, life is better than death (9:4-5). So in the face of this universal death that will come to all beings, regardless of whether they choose to eat the fruit or not, the best thing is to enjoy the things of life now, in "the few days of their vain life" (6:12; also 5:17 [Eng. 18]; 6:3; 8:15).

Anthropology. In the book of Qoheleth, there is no glimmer of the *imago dei*, the first creation story's idea of humanity as carrying a likeness to the divine. It presents a lower, more earthly, concept of the human being—who, after all, is merely dust (3:20). As Purdue notes, "Qoheleth's view negates the more optimistic tradition of human creation in the Hebrew Bible, including especially the exaltation of human beings over the creatures to rule as God's surrogate (Gen. 1:26-28; Psalm 8). Indeed, Qoheleth comes much closer to the more pessimistic understanding of a corrupt humanity in the Yahwist's primeval narrative (Genesis 2-11)."[24] Whereas the book of Qoheleth presents a picture of the deity that is more like that of the first creation account, its presentation of humanity more greatly resembles the second creation story.

As in Gen 2, a human being is presented as being composed of bones (vv. 22-23) and animated by breath (v. 7). Qoheleth 11:5 exhibits a clear reference to this creation: "Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything" (11:5). As in creation, this animating breath is explicitly the breath of God (12:7). Just as God chooses when and how to create with this breath, it is not human beings who can, ultimately, control it (8:8). In the

[24] *Wisdom and Creation*, 219.

creation thought of Qoheleth, one can see the image of the god who breathes the breath of life into the human's nostrils. Yet the relationship with this god likewise involves an aspect of fear. After eating from the knowledge tree, the man begins to fear (יראּ) God (Gen 3:10). Qoheleth also opines that it is wise to fear (יראּ) God (7:18; 8:12-13). The author suggests that just as Adam, when gaining wisdom one should respond with awe towards the deity. In addition, Qoh 3:14 also uses creation imagery to advocate such fear (יראּ) before God. Furthermore, any distinction between human and animal is slim. Humans share the same qualities and the same end as the animal realm (3:19). As in the second creation story they share a similar curse, so in Qoheleth they share a similar breath (though note that in Gen 2 God is not presented as creating animals with the divine breath). Also the concept of solidarity is carried over from the second creation account. Aloneness is discontinued for the first human with the separation into woman and man. Qoheleth likewise determines that "it is not good for the human to be alone" (Gen 2:18) when advocating that one should enjoy life with a companion (9:9) and to work in partnerships (4:9-12).

Qoheleth as a New Eve

Qoheleth's use of the second creation account goes further than thematic concepts and imagery. In addition, the character of Qoheleth resembles the actions, attributes, and concerns of the character of Eve in Gen 2-3. (Eve, of course, is the more active of the two humans in this creation story.) No one, to my knowledge, has yet observed this similarity between these two works. In one sense, such a comparison has its difficulties. Eve has few direct words, only one statement of any substance throughout the entire story

(Gen 3:2-3; her description of Cain's birth at 4:1 is less useful for determining her character). Qoheleth, in contrast, has many words; almost the entire book is Qoheleth's discourse. This divergence adds difficulty to a comparison between the two figures, for we can know much of what Qoheleth thinks, feels, and reasons through this direct discourse, but we must deduce what Eve thinks from the narrative and other characters' (God's, the serpent's) statements. It is true that the book of Qoheleth presents primarily a male (M) voice and an androcentric perspective, as Athalya Brenner has observed.[25] Yet to the extent that the figure of Qoheleth reflects that of Eve, a female (F) voice intrudes into this biblical book.

