

**“Wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal
Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12 – 2:26:
A grammatico-historical study**

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Abbreviations

ANE	Ancient Near East(ern)
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament
BDAG	A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich)
BDB	Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
ESV	English Standard Version
HALOT	Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament)
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	The New Testament
OT	The Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TLOT	Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Title and keywords

Proposed title: “Wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26: a grammatico-historical study

Keywords: Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, the Royal Experiment, grammatico-historical exegesis, wisdom, toil

Slutelbegrippe: Prediker, Prediker 1:12-2:26, die Koninklike Eksperiment, grammaties-historiese eksegeese, wysheid, moeite

1.2. Abstract

In recent years, numerous studies have attempted to approach the book of Ecclesiastes using different methodologies. This has resulted in various interpretations. This is also the case for smaller parts of Ecclesiastes, such as Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, known in the vernacular as “the Royal Experiment”. This study contributes to the interpretation of the Royal Experiment by examining two of its key concepts, namely “wisdom” and “toil”, which have not received enough study up to date. The main research question is: “What is the meaning and function of ‘wisdom’ and ‘toil’ in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26?” In order to answer this question, this study employs a literature study on the introductory questions to Ecclesiastes, word study of concepts “wisdom” and “toil” and grammatico-historical exegesis of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

The study begins with historical reconstruction and verbal meaning. The use and function of the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” is studied in other biblical and extra-biblical texts. Subsequently, thorough exegesis is done of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. Ultimately this study moves from historical reconstruction and verbal meaning to the theocentric message of the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 in terms of “wisdom” and “toil”.

The preliminary hypothesis is that the Royal Experiment in terms of “wisdom” and “toil” demonstrates that a human being is not to know the meaning of life through empirical experience, but to enjoy life as a gift from the hand of God. To formulate it in another way using the words of Ecclesiastes: The concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment

of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 are the means that God uses to make a human being know that man is not to live under the sun, but under the sovereignty of God.

1.3. Background and problem statement

1.3.1. Background

What did the author intend to communicate in the book of Ecclesiastes? To whom and why was this literary work written? When and where was the book composed, and by whom? Centuries of studies have not resulted in academic consensus. In fact, although there are several difficult books in the Old Testament, it is widely held that the book of Ecclesiastes is one of the most troublesome books to interpret and preach from (Greidanus, 2010:1).

Ecclesiastes is written in a form of Hebrew different from much of the remainder of the Old Testament, and it regularly challenges the reader of the original as to grammar and syntax (Provan, 2001:23). Furthermore, the pessimistic and secular tone of the book is viewed by many as inconsistent with the traditional wisdom literature and the rest of the Bible (Schoors, 2013:19).

Unlike the popular and didactic wisdom found in the book Proverbs, Ecclesiastes has a speculative or even pessimistic stance towards wisdom. In some cases, this has resulted in doubt regarding the book's canonicity (Loader, 1986:2). Nevertheless, the dominant approach to the book has been interpretations that ultimately see in Ecclesiastes the teaching of thoroughly orthodox ideas, albeit through rather an unorthodox means (Shields, 1999:117).

Ecclesiastes forms part of the wisdom literature in the Old Testament. However, there are no exact parallels to Ecclesiastes in the Bible or even in ancient Near Eastern Literature (Longman and Dillard, 2006:283). The teaching of the teacher is unlike that of any previous sage of which we have any record (Murphy and Carm, 1987:254). In form it is much closer to poetry than to prose (Loader, 1986:4; Ellul, 1990:25), and it contains lengthy reflections about human life rather than mere sayings and admonitions (Murphy, 1990:50; Crenshaw, 1987:28).

One of the ways in which the writer tries to find answers to the meaning of human life is by

way of an experiment. The teacher writes from the position of king in Jerusalem (1:1, 12) and describes in 1:12-2:26 how he searched for the meaning of life by experimenting with different things. His empirical experiment is not abstract or ideological, but practical and concrete. Two key concepts in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 are “wisdom” and “toil”. These two concepts are found frequently throughout the book:

1. The Hebrew root for “wisdom” is חָכַם. It is found about 318 times in the Hebrew Bible [BHS], of which it occurs 53 times in Ecclesiastes. This means that the use of חָכַם in Ecclesiastes amounts to 17% of the occurrences in the Old Testament. The word root is found in the following derivatives in Ecclesiastes (cf. Brown *et al.*, 2000:314-315):

- חָכֵם: “to be wise” (2:15, 19, 7:16, 23), 4 times.
- חָכָם: “skillful, shrewd, wise man” (2:14, 16^(x2), 19; 4:13; 6:8; 7:4, 5, 7, 19; 8:1, 5, 17; 9:1, 11, 15, 17; 10:2, 12; 12:9; 12:11), 21 times.
- חָכְמָה: “wise, skill, shrewdness” (1:13, 16^(x2), 17, 18; 2:3, 9, 12, 13, 21, 26; 7:10, 11, 12^(x2), 19, 23, 25; 8:1, 16; 9:10, 13, 15, 16^(x2), 18; 10:1, 10), 28 times.

2. The Hebrew root for “toil” is עָמַל. It is found about 75 times in the Hebrew Bible [BHS], of which it occurs 35 times in Ecclesiastes. This means that the use of עָמַל in Ecclesiastes amounts to 43% of the occurrences in the Old Testament. The word root is found in the subsequent derivatives in Ecclesiastes (cf. Brown *et al.*, 2000:765-766):

- עָמַל: “toil, labor” (1:3; 2:10^(x2), 11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24; 3:13; 4:4, 6, 8, 9; 5:14, 15, 17, 18; 6:7; 8:15, 17; 9:9; 10:15), 24 times.
- עָמַל: “work, toil, labor” (1:3; 2:11, 19, 20, 21; 5:17), 6 times.
- עֹמֵל: “toiling, sufferer” (2:18, 22; 3:9; 4:8; 9:9), 5 times.

