Qohelet and Royal Power in Ecclesiastes 8:1–8

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Introduction

Recent approaches to Ecclesiastes are nearly uniform in arguing that Qohelet[1] espouses a negative view of political leadership, often deemed a response to governmental overreaches in Hellenistic Judea.[2] Beyond undermining kingship in the so-called "royal fictional autobiography" (1:12–2:26),[3] Qohelet elsewhere complains about governmental injustice (3:16), laments oppressors' abuse of power (4:1), decries foolish leaders who spurn counsel (4:13), warns of acquisitive officials who exploit their citizens (5:8–9),[4] and advises of sinister kings who act with caprice and malice (10:20). Many scholars infer from these criticisms that Qohelet is a political outsider from the Hellenistic period assuming the guise of a king to levy criticisms against abusive officials.[5] From this understanding, Ecclesiastes 8 takes on greater significance in the book's interpretation, as it carries Qohelet's most concentrated discussion of the uses and abuses of royal power.[6] In this paper I argue that, rather than offering an expressly negative view of leadership, Eccl 8 provides a realistic, balanced view of the advantages and detriments of royal authority. This approach is consistent with the book's overall assessment of the advantages

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[1] In this paper I refer to the writer of Ecclesiastes by his given nomenclature, Qohelet, a transliteration of קֹהֶלֶת, often translated "Preacher" (ESV, NASB, NKJV) or "Teacher" (CSB, NETB, NIV) but perhaps best rendered "Convener" or "Assembler." Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes makes the best sense given the external and internal criteria (see R. V. McCabe, "Pondering the Authorship of Ecclesiastes," *DBSJ* 20 [2015]: 3–20). For a recent defense of Hezekiah as the author, see D. A. Quackenbos, "Recovering an Ancient Tradition: Toward an Understanding of Hezekiah as the Author of Ecclesiastes" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019).

[2] L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 108–9; C. G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 54–59; P. Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, THOTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 19–20; A. Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, HOTC (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 2–9; K. N. Heim, *Ecclesiastes*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 6–8; G. Athas, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 28–34 For recent approaches that espouse Solomonic authorship or are open to it, see D. C. Fredericks and D. J. Estes, *Ecclesiastes & the Song of Songs*, AOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 31–36; J. Bollhagen, *Ecclesiastes*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 6–14; W. Barrick, *Ecclesiastes*, Focus on the Bible (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2011), 17–23; R. P. Belcher, Jr., *Ecclesiastes*, Mentor (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2017), 14–18.

[3] T. Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 120–123; Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1998), 4–11.

[4] This paper follows the English versification of Ecclesiastes, whereby 5:1–20 corresponds to 4:17–5:19 in the Hebrew Masoretic text. For an alternative, positive reading of Eccl 5:8–9, see K. Dunham, "Political Folly and Royal Wisdom in Eccl 5,7-8," *Biblica* 102 (2021): 335–55.

[5] A. Lauha, *Kohelet*, 11–12; T. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 19–21; G. Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 58–65; G. Athas, *Ecclesiastes*, 28–34.

[6] W. A. Irwin, "Ecclesiastes 8:2–9," *JNES* 4 (Apr 1945): 130–131; P. Beentjes, "'Who Is Like the Wise?': Some Notes on Qohelet 8,1-15," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors, 303–315 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 305–6; S. C. Jones, "Qohelet's Courtly Wisdom: Ecclesiastes 8:1–9," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 212–13; J.-J. Lavoie, "Qui est comme le sage? Étude de Qohélet 8,1," *Theoforum* 46 (2015): 101.

and detriments of life in a fallen world whereby the reader is enjoined to appropriate God's good gifts with wisdom, joy, and sobriety. Through intertextual links to Joseph's coregency in Egypt (Genesis 37–50) and to Solomon's rise to power and construction of the temple in 1 Kings 1:1–9:9, Qohelet advises that royal power can be utilized for good or evil, depending on a variety of factors and exigent circumstances. In view of this, Qohelet commends self-discipline, forbearance, and fidelity to those in leadership so that the application of wisdom be not derailed through foolish missteps. We will examine first the discourse parameters of the unit, followed by the text and translation of Ecclesiastes 8:1–8 and a closer examination of the intertextual references within the passage.

Discourse Parameters

Qohelet turns from a warning about illicit sexual activity (7:25–29) to a warning about rash involvement in political intrigue (8:1–8). Much discussion surrounds the limits of the passage. A number of interpreters link 8:1 to the preceding unit, on the basis of catchwords such as חָכָם ("wise"), חָכְמָה ("wisdom"), ידע ("to know"), and אָדָם ("man/human") (Galling, 109; Lohfink, 59; Lauha, 144; Fredericks, 182; Fox 1999, 272). Closer scrutiny, however, suggests that 8:1 serves best as the introduction to 8:1–8.[7] Catchwords link v. 1 to the following verses: חָכָם ("wise") (vv. 1, 5), דָּבָר ("word/matter") (vv. 1, 3, 4, 5), ידע ("to know") (vv. 1, 5 [2x], 7), מִי ("who") (vv. 1 [2x], 4, 7), אָדָם ("man/human") (vv. 1, 6, 8), and פָּנֶה ("face") (vv. 1 [2x], 3) (see Schwienhorst-Schönberger, 412).

Other factors likewise contribute to the unit's coherence. First, the term פֵּשֶׁר (traditionally "interpretation") in v. 1 is unique in the OT—occurring elsewhere with its cognates פִּתָּרוֹן/פתר only in the contexts of dream-divination in the royal court by Joseph (14x in Gen 40–41) and Daniel (34x in Dan 1–7).[8] The term's uniqueness serves here to introduce the following verses, which concern circumspect conduct in the royal court under the capricious power of a king. This runs distinct from the preceding admonitions about the outside woman in 7:25–29, which carry a different conceptual purview. Further, v. 1 uses the term עֹז ("strength/might") as an apt introduction to the unit's focus on royal authority and power with terms like פִּי ("mouth/command"), שְׁבוּעָה ("oath"), שִׁלְטוֹן ("authority"), and מִצְוָה ("command"). Second, the turn to rhetorical questions signals the unit boundary. The unit contains four rhetorical questions headed by מִי ("who?") (vv. 1 [2x], 4, 7) as well as two interrogatives headed by מָה ("what") (vv. 4, 7). The previous unit carried no rhetorical questions (7:25–29), whereas the preceding units (7:1–14; 7:15–24) both marked their conclusions with rhetorical questions (7:13–14; 7:24). The question "Who knows?" in v. 1 anticipates the "no one knows" rejoinder in v. 7. Rhetorical questions thus carry a discourse function in the larger context to mark literary boundaries and serve here to introduce Qohelet's encomium of the sage.

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[7] So Seow, 290; Bartholomew, 280; P. Beentjes, "'Who Is Like the Wise?': Some Notes on Qohelet 8,1-15," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors, 303–315 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 305–6; Fischer, *Skepsis oder Furcht*, 61–62.

[8] See the discussion in S. C. Jones, "Qohelet's Courtly Wisdom: Ecclesiastes 8:1–9," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 212–13.

Third, the previous unit indicated its opening and close through an inclusio device marked by the verb בקשׁ (“to seek”) and the accusative חֶשְׁבּוֹן/חֶשְׁבּוֹן (“insight/schemes”) in vv. 25 and 29.[9] Within that previous unit too occurred the following catchwords, which do not appear in 8:1–8, pointing to the coherence of that unit: בקשׁ (“seek”) (7:25, 28, 29); מצא (“find/catch”) (7:26, 27 [2x], 28 [3x], 29); and חֶשְׁבּוֹן/חֶשְׁבּוֹן (“insight/schemes”) (7:25, 27, 29). Although the term אָדָם (“man/human”) occurs in both 7:29 and 8:1, in 7:29 the term is definite and referentially represented by the 3mp pronoun הֵמָּה (“they”) to denote humanity in general, whereas the term אָדָם in 8:1 is indefinite and refers likely to an individual. Conversely, keywords that occur in this unit, such as מִי, חָכָם, דָּבָר, and פָּנֶה, do not occur in the previous one.

Fourth, the verb conjugations signal a switch in discourse function from observations regarding his inquiry into the nature of male/female relationships to instructions concerning the wisdom seeker’s conduct in the royal court. This change is marked by the transition from *qatal* verbs, occurring 10x in the previous unit (with only two *yiqtol* forms—his inquiry carries a completed aspect), to *yiqtol* verbs, occurring 15x in this unit (with no *qatal* forms—his instructions carry ongoing relevancy). The imperatives mirror this tack, as the two imperatives in the previous unit both use the verb ראה (“see”) to underscore the unit’s purpose as observation, whereas the present unit’s imperative uses the verb שׁמר (“keep/obey”) befitting its function as instruction, signaling a new hortatory purpose. Fifth, v. 9 serves best as the transition to the following unit (8:9–17), as the opening accusative phrase אֶת־כָּל־זֶה (“all this”) is fronted so as to carry a cataphoric purpose in introducing what Qohelet has observed of the conduct of wicked people. That unit is also marked by the switch back to *qatal* verbs, which occur 3x in v. 9 and 16x in the unit.

Text and Translation

The following text and translation of Ecclesiastes 8:1–8 precedes a detailed analysis of the portions of the passage that support the conclusions offered.

Ecclesiastes 8:1–8		
1	מִי כְהֶחָכָם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֵּשֶׁר דָּבָר חָכְמַת אָדָם תָּאִיר פָּנָיו וְעֹז פָּנָיו יְשֻׁנֶּא׃	Who is like the wise?[10] And who knows the portent of a word? A person’s wisdom

[9] On this point and the next, see J.-J. Lavoie, “Qui est comme le sage? Étude de Qohélet 8,1,” *Theoforum* 46 (2015): 101.