The term "Qoheleth" (קֹהֶלֶת) has long puzzled interpreters of the book, for it is a feminine form (qal fs ptc) and twice occurs with the definite article (12:8 and 7:27, as the latter instance is typically emended). The term is based upon the Hebrew root קהל; therefore, "[the] one who gathers, collects, or assembles." Whether it is to be taken as a proper name or an appellative is not clear. While too much should not be made of the fact that the term is grammatically feminine (masculine singular verbs are used with it at 1:2 and 12:7), it is nonetheless a grammatical oddity that permits this figure to appear not completely masculine. Both the names of Qoheleth and of Eve are composed from roots that represent the actions they perform. The name Eve (חַוָּה), based on the verb חיה ("to live"), is the one who brings forth life, "the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20). Similarly, Qoheleth is the one who "collects," assembling proverbs and wise sayings. Adam's

[25] Brenner, "Some Observations on the Figuration of Woman in Wisdom Literature," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 50-66 (59-61); repr. from *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. H. A. McKay and D. J. A. Clines; JSOTSup 162; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 192-208. See also her analysis of Qoh 3:1-9 (*On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* [BI 1; Leiden: Brill, 1993], 133-163).

name אָדָם, in contrast, represents a noun (אֲדָמָה), the ground from which he is taken. Therefore, both Eve and Qoheleth are actors, the subjects of the actions of their names, but Adam is merely an object of his namesake (God doing the work to make him up from the אֲדָמָה). Furthermore, like Qoheleth, Eve not only gathers wisdom but also dispenses it, sharing insight with others (12:9; Gen 3:6)

The overview of the figure of Qoheleth displays notably similar actions to that of Eve.

> I, Qoheleth, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind. . . I said to myself, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow. (1:12-14, 16-18)

Like Qoheleth, Eve also is concerned with acquiring wisdom and understanding (vv. 13, 16). Inquisitive and thoughtful, she chooses to eat from the tree which promises knowledge, which is "desired to make one wise" (Gen 3:6). The plank of the serpent's argument that finally convinces her is that, when eating, her "eyes will be opened and [she] will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). In Eve's searching, she very literally acquires the fruit of wisdom, just as Qoheleth acquires the sought-after wisdom (v. 16). Indeed, Eve's choice to heed the serpent is part of her search for wisdom. This snake has the reputation of being more clever than any other of the created beings (Gen 3:1). Though the adjective עָרוּם is often translated in the second creation story with a negative connotation, it actually is a term from the wisdom corpus, where it is used as a positive descriptor. Designating a sensible, prudent, shrewd, or clever person, it is used

frequently in proverbial statements to contrast with the foolish or simple individual (cf. Prov 12:16, 23; 13:16; 14:15, 18; 22:3; 27:12). From a wisdom perspective, Eve is demonstrating wisdom by choosing to listen to this most prudent and knowledgeable of all the animals. As does Eve, Qoheleth yearns for knowledge and wisdom, putting much effort into attaining it and sacrificing much for it (2:3, 9, 12; 7:23; 8:16; 9:1; 12:9).[26]

Eve obtains her information by visual observation; she sees (ראה; Gen 3:6). In addition to v. 14 in this passage, seeing and observing is the prime method that Qoheleth also uses to gain knowledge (2:10; 3:10, 16; 4:1, 4, 7, 15; 5:12, 17 [Eng. 13, 18]; 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10, 16, 17; 9:11, 13; 10:5, 7). Both characters observe their data, then analyze it. Eve demonstrates good reasoning abilities, weighing out the benefits and drawbacks of the information she observes (Gen 3:2-3, 6). Likewise, Qoheleth not only sees but also assesses information, "applying the mind" as well as the eyes (vv. 13, 17; also 7:23, 25; 8:9). Both show themselves also to be free thinkers; they do not do what they are "supposed" to do. Eve is an independent thinker who does not follow instructions. She reinterprets the tradition, what stands for common wisdom in the garden (not to eat the fruit because bad things will happen). Not repeating it verbatim, she elaborates and adds her own interpretation (Gen 3:3 vs. 2:16-17). Qoheleth likewise is a nontraditionalist, working with "traditional" wisdom thought (like that in Proverbs and Job) but reinterpreting the tradition with twists and qualifications. Yet Eve is also a prime example of the "sorrow" and "vexation" that can come from becoming wise (v. 18). She,

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[26] Qoheleth 7:28 may not be the misogynistic statement that it is often understood to be, but another instance of Qoheleth's search (here unfulfilled) for wisdom. See the argumentation of Seow (*Ecclesiastes*, 264) and Carole R. Fontaine, "'Many Devices' (Qoheleth 7.23-8.1): Qoheleth, Misogyny, and the *Malleus Maleficarum*," in *Wisdom and Psalms: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 137-168 (167-68).

along with her fellow creatures, experiences the toil of which Qoheleth speaks so frequently.