Furthermore, these concepts “wisdom” and “toil” are found together to a great extent within Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, as can be seen from Table 1

Root	Word	Meaning	Location	Frequency		Proportion of occurrences in Ecclesiastes
חכּם	חֲכָם	be wise, become wise	2:15, 19	2	17	32%
	חָכָם	skillful, shrewd, wise man	2:14, 16 ^(x2) , 19	4		
	חֲכָמָה	wisdom, skill, shrewdness	1:13, 16 ^(x2) , 17, 18; 2:3, 9, 12, 13, 21, 26	11		
עמל	עָמַל	toil, labor	2:10 ^(x2) , 11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24	9	15	43%
	עַמַּל	work, toil, labor	2:11, 19, 20, 21	4		
	עֲמִיל	toiling, sufferer	2:18, 22	2		

Table 1: חכּם and עמל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

Such a frequent occurrence of these two concepts in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 suggests that these words play a significant role in the interpretation of the pericope. Consequently, the use and function of these two concepts in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 calls for further study.

1.3.2. Problem statement

Different scholars give different descriptions for the content of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26: “Experiments and Their Results” (Loader, 1986:24), “Qoheleth’s Autobiographical Speech” (Longman, 1998:76), “Qoheleth’s Confession” (Brown, 2000:28), “Nothing is Ultimately Reliable” (Seow, 1997:117), “Wisdom, Pleasure, and Joy” (Provan, 2001:65), “The Teacher’s Search for Meaning” (Greidanus, 2010:49) or “the Royal Experiment” (Crenshaw, 1987:68). The number of different descriptions inevitably gives rise to the questions: Which one is correct? How can we be sure that we correctly interpret Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26?

A considerable number of studies have also been done on topics found in Ecclesiastes 1:12-

2:26. These include “Royal Voice” (Koh, 2006:25-37), “Anthropology” (Lohfink, 2003:43-57), “Human Action” (Perdue, 1994:213-216), “הַבְּרָלָה [meaninglessness, (Bible (NIV), 2011)]” (Millers, 2002:105-112), “הַתְּרוּן [gain, (Bible (NRSV), 1989)]” (Ogden, 2007:39-54), “רִיב רֵעִים [a striving after wind, (Bible (ESV), 2001)]” (Duncan, 2017:38-40), and “Failure and Ultimate Certainty” (Eaton, 1983:73-89). However, despite the frequent occurrence of the concept “wisdom” and “toil” in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, and in spite of Schoors’ (2013:211) calling them “cardinal instruments for the Royal Experiment”, few exegetical studies have been done on these concepts.

Many commentators and scholars attempt to approach Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 comprehensively and within the structure of the whole of Ecclesiastes in their commentaries and treatises. But few of them pay enough attention to those two words. There are some scholars who focus on grammatical issues in the pericope, such as Seow (1997) and Schoors (2013). However, their studies are limited to comprehensive lexical (syntactic and semantic) data. There seems to be no theological interpretation of these two words within their grammatico-historical context.

The current study aims to do exactly that: to give a theological interpretation of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. In order to do this, this study will begin with historical reconstruction and verbal meaning. The use and function of the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” will be studied closely and profoundly in other biblical and extra-biblical texts. Next, thorough exegesis will be done of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. Ultimately this study will move from historical reconstruction and verbal meaning to the theocentric message of the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 in terms of “wisdom” and “toil”.

Consequently, the main research question is: “What is the meaning and function of ‘wisdom’ and ‘toil’ in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26?”

Questions arising from this research question are:

- In what manner do the introductory questions of the book of Ecclesiastes shed light on the meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26?
- What does “wisdom” mean and how does it function in ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Apocryphal Wisdom Literature?
- What does “toil” mean and how does it function in ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Apocryphal Wisdom Literature?
- How are “wisdom” and “toil” used in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26?
- What is the theological meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26?

1.4. Aim and Objectives

1.4.1. Aim

The main aim of this study is to determine the meaning and function of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

1.4.2. Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- Research the introductory questions of the book of Ecclesiastes to shed light on the meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26;
- Study the word “wisdom” in the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, the Old Testament, and the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature;
- Study the word “toil” in the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, the Old Testament, and the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature;
- Do grammatico-historical exegesis on Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 with the focus on “wisdom” and “toil”; and
- Ascertain the theological meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

1.5. Central theoretical argument

The meaning and function of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 can be determined if these words’ usage are studied within the context of ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, and if exegesis on Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 is done grammatico-historically. The preliminary hypothesis is that the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 are the means that God uses to make a human being know that man is not to live under the sun, but under the sovereignty of God.

1.6. Methodology

In order to answer the main research question of this study, the following methodology will be used:

1.6.1. Literature study

In Chapter 2 a literature study will be conducted to determine how the introductory questions of the book of Ecclesiastes may shed light on the meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. Bartholomew’s (1999; 2009) survey on Ecclesiastes will be used as starting point, supplemented with the insights of recent articles, monographs and commentaries.

1.6.2. Word study

In Chapter 3, the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” will be researched in the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament and the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature. In order to do this, major dictionaries will be consulted (cf. Brown *et al.*, 2000 (BDB); Botterweck and Ringgren, 1980 (TDOT); Harris *et al.*, 1999 (TWOT); Koehler and Baumgartner, 2000 (HALOT); Jenni and Westermann, 1997 (TLOT); VanGemeren, 1997 (NIDOTTE)) and weighed against the findings of more recent studies.