[10] Jerome and Syr. support the MT’s unusual phrasing, which retains the article (non-syncopated) after the preposition כְּ in כְהֶחָכָם (one would expect כְּחָכָם as in the corollary לְחָכָם in 2:16; 6:8; 7:19), while other versions differ. LXX Rahlfs has τίς οἶδεν σοφούς (“who knows the wise?), which Goldman deems a corruption (*BHQ*, 97*). Other versions such as α' (τίς ὧδε σοφός), σ' (τίς οὕτως σοφός) (restored by Field), and Vg. (*quis talis ut sapiens*)

		lights up his countenance, and the resolve of his countenance[11] shines forth.[12]
2	אֲנִי֙ פִּי־מֶ֣לֶךְ שְׁמֹ֔ור וְעַ֖ל דִּבְרַ֣ת שְׁבוּעַ֣ת אֱלֹהִ֑ים׃	Obey the king's command, I advise,[13] especially for the sake of your oath before God.

("who is so [in such a way] wise?") presuppose מִי כֹה חָכָם (emended thus by Seow, who argues that the article is always syncopated in Eccl, but this is not the case following the particle שֶׁ־ in 1:7; 6:10; 10:3 [277]). While the MT is difficult (Goldman attributes this grammatical feature to late Hebrew but Driver to northern Israelite dialect), the latter emended reading carries its own difficulties, as the phrase מִי כֹה is itself awkward and appears nowhere else in the OT. I prefer the MT with its more difficult reading.

[11] In place of the MT's substantive noun עֹז, the versions read the substantive adjective עַז: LXX ἀναιδὴς ("shameless, impudent"); Vg., Jerome *potentissimus* ("strong, powerful"); Syr., Tg. *ḥsyp* ("audacious, impudent"). The Hebrew phrase with the adjective עַז פָּנִים appears elsewhere to denote someone who is "ruthless" or "impudent" (lit. "fierce of face") (Deut 28:50; Dan 8:23). Goldman favors the versions, emends the MT, and translates "the arrogant" (*BHQ*, 97*). Elsewhere, Goldman explains that the MT's construct phrase carries other difficulties such as the "superfluous and incongruent" 3ms suffix on פָּנָיו and the imbalance of parallelism with the previous line, where פָּנָיו is the accusative (Y. A. P. Goldman, "Le texte massorétique de Qohélet, témoin d'un compromis théologique entre les 'disciples des sages' (Qoh 7,23-24; 8,1; 7,19)," in *Sôfer Mahîr: Essays in Honour of Adrian Schenker Offered by the Editors of Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, ed. Y. A. P. Goldman, A. van der Kooij, and R. D. Weis, 69–93 [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 86). Lavoie turns this argument against its proponents, however, in noting that nearly all who emend the noun to an adjective bring other unnecessary modifications to the text as an entailment (J.-J. Lavoie, "Qui est comme le sage?" 92). The MT constitutes the *lectio difficilior* and makes sense within the context, so I retain it.

[12] The verb יְשֻׁנֶּא is conventionally tied to the root שׁנה I, "to change," thus altering the III-ה root to III-א, an alleged mark of late Hebrew (cf. Sir 12:18; 13:25), although Gesenius shows that such variations occur through all stages of biblical Hebrew (§75.VI, 216–17). LXX (μισηθήσεται) and Syr. (*nstn'*) read the verb as שׂנא, "to hate, be hated." Goldman argues that the Pual vocalization ties to the MT's construct phrase עֹז פָּנָיו as the subject (98*). Vg. and Jerome evidence an active verb with *et potentissimus faciem illius commutavit* ("and the mighty changes his face"), the reading Goldman prefers as the original and *difficilior*, emending to יְשַׁנֶּא. I follow Goldman in emending the Hebrew verb to the Piel form (so also Seow, 278), but I opt for a different interpretation of the root שׁנא, following Emerton, Müller, Eitan, and others in recognizing a homonym שׁנה/שׁנא III with the meaning "to shine," "beam," or "radiate."

[13] The independent 1cs pronoun אֲנִי has perplexed commentators. *BHS* suggests that the versions read the lexeme as אֵת, but Goldman rightly counters that there is no evidence for this and that such a reading would necessitate a definite accusative rather than the anarthrous phrase פִּי־מֶלֶךְ (98*). Interpreters have offered various explanations for its presence. Whitley emends the phrase to אנפי מלך ("the king's face"), a reading he ascribes to fifth-century Aramaic (72). Renan alters to the preposition אֶל ("to") (152). Beentjes retains the pronoun, seeing it as the answer to the questions posed in v. 1: "Who is like the sage and who knows the interpretation? I (Qohelet) do" (Beentjes, "Who Is Like the Wise? 306). LXX, Syr., and Tg. omit it, as does Goldman. Among the Greek versions, σ' retains it with ἐγώ παραινῶ ("I advise"). Vg. and Jerome also attest it: *ego os regis observo* ("I observe the mouth of the king"). I prefer to follow the MT and see a discourse function for the pronoun reaching back to the so-called editorial intrusion of 7:27.

3	אַל־תִּבָּהֵל מִפָּנָיו תֵּלֵךְ אַל־תַּעֲמֹד בְּדָבָר רָע כִּי כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַחְפֹּץ יַעֲשֶׂה׃	Do not go away rashly from his presence. Do not stand with an evil rumor, for he does whatever he pleases.
4	בַּאֲשֶׁר דְּבַר־מֶלֶךְ שִׁלְטוֹן וּמִי יְאמַר־לוֹ מַה־תַּעֲשֶׂה׃	For the king's word[14] is supreme: who can say to him, "What are you doing?"
5	שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה לֹא יֵדַע דָּבָר רָע וְעֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט יֵדַע לֵב חָכָם׃	Whoever obeys his command pays no heed to an evil word, and a wise mind knows the proper time and judgment.[15]
6	כִּי לְכָל־חֵפֶץ יֵשׁ עֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט כִּי־רָעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו׃	For there is a proper time and judgment for every matter, although humanity's misfortune[16] weighs heavily upon him.
7	כִּי־אֵינֶנּוּ יֹדֵעַ מַה־שֶּׁיִּהְיֶה כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה מִי יַגִּיד לוֹ׃	For no one knows what will happen, for whatever will happen who can inform him?
8	אֵין אָדָם שַׁלִּיט בָּרוּחַ לִכְלֹוא אֶת־הָרוּחַ וְאֵין שִׁלְטוֹן בְּיוֹם הַמָּוֶת וְאֵין מִשְׁלַחַת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְלֹא־יְמַלֵּט רֶשַׁע אֶת־בְּעָלָיו׃	No person has power over the wind to confine the wind, and no one has power over the day of his death. No one is discharged in the time of war,[17] and wickedness[18] will not deliver those who practice it.

[14] The MT phrase דְּבַר־מֶלֶךְ ("the king's word) carries diverse attestation in the versions. LXX Rahlfs follows Venetus and a paucity of mss to hew close to the MT with καθὼς λαλεῖ βασιλεὺς ἐξουσιάζων ("just as a king speaks having authority"). Alexandrinus, Ephraemi, Sinaiticus (corr), and about thirty medieval mss place the verb at the end of v. 4a (καθὼς βασιλεὺς ἐξουσιάζων λαλεῖ), which Goldman reads as indicative of hesitation in placing the word into a preexisting text (hinting that the OG omitted the verb, which is the case in Vaticanus, 998, Sinaiticus, around twenty medieval mss, and the Aldine, Sixtine, and Complutensis editions) (99*; cf. LXX Gentry). Other versions provide support for MT, including α' (ἐλάλησε), σ' (λόγον), and Jerome (*dixerit*). I prefer to follow the MT in retaining the lexeme דָּבָר, with its discourse function in linking back to דָּבָר רָע in vv. 3 and 5.

[15] Goldman emends the *yiqtol* יֵדַע ("knows/will know") to the participial יֹדֵעַ ("is knowing") in keeping with v. 7 and as possibly supported by the versions: LXX, γινώσκει; Syr., *yd'*, Tg., ינדע (Goldman cites Vg. and Jerome as well, but these slightly favor MT in my reading). The emendation is unnecessary, as the *yiqtol* form is the more difficult reading, and the versions can be construed as supporting it.

[16] LXX and θ' evidently mistook the *resh* in the MT's רָעַת הָאָדָם ("the man's misfortune/evil") as a *dalet* in their rendering γνῶσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ("the man's knowledge"). MT finds support in σ', Vg., Jerome, Syr., and Tg.

[17] LXX Gentry opts for what Goldman considers the OG reading ἐν ἡμέρα πολέμου ("in the day of battle"), in distinction from the shorter MT reading בַּמִּלְחָמָה ("in the battle"). LXX Rahlfs follows σ' (εἰς πόλεμον) and the Old Latin (Jerome) to modify the Greek text in keeping with the MT's shorter reading: ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ ("in the battle"). Syr. supports the OG reading, while Tg. supports the MT. A plausible case can be made for inclusion or omission on the basis of internal criteria, making this a difficult choice (see Goldman, 100*). I slightly favor retention of the MT.

[18] Numerous interpreters propose to emend the nominative רֶשַׁע ("wickedness") to עֹשֶׁר ("wealth), on the basis of allegedly making better sense of the clause (Renan, 128; Zimmerli, 211; Loader, 96; Fox 1999, 281). Dahood argues that רשׁע itself means "wealth" by its association with wicked people and ventures (e.g., "filthy

Intertextual Allusions and Echoes to the Joseph Narrative (Genesis 37–50)

Qohelet switches from observations concerning the nature of and possible ensnaring dangers in male/female relationships in 7:25–29 (likely also carrying thematic links to the Joseph narrative) to the risks associated with conduct in the royal court under the watchful eye of a powerful and potentially capricious king in 8:1–8. Wisdom carries inherent benefits, as Qohelet notes here and has affirmed in previous passages (2:13, 26; 7:11–12, 19), but these benefits may be offset by foolish missteps which threaten to thwart wisdom's practical application. Here Qohelet uses the framework of vassal-treaty allegiance oaths to underscore the king's power and the necessity of submission as well as references to mantic wisdom in the royal court to point up the value wisdom brings when navigating these dangers. Through intertextual links to the Joseph narrative, Qohelet evokes the example of a sage who excelled in this political role.[19]

Joseph faithfully applies wisdom in the Egyptian royal court, and he is designated a sage par excellence by the Egyptian king: "So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are'" (Gen 41:39).[20] Solomon too, while himself a king rather than courtier, demonstrates that wisdom brings success and efficacy to his reign: "God gave Solomon wisdom, very great insight, and understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone—wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, sons of Mahol. His reputation extended to all the surrounding nations. Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005. He spoke about trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop growing out of the wall. He also spoke about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. Emissaries of all peoples, sent by every king on earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to listen to Solomon's wisdom" (1 Kgs 4:29–34). The wise, like Joseph and Solomon, regulate themselves in these settings with caution, awareness, timeliness, and submission.