I have spoken above of the theme of death in the book of Qoheleth. Eve evidences a similar attitude towards death. She is not only aware of the specter of death, she also accepts a life lived within the reality of this death. Though death is presented as a threat, Eve is not afraid of it and does not allow it to deter her (Gen 3:3). Like Qoheleth, she makes her choices facing death head-on. What convinces her to make this decision is threefold: that the prospect is "good" (טוֹב), "desirable" (נֶחְמָד), and that "it is a delight to the eyes" (תַּאֲוָה-הוּא לָעֵינַיִם) (Gen 3:6). Like Eve, Qoheleth is also continually looking for what is טוֹב, as mentioned above. Qoheleth is also tempted by what is "pleasurable" (nouns and verb, respectively, of שִׂמְחָה; 2:1, 2; 3:22), "delightful" (חֵפֶץ; 5:3 [Eng. 4]), and all things "desired by my eyes" (שָׁאֲלוּ עֵינַי; 2:10).

The punishment for Eve's decision for wisdom is two-fold, both aspects of which are replicated by Qoheleth (Gen 3:16). First God informs her, "I will make great your pain in childbearing; in pain you will bring forth children." The root עצב, used twice in this statement (as a verb and a noun), signifies mental grief and anguish as much as it does labor pain in birthing. The pain of having children is both emotional and physical. She knows the difficulties, frustrations, and heartbreak that comes with parenthood. Eve's identity, with this new role in life and her new name (Gen 3:20), is now focused around motherhood. Qoheleth uses a generous amount of birthing imagery (5:14 [Eng. 15]; 6:3; 7:1; 11:5), and the statement in the catalogue of occasions is from the parent's perspective of giving birth (לָלֶדֶת; 3:2). Qoheleth does give an impression of being sensitive, even perhaps knowledgeable, of motherhood and bearing children. Qoheleth

also speaks of the trials and disappointments of parenting in general, seeming to understand well the emotional pain involved in not being able to provide properly for progeny and the frustrations of having disappointing (i.e., foolish) children (2:18, 18-19 23; 5:13 [Eng. 14]; 6:3). Second, Eve is told, "Your desire will be for your man, but he will rule over you." She is placed in a situation of wanting something that will not work out well for her, of an ultimately unsatisfying relationship. Just as does Eve, Qoheleth likewise experiences what it is to desire something that is ultimately unattainable, the frustrations and dissatisfaction of wanting wisdom to be valued and sufficient but living in a world where that it not the case (7:16, 23-28; 9:13-18).

Conclusion

I am still in the process of working on this topic, so what I want, in the end, to conclude about it may still change a bit. At this point, however, I would suggest that the book of Qoheleth's use of creation thought is unquestionable. Reliance upon the first creation account is possible, although I think it also possible that the author of Qoheleth may have instead had in mind other ancient cosmolog(ies).[27] Use of the second creation account seems explicit and deliberate. There is a closer dependence on the details and a greater amount of material and concepts that are repeated in the later work. I am not ready to say that the figure of Qoheleth was deliberately modeled on that of Eve, but a similarity exists whether there was intended resemblance or not. The opposite way to state my findings would be to find Eve to be a wisdom figure herself. This would

[27] Seow suggests this as an alternate possibility (*Ecclesiastes*, 55).

contrast with Woman Wisdom, who herself *is* wisdom embodied. Eve would then fit in with the role of those (men) who are pursuing Woman Wisdom (e.g. Prov 3:13-26).