This chapter will not only examine the lexical meanings of the concept “wisdom” and “toil”, but also, as Barr (1961:233-4) emphasizes, the theological thought behind these concepts as expressed in the word combinations, sentences, and, in the context of the book as a whole. However, diachronic (historical) linguistics, as suggested by Saussure’s (2011:140-90)

analysis, including studies on etymology, phonetic and morphological changes, is far from the concern of this study. The reason is that, although the meaning of a text naturally depends on the particular words and their meanings; it is not simply a mechanical product of word meanings but includes a complex texture that varies with circumstances (Poythress, 2005:214). In accordance with Silva's (1994:38) concern, the interest of this study is rather in synchronic aspects, namely, the significance of the concept "wisdom" and "toil" in the consciousness of the biblical writer as well as that of other ancient Near Eastern writers.

1.6.3. Grammatico-historical Exegesis

In Chapter 4 exegesis of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 will be done from the vantage point of grammatico-historical exegesis. Grammatico-historical exegesis attempts to shed light on what the author of a biblical book said to the first reader 'then' and 'there', as well as what it means 'now' and 'here'. It is a text-immanent exegesis that defines the context and co-text (the textual context of the pericope within the broad structure of the book) of a pericope. The grammatico-historical exegetical methodology of Douglas Stuart (2009) will be used as point of departure since it considers the possible lexical, rhetorical, literary, historical, theological, structural, and biblical elements of a pericope.

1.7. Chapter division

In Chapter 1, the introduction of the current study is mentioned. In Chapter 2, we will investigate authorship and date, genre, structure and integrity, canonicity, and message of the book of Ecclesiastes. In Chapter 3, we will examine those two concepts "wisdom" and "toil" in ancient wisdom literature, namely in the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, and the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature. In Chapter 4, the exegesis of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 will be done from the vantage point of grammatico-historical exegesis. In Chapter 5, we will conclude this study.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

2.1. Introduction

The book of Ecclesiastes is a mysterious book, as it expresses “the mystery of the work of God”, which “is at the core of Qoheleth’s thought” (Murphy and Carm, 1987:256). Ecclesiastes rather deals with wisdom in terms of a philosophical, speculative or even seemingly pessimistic viewpoint on human life than in terms of only the didactic aspect. However, it also includes “portions that are not nearly so cynical or negative about the value of life”. (Fee and Stuart, 1993:234) Ecclesiastes remains a controversial piece of wisdom literature found in the Old Testament, so much so that scholars have been divided over the introductory questions of the book.

This book contains a variety of difficult problems, which has captured the attention of critical scholars in each successive generation (Childs, 1979:581). The most recent scholarly assessment of the book can be summed up by such negative terms as “nihilistic, pessimistic, fatalistic, skeptical, cynical, materialistic, experimental, and the like” (Kaiser, 1979:11). In contrast, there are also recent scholars, such as Whybray (1989; 1994), who argues that “Qoheleth was mainly a preacher of joy”, and Ogden (2007), who asserts that the gist of Ecclesiastes “is that life under God must be taken and enjoyed in all its mystery”.

In this chapter, introductory questions on the book of Ecclesiastes are investigated by means of a literature study, which includes surveying the authorship of the book, the date the book was written, its genre, structure and unity, as well as its canonicity and message. A literature study on the introductory questions may shed light on (or at least help with the general interpretation of) the meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

Using Bartholomew’s (1999; 2009) survey on Ecclesiastes as starting point, the following will be investigated:

- the authorship and date of Ecclesiastes;

- the genre of Ecclesiastes;
- the structure and integrity of Ecclesiastes;
- the canonicity of Ecclesiastes, and
- the message of Ecclesiastes.

2.2. Authorship and date

As the superscription attributes the book to “תְּלֵלִיָּהּ [Qoheleth], the son of David, a king in Jerusalem (1:1)”, one might maintain that the original author of the book of Ecclesiastes is תְּלֵלִיָּהּ. This word in Hebrew is a masculine participle related to the root לָקַח, which is translated as “assemble, gather, or congregation”. Therefore, תְּלֵלִיָּהּ is turned into “collector, preacher” (Brown *et al.*, 2000:875) or “speaker in assemblies” (Harris *et al.*, 1999:790). The Septuagint’s rendering into Greek is “ἐκκλησιαστής”, which in the English version is “Ecclesiastes”, the name most familiar to modern readers.

The mainstream view even up to and beyond the Reformation on the authorship of Ecclesiastes is that an old and repentant Solomon, looks back over his life, in particular the period after his apostasy from God, which is recorded in 1 Kings 11:1-13 (Longman, 1998:2). In fact, the affirmation of Solomon’s authorship appears very early in Christian interpretation at least as far back as Origen [185-254 A.D.] (Bartholomew, 2009:43). According to the KJV Bible Commentary (Hindson and Kroll, 1994:1256), “One Rabbinic source declares that he [Solomon] wrote the Song of Songs [Canticles], with its accent on love, in his youth; Proverbs, with its emphasis on practical problems, in his maturity; and Ecclesiastes, with its melancholy reflections on the vanity of life, in old age”.