Mantic Wisdom in the Royal Court (v. 1)

To point up the value of wisdom in the context of high-level leadership, Qohelet begins this passage with a switch in rhetorical modes to an encomium of the sage and his wisdom. In spite of potential pitfalls in its application, wisdom itself provides a boon to those who possess it (cf. 2:13; 7:11–12), advancing them to the highest echelons of society. The verse carries several

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lucre"). This is unconvincing. There is no mss evidence for the change, and the versions support the MT so I retain it.

[19] I follow Hollander's classification of intertextual literary connections as comprising citation, allusion, and echo (see J. Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981], 64). For further explanation of these modes, see K. Dunham, "Intertextual Links between Deuteronomy and Ecclesiastes as a Pointer to Qohelet's Positive Message," *JESOT* 6 (2020): 13–57. Briefly, a citation is the formal or informal rhetorical use of an earlier text by a later author such that the author preserves explicit literary markers from that text. A literary allusion is the freer rhetorical adaptation of an earlier text by a later author in a way that is intentional and recognizable by the audience. A literary echo is the intentional or unintentional rhetorical adaptation of an earlier text by a later author, often due to that text's formulaic shaping of the author's worldview or language.

[20] Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural citations are from the Christian Standard Bible (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017).

features unique to Ecclesiastes and to the larger OT context: (1) the term פֵּשֶׁר ("portent") occurs only here and its Hebrew cognates פִּתָּרוֹן/פתר and Aramaic cognates פְּשַׁר/פשר occur only in the contexts of dream divination (oneiromancy) in foreign royal courts (Joseph, Genesis 40–41; Daniel, Daniel 1–7); (2) the rhetorical question "Who is like?" appears elsewhere only to denote exceptional persons or peoples, such as Yahweh (Exod 15:11; Ps 35:10; 113:5) or Israel (Deut 33:29; 2 Sam 7:23; 1 Chron 17:21); (3) the idiom of "making the face to shine" appears elsewhere only with reference to God's action of blessing his people or his dwelling place (Num 6:25; Ps 31:16; 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; 119:135; Dan 9:17); and (4) the idiom "strong/strength of face" is rare in the OT, occurring with the adjective only twice to denote ruthlessness or impudence (Deut 28:50; Dan 8:23; cf. "strong of soul" in Isa 56:11). Collectively, these features suggest that Qohelet has changed his tone and didactic purpose to praise the insight and actions of the wise in order to instruct them how best to apply wisdom in tensive situations like the royal court.

The verse begins with a rhetorical question "Who is like the wise?" featuring an unusual grammatical element with the non-syncopated article following the preposition כְּ (מִי כְּהֶחָכָם) (cf. 1:7; 6:10; 10:3).[21] Many interpreters cite this as evidence of late BH, given such occurrences in exilic and postexilic texts (Ezek 40:25; 47:23; Neh 9:19; 12:38; 2 Chron 10:7; 25:10; 29:2, 7) (Barton, 52–53; cf. McNiele, 76). Driver, on the other hand, identifies this as evidence of northern Israelite Hebrew dialect.[22] Schoors notes that the non-syncopated article occurs also in earlier biblical texts (1 Sam 13:21; 2 Sam 16:2; 21:20) but is virtually absent from Qumran texts, complicating the discussion of dating (594). The gist of the question extols a people or persons that are incomparable, as is the case in the other examples of the form.[23] Only a handful of such texts appear in the OT, lauding the virtues or magnificence of Yahweh (Exod 15:11; Job 36:22; Ps 35:10; 71:19; 89:9; 113:5; Isa 44:7; Jer 49:19; 50:44), Israel (Deut 33:29; 2 Sam 7:23; 1 Chron 17:21), Abner (1 Sam 26:15), and Tyre (Ezek 27:32).

The form shares affinities with the encomium, which is a poem or prose piece that praises an abstract quality or conventional character type. The encomium carries five traditional features: (1) an introduction of the subject to be praised (e.g., "an excellent wife who can find?" in Prov 31:10); (2) delineation of the subject's distinguished ancestry or background (e.g., Wisdom's origin in Prov 8:22–30); (3) a catalog or description of the subject's praiseworthy acts or qualities (e.g., the virtuous wife in Prov 31:10–31); (4) an extolment of the subject's indispensable or superior nature, often in contrast to an inferior rival (e.g., Wisdom is more profitable than silver or gold in Prov 3:14); and (5) a conclusion urging the reader to emulate the subject.[24] Here these features are abbreviated (as in Prov 3:13–20), with (1) the introduction of the praise-worthy sage (who is like the sage?), (3) a description of the sage's admirable wisdom skills (he knows the portent of a revelatory word), and (4) an exaltation of his superior nature and attainments (his countenance radiates joy and favor) (2, 5 are omitted). The use of encomium elements suggests that Qohelet is taking a positive view of wisdom rather than a skeptical one.

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[21] This is one of some thirty-seven questions in the book, as noted by J.-J. Lavoie ("Qui est comme le sage? Étude de Qohélet 8,1," *Theoforum* 46 (2015): 102.

[22] S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898), 178. Dahood seizes upon this possible source to support his argument for Phoenician influence ("Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth," 45–46).

[23] *Contra* Loader, who sees the phrase as underscoring the worthlessness of wisdom (93–94) and Longman, who sees it as a sarcastic expression of frustration over wisdom's inutility (208).

[24] L. Ryken, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 74.

The second rhetorical question has occasioned much debate. Traditionally the phrase has been rendered "And who knows the interpretation of a matter?" (וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֵּשֶׁר דָּבָר). The meaning of the phrase revolves in particular around the lexical import of the accusative construct phrase, with the *hapax* term פֵּשֶׁר traditionally translated "interpretation" and the term דָּבָר often read as "thing/matter/event" rather than "word." Still other interpretive issues cloud the sense. Often "Who knows?" questions in the OT using the Hebrew phrase מִי יוֹדֵעַ convey skepticism and hint at a negative response: "no one knows."[25] Thus a majority of commentators interpret the question as expressing a pessimistic view of wisdom's value, with the phrases in v. 1b and the following verses explaining wisdom's shortcomings (Delitzsch, 330; Hertzberg, 159–60; Longman, 208–9; Crenshaw, 149) or they take portions of or the entire verse as a gloss (Lauha, 144; Whybray, 128–29). Furthermore, the term פֵּשֶׁר occurs only here in the OT, providing little context to clarify the term's meaning.

What, then, is the meaning? Rhetorical questions featuring "Who knows?" occur throughout the book (Eccl 2:19; 3:21; 6:12). In the previous passages these questions need not carry the hopelessly skeptical view that Crenshaw and others suggest. Often, these questions simply underscore Qohelet's frustrated ignorance about the future or unknowable realities. Given Qohelet's use of encomium features, he is expressing a positive view of wisdom's virtues and adapting the conventional question-form to suit his rhetorical purposes. This understanding finds support in the parallelism with the first question, which praises the sage for his commendable qualities. So too here a positive response is wont: It is precisely the sage who can reveal the portent of a word because God gives him the discernment to do so.

This reading finds corroboration in several studies that have investigated the meaning of פֵּשֶׁר in this context. Scott Jones argues that the term carries the connotation of mantic wisdom in a foreign royal court, given the exclusive use of the cognate terms פִּתְרוֹן/פתר with respect to Joseph's dream divination in Egypt (14x; see Gen 40:5, 8, 16, 22; 41:8, 11, 12, 13, 15) and the Aramaic cognates פְּשַׁר/פשׁר in Daniel's oneiromancy in Babylon (34x in Dan 1–7).[26] The term itself need not connote the foreignness of the royal court, simply that official divination was common in these settings. In both cases, the divination concerns prognostication of symbolic dreams. Oppenheim's analysis of dreams in the ANE classifies them into two broad categories: (1) message dreams, which were verbal messages the deity spoke directly to the dream recipient; and (2) symbolic dreams, which might be auditory but were usually visual and which pointed to a hidden meaning requiring explanation.[27] Joseph and Daniel both expound the latter kind, which required a specialist to determine the import of the symbolism. In the ANE dreams could come from a variety of sources, including the gods, demons, the dead, or one's personal deity, requiring dream interpreters called *šā'ilātu* in the Old Babylonian period (Mari, eighteenth century B.C.) and *ḥry tp* in ancient Egypt.[28] The latter were prominent in the Egyptian royal court, where dream revelation was notably widespread, and were considered expert dream

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[25] See J. L. Crenshaw, "The Expression *mî yôdēa'* in the Hebrew Bible," *VT* 36 (1986): 274–88.

[26] Jones, "Qohelet's Courtly Wisdom," 212–13.

[27] A. L. Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East: With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 46 (1956): 186–217. Shupak adds a third category of incubation dreams (see N. Shupak, "A Fresh Look at the Dreams of the Officials and of Pharaoh in the Story of Joseph (Genesis 40–41) in the Light of Egyptian Dreams," *JANES* 30 [2006]: 107).

[28] *DDL*, s.v. "Dreams," by E. M. Yamauchi, 573–80; Shupak, "Dreams of the Officials," 105–7.

expositors. They typically consulted divination books to prognosticate the import of dreams from at least the thirteenth century B.C. (Chester Beatty Papyrus III).