However, “in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the Enlightenment’s legacy gradually took hold in biblical studies, it became more common to deny Solomon’s authorship of Ecclesiastes” (Bartholomew, 2009:33). Most scholars¹ in recent centuries have not attributed authorship to Solomon except for a few, like Kaiser (1979), Eaton (1983), and Smith (1996). There is some alleged evidence for the rejection of Solomon’s authorship,

¹ Childs (1979:582) notes: “There is an almost universal consensus, shared by extremely conservative scholars, that Solomon was not the author of the book”. Recent scholars, who are known as comparatively conservative, such as Longman (1998), Provan (2001) and Greidanus (2010), disagree with the assertion that Solomon was the author of the book of Ecclesiastes.

briefly summarized below as follows:

1. The language of the book does not permit a Solomonic date (around the tenth century B.C.), as one can find Persian loanwords, such as פֶּרְדֵּיִם [parks] in 2:5 and פְּתָגָם [decree] in 8:11 (Seow, 1997:37), which only came into usage after the advent of the Persian Empire in the early to mid-fifth century B.C. One of the most famous Old Testament commentators in the nineteenth century, Delitzsch (1975:190), maintains: “If the book of Ecclesiastes were of old Solomon’s origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language”.
2. Solomon’s name is not mentioned in the text at all, and only cryptic references occur in verses like 1:1, 12, 16; 2:9. Even these cryptic references disappear after chapter 2, and some later statements are considered inappropriate to have come from a king’s mouth (LaSor, Hubbard and Bush, 1996:498).
3. In the first postscript of the book (12:9), an implication about who קִהְלֵת is comes out in a statement that reads: “קִהְלֵת had not only become a חָכָם but *moreover* [יִוְתֵר] had brought information to *the people* [הָעָם]”. Regarding this declaration, Lohfink (2003:10) argues that “חָכָם can mean simply ‘educated’, ‘learned’, but it can also denote ‘the teacher of a school’”. He then interrogates: “Was קִהְלֵת originally or still, a teacher in the temple school? But then what did he do *moreover* [יִוְתֵר]?” In his view, there is no evidence in the Bible that Solomon offered his teachings in public places like a temple school or a marketplace for the common people, as did the Greek peripatetic philosophers (Lohfink, 2003:10).
4. Even if קִהְלֵת was identified as Solomon, he would not be the ultimate author of the book due to the literary attributes of Ecclesiastes. Fox (1977) gives convincing answers to this. He regards the literary characteristics of Ecclesiastes as *narrative*, and that, there is more than one voice speaking in the Book of Ecclesiastes. He presents Ecclesiastes 1:2, 7:27 and 12:8, including its epilogue (12:9-14), as the reason for verses where אָמַר הַקִּוְהֵלֵת (Qal perf 3ms) occurs. He doubts if it is appropriate that the speaker of the monologue suddenly refers to himself in the third person, in the middle of a first-person monologue

(7:27). Fox (1977:91) argues that we have heard another voice speaking these words, namely, the voice of the *frame-narrator*, who is talking about קֹהֵלֶת as having lived and speaking about קֹהֵלֶת.²

If Solomon is not the actual author, why does Qoheleth seek to link himself with the famous king of Israel? In this regard, La Sol, Hubbard and Bush (1996:500) rightly answer: “The simplest answer is for literary effect. The words of the head of Israel’s wisdom movement would carry weight with the sages whom Qoheleth aimed to correct”.

If the view is correct that Solomon did not compose the book of Ecclesiastes, the natural follow-up question will be: “Who did, and when?” Many recent scholars regard the book of Ecclesiastes as written by an unknown Jew around the late third century B.C. (Bartholomew, 2009:46). In addition, they assume that Qoheleth was a contemporary of the author of the book, that he was a sage dwelling in Israel, and that Qoheleth had given much more weight to Solomon’s contribution to the literary heritage of the ancient sages who were previous to him (Crenshaw, 2010:47).

Regarding the date of the book, we have already noted above that due to Persian loanwords, any date prior to the fifth century B.C. is out of the question. According to Loader (1986), the book could not have been written later than about 180 B. C. (the *terminus ad quem*), because this is the time when Ecclesiasticus (The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach) was completed, which employs expressions and ideas borrowed from Ecclesiastes. Loader (1986:3) convincingly argues as follows:

The Hebrew of the book is later than that of fifth-century Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi; this indicates that the book cannot have originated before the fourth century. On the other hand, the book precedes the religious activism that arose in Palestine in the second century, and a book whose teaching runs so counter to that activism must already have gained considerable status over time to have been able to survive the spirit of that age. Similarly, the book must have existed for some years to have been held to be a holy book (during the first half of the second century) in Qumran. So, then, we arrive at the middle of the third century B. C.

Several other scholars have also given well-thought-out explanations for the authorship and

² The current study will look at Fox’s *frame-narrative* approach in more detail below.

dating of the book with the literary approach. While the historical reconstruction alone does not provide a satisfactory answer for it, we can take a step closer to the author's identity through examining the literary characteristics of the book. Among them is one notable scholar, Longman (2009:7-8), who is in line with Fox's (1977) *frame-narrative* approach, argues the following:

Such a use of a third-person reference to Qoheleth is intrusive and is a strong argument against identifying the so-called frame narrator with Qoheleth. The verses 1:2, 7:27, and 12:8 are the voice in the frame, other than Qoheleth, who seems most likely to be the author of the finished book...He is probably a wisdom teacher, one who speaks as an insider when he critiques Qoheleth (12:8-12).

Fox's (1999:365) view takes a step further, saying: "The frame-narrator presents himself not as the author of Qoheleth's teachings or as their editor but as their transmitter. He keeps himself well in the background, but he does not disappear".

According to Fox, Qoheleth is not the frame-narrator. The frame-narrator did not make up, but rather transmitted Qoheleth's words. The frame-narrator's voice encompasses all Qoheleth's words and remarks on them in the epilogue of the book. Who is the frame-narrator? Is the frame-narrator, as the transmitter of Qoheleth's words and as an epilogist, the author or composer of the book? No one can easily identify who the author of Ecclesiastes is. Considering the above, Fox helps us discern to a degree who the author is by looking at its literary character. In this regard, it would be more proper to say that there is an implied author behind the frame-narrator, than to say that the frame-narrator is the author. Fox (1977:104) explains as follows:

An implied author is the voice behind the voices that speak in a work of literature, the person whose feelings, ideas and values are ultimately to be conveyed. An implied author is present in every work of literature, whether or not his voice is heard in the form of 'authorial intrusions'.