The correlation of פֵּשֶׁר to these contexts finds grounding as well in the study of Isaac Rabinowitz, who argues that פֵּשֶׁר denotes *not* the "interpretation" of a dream but the "portent" or "presaged reality" it signifies: "The term *pēsher*, in fine, never denotes just an explanation or exposition, but always a presaged reality, either envisaged as emergent or else observed as already actualized."[29] This portent comes usually through a dream or an enigmatic action such as the writing on the wall and conveys a concealed message that only a skilled revelatory agent can discern and communicate. Sages were skilled precisely in these divinatory arts and could identify the portent of the dream. Thus Joseph is designated a sage par excellence (Gen 41:39) and Daniel is recognized as full of wisdom (Dan 1:4, 17, 20) like that of the gods (Dan 5:11, 14). Fabry and Dahmen concur that connection to the Akkadian cognates *pašāru*/*pišru* imply a mantic origin, relating usually to divinatory solutions to dreams and other omens.[30] I translate פֵּשֶׁר thus as "portent" to connote this divinatory context.

Given the connotation of פֵּשֶׁר, the connected term דָּבָר relates too to a divinatory context. This suggests a prophetic message or revelatory "word," although as Delitzsch notes "words" pertain closely to the "things" that stand behind them (336). This reading finds complication, however, in the term's potential meaning elsewhere in the pericope: many interpreters read the term as "word" in 8:4 but as "thing/matter" in 8:3, 5 as well as 8:1. This conclusion leads to much speculation as to what the elusive "thing/matter" might be, whether the "many schemes" of 7:29 (Rose, 242), the indecipherability of wisdom (Garrett, 325), the mystery of life (Ginsburg, 390), or more generally the difficulties outlined in 7:1–29 (Eaton, 117).[31] Others, however, keep the term's mantic correlation to render it "word" or "message."[32] The latter reading finds support in the analogous Aramaic phrase פְּשַׁר־מִלְּתָא in Daniel with the meaning "the portent of the word/message" (Dan 5:15, 26; 7:26).[33] I follow the latter connection to render the term as a revelatory word or message which requires decipherment and prognostication by a skilled sage. An echo to the Joseph narrative evidences the value of hidden but divinely revealed wisdom in the context of the royal court.

Royal Locutionary Power (v. 2)

Another oblique reference to the Joseph narrative comes in Qohelet's reference to the king's locutionary power. In v. 2 Qohelet moves from the encomium of the sage and his wisdom to practical instruction about how to navigate the risks of high-level leadership. The opening 1cs pronoun אֲנִי ("I") has baffled commentators and led to proposed emendations (see Textual Notes). I prefer to retain the MT as it stands and to connect this lexeme to the mainline authorial

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[29] I. Rabinowitz, "'Pēsher/Pittārōn': Its Biblical Meaning and Its Significance in the Qumran Literature," *RevQ* 8 (Mar 1973): 225–26.

[30] *TDOT*, s.v. "פֵּשֶׁר," by H.-J. Fabry and U. Dahmen, 12:152–53.

[31] See the discussion in Lavoie, "Qui est comme le sage?" 105–6.

[32] Jones, "Qohelet's Courtly Wisdom, 226; Beentjes, "Who Is Like the Wise?" 306; Schwienhorst-Schönberger, 410; Hertzberg, 139.

[33] See Lavoie, "Qui est comme le sage?" 107.

voice in 7:25–29, especially the so-called "editorial intrusion" of 7:27 with its phrase "says Qohelet" (אָמַר הַקֹּהֶלֶת). The imperative שְׁמוֹר ("keep") in 8:2 thus reaches back linguistically to the imperative רְאֵה ("see") in vv. 27 and 29 as the continuing authorial voice which started a new phase of exploration in 7:25.[34] The pronoun אֲנִי carries a discourse function using ellipsis, requiring the translator to supply a verb of speaking ("say," "proclaim," "advise," or the like).[35] The advice does not provide "strong evidence that Qohelet himself is not a king" (*contra* Longman, 209) but assumes Qohelet's authorship and royal authority which is implicit throughout the book.

The phrase "mouth of a king" (פִּי־מֶלֶךְ) is unique in the OT. The term "mouth" (פֶּה) occurs seven times in the book (5:1, 5; 6:7; 8:2; 10:12, 13 [2x]), with every occurrence except 6:7 linked to speaking rather than eating and drinking. The term פֶּה means simply "mouth" but often connotes by metonymy that which the mouth proclaims (Prov 10:11, 31; 11:9, 11), testifies to (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6), or commands (Gen 45:21; Exod 17:1; 38:21; Deut 1:26, 43; 34:5). In terms of the latter, when the mouth represents a commandment, most often it is the sovereign word of Yahweh (Num 3:16, 39; 20:24; 27:14; Deut 1:26, 43; 34:5; Josh 15:13). The only time in the OT in which the phrase is used of a human king pertains to the Egyptian pharaoh under whom Joseph serves, when the pharaoh gives a command for Joseph's family to be provided wagons and provisions (Gen 45:21).[36] The term thus signifies the supreme declaration of the potentate: an order which his servants must carry out. Joseph provides an example of a courtier who carries out such a command.

The term "king" (מֶלֶךְ) occurs thirteen times in the book of Ecclesiastes and is associated with the royal voice of Qohelet (1:1, 12; 2:8, 12; 8:2). Kings in the ancient world held absolute power over life and death and represented the people and territory over which they ruled in symbolizing their wealth, order, security, and fertility.[37] In the OT Yahweh is first and foremost king over Israel and the nations by virtue of his power as Creator and Redeemer (1 Chron 16:31; 93:1–5; 96:10–13; 97:1–5; 99:1–2), with earthly kings in David's line deriving their legitimacy from Yahweh (2 Sam 7:8–16; 1 Chron 17:7–15; Ps 2:7; 89:3, 28; 106:45). God's reigning over the cosmos and over his image-bearers constitutes, in fact, the *leitmotif* of Scripture.[38] This divine sovereignty is concentrated in the earthly and intermediary human king who represents, enacts, and enforces Yahweh's supremacy according to the statutes and laws revealed in the Torah.

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[34] The imperative שְׁמוֹר in 8:2 is the only imperative in this unit and the only imperative until 9:7. HCM also recognize the discourse function of the pronoun אֲנִי (228). Delitzsch points also to the Masoretic accent *pashta* which occurs with the imperative רְאֵה in 7:27 and signals that אֲנִי stands outside the discourse frame (339).

[35] Symmachus translates with ἐγώ παραινῶ ("I advise"), supplying a lexeme that makes good sense in the context.

[36] The phrase reads literally "according to the mouth of Pharaoh." For the possible Egyptian backgrounds of this terminology, see H. Brunner, "Was aus dem Munde Gottes geht?" *VT* 8 (1958): 428–29.

[37] *ABD*, s.v. "King and Kingship," by K. Whitelam, 4:49.

[38] See E. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 646–48; P. J. Gentry and S. J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 591–95; A. J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), 16–21.

Interpreters have divided over which king is in view, whether God (so Rashi, Jerome, Leupold, Hertzberg) or the human king (most commentators, see Schoors, 599). Within the context, which pertains to issues relating to the royal court, obedience to the earthly monarch is in view, especially as מֶלֶךְ refers always in the book to the human king. The Qal imperative שְׁמוֹר from the root שׁמר means here "keep," "observe," or "obey" (*DCH*, 8:475). The imperative combines with the vetitives "do not be hasty" and "do not stand" (3a) to form a threefold injunction, in turn anticipating the threefold grounding "because (כִּי) he does what he pleases" (3b), "because his word is supreme" (4a), and because "who may question him?" (4b) (Schwienhorst-Schönberger, 414). In Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple he extols Yahweh for his faithfulness in keeping (שׁמר) what he promised by his mouth/command (פֶּה) to his father David (1 Kgs 8:24)—a divine example for the courtier and an allegiance that David reciprocated toward Yahweh (2 Sam 22:22).

Mastery over the Realm

A third intertextual reference to the Joseph narrative occurs with respect to the idea of "authority" or "supremacy" as a cipher for the king's power. In v. 4 Qohelet grounds further his admonitions to obedience and loyalty in the king's supreme spoken authority. The opening compound particle בַּאֲשֶׁר is causal as in 7:2 ("for," "because"), providing another motivation for the courtier (cf. Gen 39:9, 23; Joüon-Muraoka, §170.j, 601). The "word of the king" (דְּבַר־מֶלֶךְ) echoes the "command of the king" (פִּי־מֶלֶךְ) in v. 2, framing the king's spoken power. The term דָּבָר refers here to a word, rather than a general thing/matter, and is a catchword in the unit (vv. 1, 3, 4, 5; cf. דִּבְרָה in v. 2). The nominative form שִׁלְטוֹן occurs for the first of two times in the book (the only OT uses), both within this unit (vv. 4, 8), while the verbal form שׁלט occurs four times in the book (2:19; 5:18; 6:2; 8:9) and the adjective שַׁלִּיט three times (7:19; 8:8; 10:5). The verb means "to become master of," "gain power/control over," or "domineer" (BDB, 1020; *HALOT*, 1521–22; *DCH*, 8:391). Although interpreters have deemed the term as evidence of a late date for the book, ANE background literature suggests that the term has early cognates in Ugaritic and Akkadian.[39] The noun form שִׁלְטוֹן means "authority," "power," or "tyranny," and can be used both of the power itself and of the leader who wields the power (cf. Sir 4:7) (*DCH*, 8:392). The clause is nominative, with the predicate substantive expressing an abstract quality (lit. "the king's word *is power*") (see Joüon-Muraoka, §154.e, 529; cf. "the judgments of Yahweh *are truth*" [Ps 19:9]; "all her paths *are peace*" [Prov 3:17]). Most versions render the noun

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[39] Fredericks contends on the basis of its broad attestation in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Ethiopic, and Arabic that the term has a much earlier provenance and has been misappropriated in support of a late date. In the Ugaritic Baal Cycle the nominal form *šlyṭ* characterizes Leviathan, the serpentine monster, as the "tyrant," "controller," or "despot" with seven heads. The Akkadian verbal form *šalāṭu* likewise can denote the exercise of dominion or overbearing power toward someone else. See D. C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 239–40; Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 90. On the provenance and meaning of the term in Ugaritic, see Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 50, 68; Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch*, 306; Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, §67; J. C. de Moor, "Contributions to the Ugaritic Lexicon," *UF* 11 (1979): 641n12. For Akkadian, see *CAD*, s.v. "šalāṭu," 17:238–40.

adjectivally to convey this sense ("supreme" [ESV, NIV]; "authoritative" [CSB, NASB]; "absolute" [NET]). The point is that the king's word has no rival: it is the highest authority in the land.