Consequently, one might as well cautiously conclude that there is an implied author behind all the words in Ecclesiastes, who transmits Qoheleth's words and concludes his argument through the frame-narrator. The contribution of Fox's frame-narrative approach has been widely acknowledged by recent scholars³ who have incorporated the idea into their

³ Among them are scholars such as Perdue (1994), J. S. Wright (1994:159-173), Longman (1998), Bartholomew

commentaries and monographs. The current study will deal with this approach in more detail in section 2.3 below.

As indicated above, one cannot readily verify the authorship of the book. However, whether one considers the author to be Qoheleth or anyone else, most recent scholars accept that Ecclesiastes is the work of a single author, namely an Israelite sage (Ogden, 2007:13). Moreover, the cohesiveness of the book is well-established and widely accepted (J. S. Wright, 1994:161).

2.3. Genre

2.3.1. Introduction

There is no doubt that Ecclesiastes belongs to the wisdom literature in the Old Testament, although it differs significantly from the other wisdom books (Proverbs and Job) in the tone of argument, atmosphere, style, and content. This means that these books do not share the same literary genre, even when it comes to the wisdom literature of Scripture. This leads to the questions: How is Ecclesiastes different from the other wisdom literature in the Old Testament, and to which literary category of wisdom literature does it belong?

Even though the specific literary genre of the book of Ecclesiastes is somewhat uncertain (cf. J. S. Wright, 1994:170), further literary identification is unavoidably required to answer the above questions. An important reason why one should analyze the genre of the book is because of the various rhetorical strategies among scholars to account for the contradictions in Ecclesiastes (Lee, 2005:23). In addition, genre analysis is important because it provides us with a reading strategy. Proper genre identification aids us in interpreting the content correctly (Longman, 1998:16).

2.3.2. Ecclesiastes as personal observation

No single genre governs everything spoken in Ecclesiastes. However, one may postulate that the dominant literary type is reflection arising from personal observation (Crenshaw, 1987:28). Qoheleth ponders all kinds of experience to gain insight into life. He observes,

(1998; 1999; 2009), Millers (2002), Mills (2003), Christianson (2007), Sneed (2012) and Duncan (2017).

considers, reflects and testifies to the validity of his conclusions. Both the observation and subsequent reflection are evident in his words throughout Ecclesiastes. For example: “I said to myself” (cf. Eccl. 1:16; 2:1, 15; 3:17), “I applied my mind” (cf. Eccl. 1:13, 17; 8:9, 16), “I have seen” (c. Eccl. 1:14; 2:24; 3:10, 16; 4:1, 4, 15; 5:17; 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10; 9:11, 13; 10:5, 7), “I perceived” (cf. Eccl. 1:17; 2:14; 3:12, 14; 8:12) and “there is” (cf. Eccl. 2:21; 6:1, 12; 8:14; 10:5) (Crenshaw, 1987:28).

It seems that the frequent use of **אֲנִי** or **אֲנִי** (the personal pronoun, “I”) indicates that his first-hand experiences, personal perception, and testimony must be both stressed and assessed by those in positions of supreme authority, as is seen in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 (Crenshaw, 1987:28). Gerhard von Rad (1972:226) holds that the prominence of the royal experiment as the royal fiction in 1:12-2:26 has prompted some interpreters to characterize the entire book in this way. But in accordance with Qoheleth’s relinquishment of the fiction of royal authorship after chapter two, the epilogues ignore it altogether (Crenshaw, 1987:29).

2.3.3. Ecclesiastes and the overlap with ANE literature

In the last half of the twentieth century, some scholars alleged that there is no ordered sequence to the argument, and there only exists in Ecclesiastes a series of reflections and monologues, scattered with brief narratives, parables, maxims, and proverbial sayings (Scott, 1965:199). Eissfeldt (1964:668-9) distinguished four principal categories of material in Ecclesiastes: (1) autobiographical reflection (1:12-18, 2:1-13); (2) admonitions addressed to a pupil (4:7-5:8, 7:9-14, 11:1-12:7); (3) generally valid observations (1:2-11, 3:1-8, 7:1-8); and (4) individual wisdom sayings (9:17-10:20).

He then measures the prose appendix in 12:9-14 as stemming from the hand of an editor. Whether such approaches are acceptable nowadays or not, there are significant differences between the views of contemporary scholars and medieval commentators on the delineation of paragraphs classified by genre (Schoors, 2013:11). In order to obtain a more detailed background, many scholars have carried out a comparative investigation of Ecclesiastes with ancient Near Eastern (ANE) or Greek literature, or a combination of both. However, there remains considerable disagreement with regards to their findings. Bartholomew (2009:63) enumerates the main streams of the study as follows:

Gerhard von Rad (1972:226) considered Ecclesiastes a royal testament. Perdue (1994:194-205) maintains that it is either a sayings collection or a first-person narrative. Thomas Krüger (2004:12-14) argues that it has the genre of a Hellenistic diatribe. Nobert Lohfink (2003:7-8) suggests that the genre is a combination of diatribe and palistrophe, a book from the world of education. Longman (1998:15-20) maintains that Ecclesiastes is a fictional royal autobiography modelled on Akkadian literature.

When it comes to the discussion of the genre of Ecclesiastes, especially its possible overlap with ancient Near Eastern literature, the works of Longman (1998) and Fox (1977; 1999) are of considerable value.