In v. 8 the adjective שַׁלִּיט and the nominative שִׁלְטוֹן also emphasize that humans lack fundamentally the power to control certain elements beyond their domain. The verse is a numerical-saying proverb with four clauses joined by the *waw* conjunction. The clauses intensify in their sequence through greater terseness as they progress, with six, four, three, and three word-units per clause. The four statements follow a biblical and ANE conventional pattern in which the number four symbolizes the comprehensiveness of ruin (as in the ascending enumeration 3+1).[40] Here the four calamities are windstorm, death, war, and judgment for wrongdoing: the first three natural disasters, the final moral. Wright notes that the first three may refer to the same causes of death mentioned by David in 1 Sam 26:10: death by storm or pestilence, death in the ordinary course of nature, and death in battle (399). The final stich carries the verbal "punch": moral deviance outweighs natural calamities as the most egregious because self-inflicted (the others are essentially outside one's scope to control). The point is that humans—even the wise—are ultimately overwhelmed in the face of existential threats that nullify wisdom's value and power.

The statements have occasioned much debate. Qohelet notes first that no one has power over the wind/spirit to restrain it. The adjective שַׁלִּיט denotes the one "having power" or "having authority" (*HALOT*, 1524; *DCH*, 8:392). The substantive form of this adjective occurs only one other time in the OT: in Gen 42:6 Joseph is depicted as "the ruler (הַשַּׁלִּיט) over the land" (cf. Eccl 7:19 "ten rulers"). Joseph is a vice-regent who exhibits power or authority over the land of Egypt, an example of wielding power in an advantageous fashion.

Yet here the focus is on the lack of power or authority that anyone has over the wind/spirit. The term רוּחַ is fairly common in Ecclesiastes, appearing twenty-four times, and means "wind" or "spirit," most often the former in its frequent idiom "chasing/striving after the wind." Thus, most versions and some interpreters assume such a meaning here ("wind": CSB, NETB, NASB, NIV, NRSV, NJB; Delitzsch, 343; Schoors, 611; Bollhagen, 287; Belcher, 299). Yet רוּחַ denotes "breath," "life-breath," or "spirit" on a few occasions (3:19, 21; 7:8; poss. 11:5; 12:7), leading a few versions and most interpreters to prefer that meaning ("breath of life": NAB; "spirit": ESV, KJV, NKJV, RSV; *DCH*, 4:413; Luther; Ginsburg, 396; Zapletal, 187; Herzfeld, 127; Podechard, 397; Gordis, 280; Seow, 282; Elster, 105; Ogden, 133; Fox 1999, 280; Levy, 114). In the case of the former, the issue concerns mankind's inability to master the elements of the created order perhaps in the face of a devastating storm; in the case of the latter, his inability to control the life-force itself at the moment of death.[41] A related question concerns whether this first phrase is to be taken independently or in tandem with the following clause as a point of

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[40] E.g., in the flood story of the Gilgamesh Epic, Ea reproaches Enlil for sending the flood rather than employing any of four other potential disasters: the lion, the wolf, famine, or plague ("The Epic of Gilgamesh," XI.188–95, in Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 90–91). Ezek 14:12–23 lists the four disasters of famine, wild beasts, the sword, and plague. Amos 1–2 delineates how Yahweh will punish guilty foreign nations for their four criminal acts of destruction (3+1). Zech 1:18–21 points to the "four horns" which scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat in his prayer of deliverance mentions four types of disaster: the sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine (2 Chron 20:9). Revelation prophesies of the four angels who will wreak havoc and harm the earth (Rev 7:1–3; 9:13–15).

[41] Delitzsch counters that death by suicide would render this statement null, but that seems to be going beyond the intent of the clause (343).

comparison. Is Qohelet saying that *just as* no one has power over the wind/spirit to restrain it, so no one has power over the day of death? If so, this might favor reading רוּחַ as "spirit," as both clauses would refer to death. On the other hand, the definite accusative אֶת־הָרוּחַ calls to mind the other definite uses of רוּחַ, which, except for 12:7, denote "wind" (1:6; 5:15; 11:5). Also, the successive *waw* conjunctions suggest that all four clauses are coordinated rather than serving as comparative (Ginsburg, 397). So which nuance is preferred? Several factors point in the direction of "wind": (1) the definite noun phrase הָרוּחַ means "the wind" in the majority of examples in the book; (2) the nuance of "wind" for רוּחַ is overall more frequent in the book (especially in human efforts to chase/strive after wind); (3) the parallels with God's restraining created elements (water) elsewhere using the same verb כלא, especially Gen 8:2, would suitably contrast with mankind's inability to confine the created element of wind; (4) a possible corollary is Prov 27:16 which states that to restrain (צפן) a contentious wife is tantamount to restraining the wind; (5) the wind is a conventional ANE form of judgment or calamity, which would fit the context; and (6) if רוּחַ means "spirit," then clauses 1 and 2 are essentially saying the same thing, which disrupts the fourfold pattern. These factors tilt preference toward the nuance of "wind." The picture is one of futile, frustrating attempts to pen up the wind or to stop it from blowing.

As a point of comparison, in ANE literature wind was the creation of the gods, and mankind was powerless to control it. In *Enuma Elish* Anu creates the four winds, which wreak havoc among the gods:

> Anu formed and produced the four winds,
> He put them in his hand, 'Let my son play!'
> He fashioned dust, he made a storm to bear it up. . . .
> The gods, finding no rest, bore the brunt of each wind.
> They plotted evil in their hearts.[42]

In turn Marduk, during his battle with Tiamat, uses the four winds against her and creates seven other kinds of destructive wind:

> He deployed the four winds that none of her might escape:
> South Wind, North Wind, East Wind, West Wind,
> Gift of his grandfather Anu;
> He fastened the net at his side.
> He made ill wind, whirlwind, cyclone,
> Four-ways wind, seven-ways wind, destructive wind, irresistible wind:
> He released the winds which he had made, the seven of them,
> Mounting in readiness behind him to roil inside Tiamat.[43]

Within the biblical wisdom context, wind is also the product of God's creation and control: "Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists?" (Prov 30:4a). Wind blows down the house of Job's children as a calamity permitted by God (Job 1:19–20). Job in turn recognizes that God controls the wind patterns (Job 26:13), apportions out the

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[42] *Enuma Elish*, I.105–7, 110–11, in "Epic of Creation (1.111)," trans. B. R. Foster, in *Context of Scripture*, 1:392.

[43] *Enuma Elish*, IV.42–48, in "Epic of Creation (1.111)," trans. B. R. Foster, in *Context of Scripture*, 1:397. These "seven evil winds" play a role also in the Akkadian composition "The Akkadian Anzu Story (3.147)," trans. M. Vogelzang, in *Context of Scripture*, 3:327–334.

wind by weight (28:25), and uses the wind to judge humans (30:22). Elsewhere the wind is Yahweh's creation (Amos 4:13), it emerges from his storehouses (Job 38:24; Ps 135:7), it carries him forth when he appears (Ps 18:10; Nah 1:3), and it destroys his enemies in judgment (Ps 48:7; 83:13; 107:25; Isa 41:16; 57:13). In these connections, several factors are significant: the wind is created and controlled by Yahweh or the most powerful gods, the winds often evidence divine power in judgment, and whoever tries to stop the wind is powerless to resist it.

In the second clause Qohelet describes humans' lack of power over death. The phrasing is similar. Here "there is no" (אַיִן) "power" or "mastery" (שִׁלְטוֹן) over the day of death. The negative particle and nominative form of "power" carry much the same meaning as the previous clause. The בְּ preposition is likely locative, denoting the sphere over which humans lack power. "The day of death" (יוֹם הַמָּוֶת) refers to the time of one's own death, as the identical phrase does in Eccl 7:1 and as do similar phrases, modified everywhere else by a pronominal suffix, throughout the OT (Gen 27:2; Judg 13:7; 1 Sam 15:35; 2 Sam 6:23; 2 Kgs 15:5; 2 Chron 26:21; Jer 52:11, 34). Similar phrases occur in ANE literature especially from Egypt, such as "the day of his landing" in the Middle Kingdom *Tale of Sinuhe*, "the day of mooring" in *The Harper Songs from the Tomb of Neferhotep*, "the day of their fate" in the Assyrian king Sennacherib's capture of Babylon, and "the day of death" in the New Kingdom Egyptian text *The Tale of Two Brothers* and in the divination rituals of a Hittite king (1.179).[44] Likewise, the Egyptian wisdom writing *Instruction of Any* from the eighteenth dynasty (1550–1305 B.C.) counsels to prepare for death so that the moment does not come by surprise:

> When your envoy comes to fetch you,
> He shall find you ready to come
> To your place of rest and saying:
> 'Here comes one prepared before you.'
> Do not say, 'I am young to be taken,'
> For you do not know your death.
> When death comes he steals the infant
> Who is in his mother's arms,
> Just like him who reached old age.[45]

The common theme in these writings is that the time of death is predetermined and unalterable, so one is to accept it with composure and courage.

The third clause alters the imagery to warfare. The negative particle אַיִן again introduces the phrase: here humans lack the power of discharge from battle. The term מְשִׁלַּחַת occurs only twice in the OT (Ps 78:49; Eccl 8:8) and means "undertaking," "detachment/dispatchment," "release," or "band of troops" (*HALOT*, 648; BDB, 1020; *DCH*, 5:541). The term relates to the verb שׁלח, "to release," "deploy," "dispatch." The בְּ preposition is likely temporal ("during"). The term מִלְחָמָה occurs three times in Ecclesiastes (3:8; 8:8; 9:11) and means "battle," "war," "fighting," or "hand-to-hand combat" (*HALOT*, 589; *DCH*, 5:294–97). Some interpret this battle as the battle with death (Ibn Ezra, 134; Seow, 283; Eaton, 120; Podechard, 397). Without

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[44] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 283, 546; "Assuring the Safety of the King During the Winter (1.79)," trans. R. Beal, in *Context of Scripture*, 1:210; "Harper Songs from the Tomb of Neferhotep (2.13)," trans. R. K. Rittner, in *Context of Scripture*, 2:64–65; "Sennacherib: The Capture and Destruction of Babylon (2.119E)," trans. M. Cogan, in *Context of Scripture*, 2:305.

[45] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 465.

contextual clues, however, that the battle is metaphorical, the normal meaning should be retained as elsewhere. This likewise preserves the fourfold pattern of calamities. With this meaning in view, commentators have suggested a number of possible meanings for the clause: "there is no substitute in war" (Schippers, 179); "a soldier cannot dispatch a message to determine his fate (i.e., negotiate a ceasefire)" (Herzfeld, 127); "one cannot lay aside armor in battle";[46] "there is no control over battle";[47] "there is no escape from the horrors of battle (e.g., pillage, capture, death)" (Murphy, 84; Levy, 114); or "there is no dismissal/discharge during war" (Ginsburg, 397; HCM, 235). The last sense is preferable: in the midst of battle the soldier is unable to release himself from duty and anyone caught in the crosshairs of a raging conflict is unable to escape.
Some interpreters contend that Qohelet refers here to the harsh wartime regulations of the Persian or Greek empire; otherwise, the text would seem to contradict Deut 20:5–8, which provides exemptions from military duties in some cases, such as the dedication of a new house, the preparation of a vineyard (a five-year process according to Lev 19:23–25), a recent betrothal, or the lack of courage (Barton, 151; Wright, 399; Zimmerli, 218; Gordis, 291). These provisions served as a reminder that following possession of the promised land, wars in ancient Israel were to be primarily defensive, that life enjoyed in the land was more important than military adventurism, and that ultimately victory belonged to God, not the army.[48] Others counter that these exemptions applied before the onset of battle; once engaged in conflict there was no release (Whitley, 73; Belcher, 300). Lauha notes that the clause here may have in mind specifically conscripted soldiers serving as foreign mercenaries (150). Such mercenaries, often slaves or prisoners of war, were employed in Egypt from at least the sixteenth century B.C.[49] and in Mesopotamia from at least the eighteenth century B.C..[50] During the New Kingdom period (*ca*. 1550–1080 B.C.), Egyptian pharaohs likewise drafted into military service large numbers of freeborn native Egyptians—perhaps up to ten percent of the male population—to deal with threats from foreign invaders.[51] In the biblical context, the Ammonites hired Syrian mercenaries to fight against David in the tenth century (2 Sam 10:6), while the Israelites during the reign of Joram (852–841 B.C.) were thought by their enemies to have hired Hittite and Egyptian mercenaries (2 Kgs 7:6). The Code of Hammurabi includes a stipulation for conscripted soldiers: "If either a soldier or a fisherman who is ordered to go on a royal campaign does not go, or hires and sends a hireling as his substitute, that soldier or fisherman shall be killed; the one who informs against him shall take full legal possession of his estate."[52] To run away from military duty meant, if caught, certain death.

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[46] F. Zimmerman, "The Aramaic Provenance of Qohelet," *JQR* 36 (1945): 42. Zimmerman ties מִשְׁלַחַת to the verb שלח in Aramaic, meaning "to strip off." Another unlikely suggestion is Dahood's, that the final letter be dropped from מִלְחָמָה to read מלחם, which he renders as "cleverness" in the phrase "there is no deliverance in cleverness" ("Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth," *Biblica* 33 [1952]: 211). This suggestion is not compelling.

[47] Gordis understands מִשְׁלַחַת to derive from an ellipsis of מִשְׁלַחַת יָד, which in Isa 11:14 denotes "an outstretching of the hand" (="power over") (291).

[48] See P. C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 273–74.

[49] J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 19–20; Seevers, *Warfare in the Old Testament*, 101.

[50] *ABD*, s.v. "Military Organization in Mesopotamia," by F. Malbran-Labat, trans. J. L. Davis, 4:827.

[51] Seevers, *Warfare in the Old Testament*, 99.

[52] "The Laws of Hammurabi (2.131)," §26, trans. M. Roth, in *Context of Scripture*, 2:338.

The final clause concerns wrongdoing, although the phrasing is rather obscure. The gist seems to be that wickedness in the decisive moment overtakes its practitioner. The final clause switches from the negative existence particle to a *yiqtol* verb negated by לֹא. These kinds of negative constructions constitute objective denials of some reality (Williams, §395, 143).[53] The verb מלט occurs three times in the book, once in the Niphal (7:26) and twice in the Piel (8:8; 9:15). The term in the D-stem means "to deliver," "rescue," "save someone/oneself," or "let escape" (BDB, 572; *HALOT*, 589; *DCH*, 5:298–99). As noted in 7:26, the word often describes the swift and sudden evasion of enemies in a dangerous, life-threatening situation, usually in the time of warfare.[54] The D-stem focuses on the agency of the deliverer who facilitates the escape. The noun רֶשַׁע occurs four times in the book (the adjective רָשָׁע seven times), most recently at the head of this third section of the book in 7:25. The word group רָשָׁע/רֶשַׁע occurs most often in chapter 8, with five uses (vv. 8, 10, 13, 14 [2x]). The term רֶשַׁע is an ethical term denoting the habitual deeds of the evildoer, characterized as "wickedness," "wrongdoing," or "evil" (*HALOT*, 1296; *DCH*, 7:561), connected elsewhere in the book to injustice (3:16–17) but in this chapter to the malevolent character of those who practice evil. The word focuses on the violation of law, especially divine law, resulting in a state of guilt (SDBH). The point is that wickedness fails to deliver its possessor: the moral laws ordained by God are even stronger than natural calamities (Elster, 105). The term בַּעַל occurs seven times in the book and up to this point has occurred in the plural form and carried the sense of "owner" or "possessor" of either objective goods (5:11 [10], 13 [12]) or intangible qualities (7:12; 8:8) (*HALOT*, 143; *DCH*, 2:237).[55] The versions are divided over whether to render בַּעַל as singular (LXX, Vg.) or plural (Syr., Tg.). It seems best to retain the plural as in the previous uses and to understand the plural as the plural of majesty denoting the owner's power (Podechard, 346; Ginsburg, 349) or as a literal plural denoting that those who practice wickedness are many (Schoors, 615). The term בַּעַל occurs often in an idiom that indicates the ownership of a quality embodies the owner's manner and character (*HALOT*, 143). Those who habitually practice misdeeds may imagine that their deviant behavior always gets them off the hook, but this twisted thinking eventually destroys the evildoer. Similar wisdom tenets are common in Proverbs. "The upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it" (Prov 2:21–22, ESV). "Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes" (Prov 3:25). "The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble" (Prov. 4:19). "The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin" (Prov 5:22; cf. 10:24–25; 11:5, 8; 12:7). Job's counselor Eliphaz recognizes that God "catches the wise in their own craftiness" (Job 5:13; cf. 1 Cor 3:19). The closing verse of this section thus reaches back to the themes of the previous unit (esp. 7:26) to emphasize that the ensnaring effects of sin threaten to undo the value and potency of wisdom if the wise are not vigilant.

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[53] Whybray argues that the syntactical change means that Qohelet is no longer speaking of events over which humans are powerless (133).

[54] *NIDOTTE*, s.v. "מלט," by R. L. Hubbard, Jr., 2:950–951.

[55] In the later uses in the book it signifies "master" or "lord" (10:11, 20; 12:11).

Intertextual Allusions and Echoes to Solomon's Accession and Construction Narrative (1 Kgs 1:1–9:9)

Beyond the ties to the Joseph narrative, Eccl 8:1–8 carries several literary affinities with the narrative of Solomon's rise to power and construction of the temple in 1 Kings 1:1–9:9.

Mantic Wisdom (v. 1)

Earlier, I examined the phrase "the portent of a word" in v. 1 as a potential reference to the dream divination that Joseph carries out in the Egyptian royal court. Another example of dream divination in the OT occurs in Solomon's dream experiences. His first dream encounter occurs at Gibeon, where Yahweh appears to him and speaks to him (1 Kgs 3:4–15; 2 Chron 1:6–12). This encounter with Yahweh relates to an ANE practice called "incubation." In this, the worshipper offered prayers and sacrifices and then slept within the sacred precincts of the sanctuary or temple to solicit a message from the deity. In Solomon's case, he experiences a message dream in which Yahweh speaks directly. Yahweh appears to Solomon again after he finishes construction on the temple, a dream that is characterized as identical to the encounter in Gibeon (1 Kgs 9:1–9). This suggests that Solomon may have repeated his incubation, this time within the confines of the freshly constructed temple. Yahweh appears again and delivers another message encouraging Solomon that Yahweh's presence will fill the temple and warning him to obey as David did lest Yahweh remove his presence and blessing. Significantly, Solomon is the only king in Israel's recorded history to receive dream revelation, in stark contrast to Saul, who fails to receive a word from Yahweh by dreams, prophets, or Urim (1 Sam 28:6, 15). This connection corroborates the Solomonic backdrop of the book beyond merely the royal autobiography of 1:12–2:26, as does my proposed understanding of the term שׁנא in v. 1, with reference to the Solomonic Psalm 127.