2.3.3.1. Longman (1998)

Longman, by means of a comparison with Akkadian fictional autobiography, contends for the fictional autobiographical nature of Ecclesiastes. He analyzes fifteen texts written in Akkadian that share a few traits in common, which he descriptively labels “fictional autobiography”. These Akkadian texts are united by a similar three-part structure, described as follows: 1) They begin with the first-person identification. 2) The second part of these Akkadian texts contains a personal narration, where the first-person speaker recounts his or her exceptional acts. The length of this section varies greatly among texts that make up the genre. 3) In all the texts there is a third section, and based on this third part it is possible to divide the genre of fictional autobiography into four subgenres. They end with (a) blessings and curses, (b) a list of donations to the cult of some deity, (c) prophetic (near apocalyptic) references, or (d) wisdom admonition, instructions.

The texts that correspond most closely with the book of Ecclesiastes are three texts that end with wisdom admonitions, specifically instructions on how to behave. The three texts are: (a) the Cuthaeen Legend of Naram-Sin (most likely written just before the Old Babylonian period), (b) the Sin of Sargon text (neo-Assyrian), and (c) an Adad-guppi autobiography (neo-Babylonian). Of these three texts, the most complete is the Cuthaeen Legend. Naram-sin of Akkad introduces himself as the subject.

The lengthy first-person narrative focuses on Naram-Sin’s political and personal struggles with a people known as the Anubanini. These experiences lead to a series of first-person instructions that characterize this subgenre. The affinity with Qoheleth’s speech in

Ecclesiastes is not primarily material but is formal. Ecclesiastes shares the same three-part structure as that of the Cuthaeen Legend of Naram-Sin, although the content of the narrative and the wisdom advice are quite different. Longman’s (1998:19) analysis of Qoheleth’s speech in the body of the book (1:12-12:7) is indicated in Table 2 below:

1:12 (section 1)	1:13-6:9 (section 2)	7:1-12:7 (section 3)
Qoheleth begins with a first-person introduction: “I, Qoheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem”.	The second section is an extended first-person narrative, where Qoheleth describes his own quest for meaning in life.	This section contains first-person instruction delivered by Qoheleth for the benefit of those who follow after him. It is true that Qoheleth offers advice in the second section of the book (e.g., 4:12; 5:3), but this section contains large blocks of instruction material.

Table 2: Longman’s analysis on the body of Ecclesiastes 1:12-12:7

Longman (1998:20) concludes that Qoheleth offers the same three-part structure found in the Cuthaeen Legend, and with the same effect. The advice provided by Qoheleth is firmly rooted in his own personal experience. Qoheleth’s speech in the body of the book of Ecclesiastes employs the same pattern of autobiography as that which appears in Mesopotamian literary tradition. This analysis leads to a basic three-part structure of the whole book of Ecclesiastes, as indicated in Table 3 below.

1:1-11	Framework – Prologue	
Qoheleth’s Autobiographical Speech		
1:12-12:8 (The body of the book)	1:12	Autobiographical Introduction
	1:13-6:9	Autobiographical Narrative
	6:10-12:8	Wisdom Admonitions
12:9-14	Framework – Epilogue	

Table 3: Longman’s (1998) view on the structure of the book of Ecclesiastes

The division between Qoheleth’s words and the frame has long been recognized based on the shift in pronominal reference. The frame refers to Qoheleth in the third person, while Qoheleth’s speech is clearly autobiographical.

Longman’s analysis of the genre of Ecclesiastes is stimulating and helpful in confirming the

autobiographical wisdom nature of Ecclesiastes. Yet, some questions about the detailed comparisons remain. Is all the content that constitutes Ecclesiastes appropriate for a fictional autobiography or a royal testament? A fictional autobiography is, in fact, inadequate to explain the total form of the book. Since the royal experiment disappears after 2:26 in Ecclesiastes, the rest of the book is no match for what a king says in a grave biography and a royal testament.

As Bartholomew (2009:67) maintains, Qoheleth illustrates his experience, observations, and reflections, and this brings a more philosophical and speculative element into his discussion. Longman regards the form of the material within the frame of Ecclesiastes as that of a fictional autobiography. These autobiographies were composed in prose form, whereas most Akkadian literary texts were written in poetic form. It seems that Longman neglects the aspect that Ecclesiastes is highly poetic,⁴ although, admittedly, scholars remain divided on whether its style is that of poetry or prose. However, for Longman, an important point regarding the comparison of Ecclesiastes with that of the ancient Near Eastern literature is not to focus on the form itself, but on its autobiographical and instructional nature.

As indicated by Bartholomew (1998:153), Longman supports the idea that “comparative genre analysis is done after a diachronic analysis of Ecclesiastes in which the first-person narration is identified as the main characteristic of the book”. Consequently, he gets to the point that the ‘I’ of Ecclesiastes is a fictional figure (like that of an Akkadian fictional autobiography), which differs to Whybray’s understanding⁵. Yet Whybray acknowledges the need to analyze the literary structure of Ecclesiastes in terms of the narrator. However, the defect of his view occurs here. Comparative genre analysis ought to be based on synchronic (or literary) analysis. As a result of privileging diachronic analysis, he fails to clarify the reason for the occurrence of the third person in 7:27⁶ in terms of the literary analysis. As Fox (1999:365) has maintained, Ecclesiastes 7:27 indicates that the frame cannot be regarded as just a frame put on a complete first-person narration.

⁴ Cf. Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 and 11:7-12:8

⁵ Whybray’s (1980:6) opinion on the first person appearing in Ecclesiastes is as follows: “Even though in the first part of the book he [Qoheleth] uses the device of pretending to be King Solomon, there is no doubt that throughout the book this ‘I’ is a real and not a fictitious ‘I’”.

⁶ As already observed above, in 7:27 אָמַר הַקּוֹהֵלֶת [says Qoheleth] appears amid saying in the first person.