Vassal Allegiance Oaths (v. 2)

Qohelet grounds his admonition to obey the king in v. 2 literally "[and] upon the word/matter of the oath of God" (וְעַל דִּבְרַת שְׁבוּעַת אֱלֹהִים), a difficult phrase that has given rise to multiple interpretations.[56] The *waw* is likely explicative or emphatic ("namely," "even") (Ginsburg, 392; Seow, 279; cf. GKC, 484, §154a, n.1b). The phrase עַל דִּבְרַת occurs also in 3:18 and 7:17, an idiom meaning "in accordance with," "for the sake of," or "because of."[57] Here the construct of דִּבְרָה connects obliquely to the catchword דָּבָר ("word") in the previous verse,

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[56] Some interpreters accordingly follow LXX in taking the phrase with the following verse: "and concerning the oath of God do not be hasty" (Provan, 162; Longman, 209). This solution, however, diverges from the MT accentuation and depends overly on 5:2 (1) as a parallel. In this scenario, the text ends up saying nearly the opposite of its intended meaning: Qohelet would be advising not to take an oath rather than to be obedient to an oath. In the matter of oaths of allegiance, hesitancy or avoidance would not be permitted or recommended, as abstention would lead to certain death (1 Kgs 2:43; 2 Chron 23:14–16).

[57] The preposition עַל introduces a norm, the basis on which an act is performed or a word spoken (see Waltke and O'Connor, *IBHS*, 218, §11.2.13e), idiomatically conveying "on account of."

alluding to the illocutionary act of swearing the oath as counterpart to the king's command. The term שְׁבוּעָה means "oath," "solemn promise," or "curse" (*HALOT*, 1384–85; *DCH*, 8:227–28) and relates to the verbal form שׁבע, "to swear," "make an oath," "bind oneself by an oath" (*HALOT*, 1396–97; *NIDOTTE*, 4:32). It occurs twice in Ecclesiastes (8:2; 9:2). The interpretive questions here concern whether this is an oath *to* God or *by* God, whether it is an oath the king makes or the courtiers make, whether the oath is made in the legal court or royal court, as well as the content of the oath. Oaths in the ancient world were solemn assurances that one would keep his or her promise or not perform a forbidden act, on the pain of judgment and ultimately death by the deity who served as witness and enforcer of the oath.[58] Oaths carry some conceptual overlap with vows, with the latter placing more focus on the worshipper's appeal to God to fulfill some action on his behalf. Oaths pertained more to the resolute actions of the human adjuror or to the truthfulness of his assertions.[59] God swears oaths by himself as the ultimate or highest power, usually to verify the veracity and reliability of his promises (Gen 22:16; Isa 45:23; Jer 49:13; 51:14; Amos 6:8).

Typically the oath formula followed a conventional pattern: "May God do thus and more to me/you if I/you do/do not so and so. . ." (1 Sam 3:17; 24:12; 25:22; 1 Kgs 19:2; 2 Kgs 6:31); "As the LORD lives" (1 Sam 14:39; 19:6; 20:3; 2 Sam 15:21); or the abbreviated phrase "cursed be the one" (Deut 27:15–26; 1 Sam 14:24, 28). Saul provides a case study in foolish oaths and vows, probably the singular character most associated with this shortcoming in OT history (1 Sam 14:24, 28, 39; 19:6). The verb שׁבע appears occasionally in the Psalms with reference to the Davidic covenant (Ps 89:3, 35, 49; 110:4; 132:11; cf. Acts 2:30), although not within the narrative of the covenant's inception. Although this particular phrase "oath of God" occurs nowhere else in the OT, the phrase "oath of Yahweh" (שְׁבֻעַת יְהוָה) appears three times. First, in Exod 22:11 the phrase refers to the sworn testimony that one accused of stealing his neighbor's property must give to absolve himself of guilt. Second, in 2 Sam 21:7 the phrase refers to the covenant between David and Jonathan, whereby David is bound to show loyalty to Mephibosheth. Third, the phrase occurs in Solomon's rebuke and later execution of Shimei in 1 Kgs 2:43–44 for his failure to uphold the oath of fealty he had sworn to the king: "Did I not make you *swear* (שׁבע) by the LORD and solemnly warn you, saying, 'Know for certain that on the day you go out and go to any place whatever, you shall die'? And you said to me, 'What you say is good; I will obey.' Why then have you not kept your *oath to the LORD* (שְׁבֻעַת יְהוָה) and the commandment with which I commanded you?" (ESV). In each case the oath is sworn *to* God *by* the human subject to attest to his commitment and integrity respecting a given duty or responsibility. The final example of the oath sworn to Yahweh with respect to allegiance to King Solomon has close affinities to the present context.

What is the nature of the oath prescribed here? Often the term *oath* occurs in the context of a covenant, which has led some interpreters to conclude that the Davidic covenant is in view (Ps 2:6–8; 110:4), with the oath made by God to the king and therefore enforced by divine fiat (Hertzberg, 164; Ogden and Zogbo, 280). God pledged himself to uphold his covenant with David and his descendants, and the oath would then correlate to the divine legitimation of the Davidic lineage that Qohelet claims (1:1). While this notion carries some merit, in view of the

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[58] *NIDOTTE*, s.v. "שׁבע," by T. W. Cartledge, 4:32–33.

[59] See *DDL*, s.v. "Oaths and Vows," by B. V. Seevers, 1329–31; *ZEB*, s.v. "Oath," by T. M. Gregory, 4:526.

uses of "oath of Yahweh" elsewhere in the OT (always the objective genitive), especially the Solomonic adjuration of Shimei in 1 Kings 2, the more likely understanding relates to the oath subjects would swear before God concerning loyalty to their king as the king accedes to the throne (2 Sam 3:21; 2 Kgs 11:17; 1 Chron 11:3; 29:24).[60] Qohelet substitutes "God" (אֱלֹהִים) for Yahweh in keeping with his normal practice.

Parallels for such an oath may be seen in the vassal treaties of the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon at the enthronement of his son and heir Ashurbanipal (672 B.C.).[61] Multiple references to "the oath of the god" are included in the litany of allegiances the courtier was to swear to the crowned king, including thirty-three sections comprising oaths not to offend or revolt against the king, to report any defamatory speech, to abstain from giving attention to or concealing rebellion, to refrain from allying with rebels, to desist from supporting military revolt, to quell any palace uprising, and to capture and kill any usurper:

> (You swear) that you will neither listen to nor conceal anything improper,
> unsuitable or unseemly words concerning the exercise of kingship, which
> are unseemly and evil against Ashurbanipal, the crown-prince,
> either from the mouth of his brothers, his uncles, his cousins,
> his family, members of his father's line; or from the mouths of officials
> or governors, or from the mouth of an officer or courtiers.[62]

Courtiers were to swear and demonstrate solemn fealty to the king and thus to obey by proxy God himself who had established the king. Obedient allegiance to the king is a common wisdom theme: "Fear the LORD and the king, my son, and do not join with rebellious officials" (Prov 24:21, NIV; cf. 16:10; 20:2, 26; 22:11; 25:6) The apostle Paul likewise instructs concerning governing authorities: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom 13:1, ESV). Qohelet advises obedience to the human king, while at the same time implicitly acknowledging the higher authority (God) to whom the king himself is subject.[63]

Royal Power to Accomplish What He Desires (v. 3)

In v. 3 Qohelet advises against rash and insubordinate behavior in the royal court. The rationale for avoiding liaison with uprisers is that the king's authority is absolute. The particle כִּי is causal ("because," "for"), providing the motivation for the previous vetitives ("do not be hasty," "do not stand") (HCM, 229). The king does whatever he pleases: the verb חפץ means "to desire," "delight in," "take an interest in," or "feel inclined toward" (*HALOT*, 340; *DCH*, 3:287). It depicts a state in which someone is emotionally attached to and derives pleasure from an

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[60] The Chronicler provides an extended account of Solomon's accession to the throne, with oaths made by all the officers and warriors to him (1 Chron 29:24). B. Peterson has tied this extended account to the Neo-Assyrian vassal treaties discussed below ("Did the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon Influence the Chronicler's Succession Narrative of Solomon?" *BBR* 28 [2018]: 554–74).

[61] See D. J. Wiseman, "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon," *Iraq* 20 (1958): 1–91; "The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon," in *ANET*[4], 213–225 E. Leichty, *The Royal Inscriptions of Esarhaddon, King of Assyria (680–669 B.C.)* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

[62] Vassal Treaty 6.73–78, in Wiseman, "Vassal-Treaties," 34–36; *ANET*[4], 215.

[63] Proverbs develops more fully the theological tenet that the king is subject to God (see Bartholomew, 281): Prov 8:15–16; 16:12–15; 20:28; 21:1; 29:14; 31:1–9.

object, person, or event (SDBH). The verb appears only here in the book, while the noun form occurs seven times, once in this pericope (8:6). In Prov 21:1 God turns the king's heart in whichever direction he is inclined to do. Likewise, Dan 4:35 characterizes God as the great potentate doing whatever he wishes: "All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'" (Dan 4:35, NIV). The phrase "he does whatever he wishes"—with the Hebrew terms כֹּל, חפץ, and עשׂה—occurs four times in the OT, depicting God's sovereignty (Ps 115:3; 135:6; Isa 46:10; Jon 1:14).[64] Similar phrases appear only two times of a human sovereign, in both cases connected to Solomon: Hiram promises to accomplish all that Solomon desires with respect to the temple-building (1 Kgs 5:8) and Solomon's own building projects likewise accomplish everything he desires (1 Kgs 9:1). Solomon is characterized as the king who, as God, does whatever he pleases (cf. 1 Sam 18:22; 2 Sam 24:3; 1 Kgs 5:22). His power is supreme—he brooks no rival or opposition.