2.3.3.2. Fox (1977; 1999)

Fox (1977:83-92) begins with a synchronic analysis of Ecclesiastes as frame-narrative rather than with a diachronic analysis. He subsequently surveys the ancient Near Eastern literature parallel to the use of an anonymous third-person retrospective frame-narrative surrounding a first-person narrative or monologue. In his more recent study (1999), he tried to find analogies between Ecclesiastes and various genres of this style, such as Egyptian, biblical and apocryphal wisdom literature. The parallels he found are summed up in Table 4 below.

Origin	Title	Content
Egyptian	Kagemeni	The narrative frame looks back on both the teacher and his son as figures in the past and praises the teachings.
	Ptahhotep	The framework is not prominent in Ptahhotep, but the book opens with an introduction speaking about Ptahhotep and describes the circumstances in which he delivered his teaching to his son.
	The Prophecy of Neferti	It begins with a frame-narrative set in the reign of Snefru (4 th dynasty). The frame-narrative looks back on the ancient sage Neferti and introduces his words in an attitude of esteem. From the point of view of the speaker of the frame-narrative, Neferti and his words lie well in the past.
	Ipuwer	The introduction of the prophecy of Ipuwer is lost, but it probably defined the setting indicated by the ending of the work, which refers to Ipuwer in retrospect: "What Ipuwer said when he answered the Majesty of the All-Lord".
Sumerian	Suruppak	The gist is that in ancient days, the wise Suruppak gave instruction to his son Ziusudra. The book ends by praising the goddess Nisaba for the wisdom of Suruppak.
Aramaic	Ahiqar	The introductory narrative tells a complex story about the betrayal of the childless vizier Ahiqar by his nephew Nadin, whom he adopted and instructed in wisdom.
Hebrew Bible	Deuteronomy	In its present state but excluding the additions in 4:41-43; 32:48-52; and 34:1-12, Deuteronomy is an extended firstperson monologue of Moses set within a sparse third-person framework, which is indicated by several quoting-phrases.
Apocrypha	Tobit	Immediately after the title and brief identification of Tobit, which is not part of the frame-narrative, Tobit introduces himself by a personal retrospect like Qoheleth's.

Table 4: Fox's (1999) parallels between Ecclesiastes and ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature

It is noteworthy that there is no overlap between the characteristics of the ancient Near Eastern literature that Fox appeals to and those that Longman requires.⁷ This means that their respective decisions regarding the extent to which Ecclesiastes embodies comparative research of the genre, as well as the limitations of comparative genre studies, at least with regard to Ecclesiastes, widely diverge. Fox (1977:83-92) is first concerned with the frame-narrative aspect of Ecclesiastes, and he rightly finds that this is a style that extends across genres. He suggests a shift from comparative genre analysis to a focus on the literary shape of Ecclesiastes. In order to identify the literary analysis of Ecclesiastes, the other voice speaking in the third person about Qoheleth (in 1:2; 7:27; 12:8 and in the epilogue) must be understood correctly. This gives rise to the following questions: ‘What are the literary implications of the words?’, and ‘What are we meant to hear in the third-person section?’ Fox (1977:91-92) sees the other voice as operating on three levels, which is illustrated in Table 5 below.

Division	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Voice	The frame narrator (1)	Qoheleth-the-reporter (2a)	Qoheleth-the-seeker (2b)
Part	The speaker talking about (2a) in 1:2, 7:27, 12:8 and the epilogue	The narrating “I”, who look back from old age and speaks about (2b)	The younger Qoheleth who made the investigation in 1:12ff
Person	A different person from (2a) and (2b)	Different perspectives of the same person	
Functions of (1) in the epilogue	1 st	To testify to the reality of Qoheleth so that one reacts to him as having lived	
	2 nd	To convey a certain stance ⁸ toward Qoheleth and his teaching	

Table 5: Fox’s (1977) analysis on the three levels of voice in Ecclesiastes

The frame narrator, who speaks about Qoheleth in the third person, plays a significant role in distancing the author of the book from an intense objection to the unorthodox opinion expressed by Qoheleth. As Fox (1977:103) puts it: “The author blunts objections to the book as a whole by implying through the use of the frame-narrator that he is just reporting what

⁷ Cf. Longman (1991; 1998:15-20) and Fox (1977:93-94; 1999:11-14).

⁸ The frame narrator is subtly noncommittal about the truth of Qoheleth’s words. In 12:1, Qoheleth’s is said to have sought fine words and truth, but it is not said that he succeeded. This caution becomes more pronounced in v. 12 with the warning against excessive writing and speaking, the very activities Qoheleth is engaged in (Bartholomew, 2009:77).

Qoheleth said, without actually rejecting the latter's ideas”.

Fox's (1977:104) ultimate consideration on the genre of Ecclesiastes is the relationship between the frame narrator and the implied author, namely, “the voice behind the voices”. In this regard, Bartholomew (2009:77) argues:

This relationship is important because the view of the frame narrator may not be the same as that of the implied author, particularly in a book like Ecclesiastes where the conventional view of the frame narrator does not cancel out Qoheleth's skepticism unless the reader allows it.