A Wise and Discerning Heart (v. 5)

The janus proverb in v. 5 serves to summarize his previous admonitions and to introduce the corollary concepts of timing and judgment for the latter half of the unit. The first six words, outside מִצְוָה ("command"; cf. "mouth of the king" in v. 2) and the negative particle לֹא, occur earlier in the pericope, while the first word of v. 1b (חָכְמָה) frames the final word of v. 5 (חָכָם). In the second half of the verse the wise person discerns or understands proper time and judgment. Some interpreters take this clause's opening *waw* as adversative ("but") (Stuart, 233), but this is unlikely as it would set the obedient courtier in contrast to the wise of heart. More probable is that both clauses refer to the same person. The terms "time" (עֵת) and "judgment" (מִשְׁפָּט) are focus-fronted unmarked accusatives (HCM, 232; *contra* Seow, 281) and keywords for the second part of the unit. The words are relatively common in the book, occurring 40 times and 6 times respectively. Interpretive discussions surround what the terms mean in this context and to what extent they should be taken together. The LXX reads the phrase as a hendiadys with its rendering καὶ καιρὸν κρίσεως ("and a time of judgment"). A few interpreters follow suit (Ginsburg, 394; Gordis, 289; Fox 1999, 278). The repetition of the *waw* before both terms, however, as well as their reoccurrence with different syntax in the following verse, favors reading them independently.[65] Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes the term עֵת means "suitable time," "right time," or "opportune time" (see discussion at 3:1) (*HALOT*, 900–1; *DCH*, 6:626–32). More generally in the OT the term מִשְׁפָּט means "judgment," "judicial sentence/decision," "justice," "ordinance," or "custom/manner" (*HALOT*, 651; *DCH*, 5:556–64). These broad semantic contours have led to an array of suggested glosses: "fixed time and destiny" (Schoors, 604); "the final end and determination" (Barton, 150); "the right time and the right thing" (Bollhagen, 283; cf. Belcher, 296); or "a time and custom" (Longman, 210). The versions have

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[64] Schoors argues that the idiom involving these terms is a late adaptation of an Aramaic phrase (602), but this relies on circumstantial dating with respect to the Isaiah and Jonah texts.

[65] The LXX interprets the terms independently in v. 6 (καιρὸς καὶ κρίσις ["time and judgment"]), lending support to our approach here.

likewise rendered them variously: “the proper time and the just way” (ESV); “proper time and procedure” (CSB, NASB, NIV); “the time and way” (NRSV); or “the right moment and verdict” (NJB). Within Ecclesiastes elsewhere, however, the term מִשְׁפָּט always means “judgment” or “justice” (Seow, 281), which lessens the likelihood it denotes “procedure” or “way” here. This conclusion finds support in the other place in the book where the words occur together. Although the noun forms are paired only here and in the next verse, the verb form שׁפט occurs with “time” (עֵת) in 3:17: “I said to myself, ‘God will *judge* the righteous and the wicked, for there is a *time* for every intention and for every activity then.’” Both 3:16–22 and 8:5b–8 deal with timing and judgment in the face of injustice and suffering (Seow, 281). Qohelet is repurposing themes from chapter 3, with his use of the terms עֵת (“right time”), מִשְׁפָּט (“justice”), and כָּל־חֵפֶץ (“every purpose/matter”) (3:1, 16–17; 8:5–6). The connection between “commandment” in v. 5a and “judgment” in v. 5b also correlates to the concluding admonition of the book: “Having heard everything, the conclusion of the matter is this: Fear God and keep his *commandments*, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every activity into *judgment*, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:13–14). These parallel texts suggest that opportune timing and certainty of judgment are the sense here. Delitzsch (342) and Ginsburg (395) point to both terms as relating to bad governance, as there is a *time* when oppression ends in *judgment*; therefore, the wise patiently wait out the bad despot. [66] While this is true, the term עֵת refers more likely to opportune time (i.e., skill to know the right time) rather than to a fixed time, which correlates to divine judgment. The wise courtier knows when and how to act (timing) because even the king will face a fitting limit and end to his power (God’s judgment), so reckless rebellion is foolish (Lauha, 149). Reichenbach notes that Qohelet thus blends wisdom themes (right timing) with prophetic themes (divine judgment): “The heart of the wise . . . knows time and judgment, wherein it is oriented sapientially (in the observation of the times) and grounded prophetically (in the knowledge of the [eschatological] judgment of God).”[67]

Thus, the sage, like God, discerns (ידע) the proper time and the reality of judgment for actions done on earth. The sage is depicted in the second clause as one possessing “a wise heart” (לֵב חָכָם). This phrase occurs also in 10:2 and with the substantive adjective in 7:4 (“the heart of the wise”).[68] Outside of these references, only Solomon in the OT is promised by Yahweh to be rewarded with “a *wise* and discerning *heart*” for his prudent request of wisdom rather than riches (1 Kgs 3:12).[69] The term לֵב occurs 41 times in the book and denotes one’s inner faculties and

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[66] Ginsburg’s view is augmented by his understanding of וְעֵת וּמִשְׁפָּט as hendiadys (“a time of judgment”), but we have argued to take the terms independently.

[67] G. Reichenbach, “‘Zeit und Gericht’ (Koh 8,5f.): Anmerkungen zu Kohelets prophetischen Erbe,” in *Mensch und König: Studien zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Rüdiger Lux zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. A. Berlejung and R. Heckl, 191–200 (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 196.

[68] Gordis notes that LXX, Vg., and Syr. take the phrase as construct-genitive rather than nominative-adjective (so Wright, 398), but we follow the MT and understand חָכָם as an adjective rather than substantive given the lack of article.

[69] The only other OT characters described as having a “wise heart” are Bezalel and Oholiab, who construct the tabernacle, along with the unnamed skilled artisans who assist them (Exod 28:3; 31:2–6; 35:10, 25; 36:1–2, 8). There is likely a corollary here to Solomon, who constructs the temple, as both edifices require skilled builders because they are the palace and dwelling place of Yahweh. The difference with Solomon is that he is promised a wise heart by Yahweh, whereas Bezalel and Oholiab are described as already having a wise heart.

disposition as the seat of dynamic forces encompassing one's "thinking, remembering, feeling, desiring, and willing" (see discussion at 1:13).[70] The heart stands by metonymy for the whole person. Thus, heart does not connote simply the feeling/sensing mechanism as in modern parlance but the thinking/judging/evaluating faculties of the mind: the sage has a *wise mind* that is alert and discerning. Solomon exemplifies this kind of discernment in his request of wisdom over riches.

No One Can Control the Wind (v. 8)

In v. 8 Qohelet provides four examples of natural or moral disasters that can thwart the sound application of wisdom. These clauses form part of a chain of four uses of the negative particle אַיִן ("there is not") in vv. 7–8. In the first clause the negative particle אַיִן is collocated with the indefinite noun אָדָם ("humanity," "man"). This construction occurs only seven other times in the OT. The prophets use the phrase five times to describe cities that lie desolate as a result of divine judgment, devoid of humans or animals (Isa 6:11; Jer 32:43; 33:10 [2x], 12). The only other two uses occur in the parallel accounts of Solomon's dedicatory prayer, in which he affirms that "*there is no one* who does not sin" (1 Kgs 8:46; 2 Chron 6:36). So, the phrase signifies "no person" or "no human" in a totalizing sense; not just the king is in view but every person. No one has the power to resist the wind, and this metaphor stands for the potential limits of wisdom in matters of leadership and authority.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the writer of Ecclesiastes takes a realistic rather than negative view of political leadership, if that leadership is joined with wisdom and forbearance. In establishing this connection, Qohelet echoes intertextually two kings who exhibit such qualities: Joseph and Solomon.[71] Qohelet references Joseph's co-regency in Egypt in several ways: (1) the term פֶּשֶׁר (8:1) (cf. the cognates פִּתְרוֹן/פתר occur elsewhere 14x with respect to Joseph's dream divination in Egypt [see Gen 40:5, 8, 16, 22; 41:8, 11, 12, 13, 15]); (2) the reference to "the king's mouth" (v. 2) (used of a human king only in the case of Pharaoh during Joseph's reign [Gen 45:21]); and (3) the use of the שׁלט word group meaning "power, mastery" (vv. 4, 8) (the substantive form of the adjective occurs elsewhere only in Gen 42:6 to denote that Joseph was "the ruler [הַשַּׁלִּיט] over the land").

In addition to the echoes of the Joseph narrative, there were also allusions to Solomon's accession to power and construction of the temple in 1 Kings 1:1–9:9 through several means: (1) a reference to divination (v. 1) corresponding to Solomon's message dreams in Gibeon and in Jerusalem (Solomon is the only king in Israel's history to receive a dream message, where Yahweh promises him exclusive wisdom [1 Kgs 3:4–15; 9:2–9]); (2) the reference to "the oath

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[70] *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, s.v. "heart," 368–69. Cf. also H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 40–58.

[71] For a recent biblical theology of the Joseph narrative, see S. Emadi, *From Prisoner to Prince: The Joseph Story in Biblical Theology*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022).

of God" (v. 2) (cf. "oath of Yahweh" in Solomon's rebuke and later execution of Shimei in 1 Kgs 2:43–44 for his failure to uphold the oath of fealty); (3) the use of the phrase "he does whatever he pleases" (v. 3) (used elsewhere of a human king only in the case of Solomon [1 Kgs 5:8; 9:1]); (4) the use of the phrase "wise heart" (v. 5) (Solomon is likewise the only biblical character promised by Yahweh "a *wise* and discerning *heart*" for his prudent request of wisdom rather than riches [1 Kgs 3:12]); and (5) the use of the phrase "there is no one" (v. 8) (used elsewhere outside a few prophetic references only in Solomon's dedicatory prayer, in which he affirms that "*there is no one* who does not sin" [1 Kgs 8:46; 2 Chron 6:36]). Taken collectively, these factors suggest a chain of evidence that Qohelet refers obliquely to the kinds of leaders who reigned well and yet expected full obedience on the part of their courtiers. Such an understanding aligns well with my proposed reading of Ecclesiastes 8:1–8. Power when combined with wisdom provides a boon to the people and land. Joseph and Solomon in their better moments exemplified this kind of wisdom, but ultimately fell short in other ways. The consummation of this kind of reign awaits a later Son of David who will rule and reign with absolute wisdom.