In this respect, Fox has raised one of the most important points in the interpretation of Ecclesiastes, viz. how, in a final-form approach, one understands the epilogue (12:9-14) to relate to the main body (1:12-12:8) of the text. In keeping with Fox's opinion, Bartholomew (2009:78) maintains that the way to discover the message/theology of Ecclesiastes is by exploring its depth in terms of the various relationships in the book. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

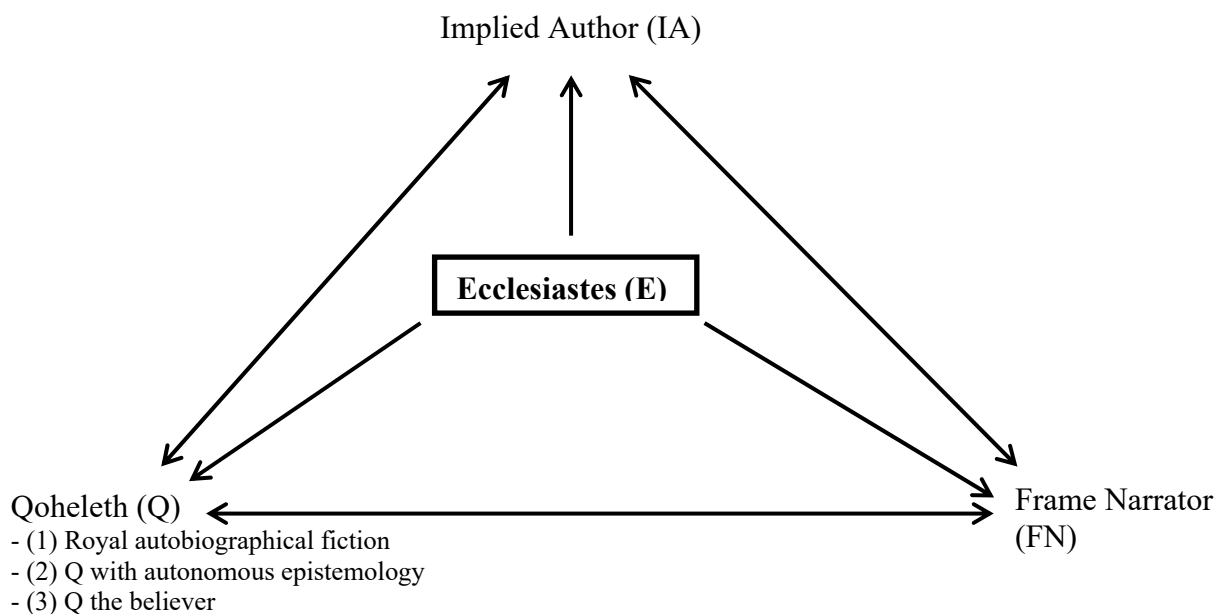


Figure 1: The relationship map of the voices in Ecclesiastes (Bartholomew, 2009)

The figure shows that the way to discover the message of Ecclesiastes is to inquire about the implied author (IA) by exploring the characters in the text, namely, the frame narrator (FN) and Qoheleth (Q), and their interrelationship. As represented in Figure 1, Q is expressed in a

couple of ways: (1) as the king of Israel in Jerusalem, (2) as an explorer in the grasp of an autonomous epistemology, and (3) as a believing Jew who affirms the meaning of life in the *carpe diem* passages⁹ and “fear of God” passages.¹⁰ Inter alia, the tension between (2) and (3) is the pivot of the book of Ecclesiastes and is a possible explanation for its dialogical nature. Another way to discern the message of Ecclesiastes is to ask how the IA relates to the FN and to Q.

The genre analysis of Ecclesiastes discussed above is of significance here because this study sees the use of the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 as that of the implied author (IA) through the frame narrator (FN) who transmits Qoheleth’s (Q) words.

The current study affirms the view held by Fox because it seeks to do justice to the genre of Ecclesiastes as a whole.

2.3.4. Conclusion

The genre analysis of the book of Ecclesiastes in terms of the frame narrative approach takes an important place in understanding the meaning of those two concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, as well as the overall intent of the writer of the book.

2.4. Structure and integrity

Gerhard von Rad (1972:227) affirms that “there is an inner unity which can find expression through the unity of style, topic and theme”, while Fox (1977:83) argues that “the Book of Ecclesiastes is to be taken as a whole, as a single, well-integrated composition, the product not of editorship but of authorship”. Zimmermann (1973:12) assumes that “there were minimally five different editors, two epilogists, and two apologists, plus a number of glossators who took a hand in its composition”.

The issue of the integrity of Ecclesiastes is related to the question of structure as well as its

⁹ Cf. Ecclesiastes 2:24-26; 3:10-15, 16-22; 5:18-20; 8:10-15; 9:7-10; 11:7-10.

¹⁰ Cf. Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, 12:13-14.

authorship (Seow, 1997:38). With respect to the research on the structure of the book of Ecclesiastes, one needs to first consider popular approaches in the field of literary criticism from the twentieth century, such as the New Stylistics or the New Criticism. Catholic scholars, Addison G. Wright (1994:45-65) and Norbert Lohfink (2003), describe their approaches to Ecclesiastes as that of the New Criticism. Even though they regard the epilogue (12:8-14) as an addition to Qoheleth by an editor or editors, their approaches show the developing tendency to read Ecclesiastes as elaborate literature (Bartholomew, 1999:8). Wright has analyzed the structure of Ecclesiastes by means of a close reading of the text along the New Critical lines.

However, what does the “New” in the title of the approach mean? Wright (1994:49) describes it as follows:

The elements of the method are not new; but the emphasis is new, the explicit and single-minded way the work is done is new, and the interest in structure is thoroughly modern and corresponds to structural preoccupations in many of the sciences today.

He maintains that this approach provides a method for analyzing the structure of Ecclesiastes, and thereby decoding the cipher in the book of Ecclesiastes as the riddle of the Sphinx. He also believes that “the principle underlying this maze is not to be sought in multiple authorships ... but that the principle is to be sought in the area of structure” (Wright, 1994:46). In his view, there appears out of the explicit disorder a plain presentation of a quite simple theme, although somewhat reduced in content from what has been known as the message of the book. Table 6 below depicts Wright’s (1994:56-57) analysis of the structure of Ecclesiastes:

- 1:1: Title
- 1:2-11: Poem on toil
- 1:12-6:9: Qoheleth’s investigation of life with “*All is vanity and a chase after wind*” passages
 - 1:12-15: Introduction (1) plus a proverb
 - 1:16-18: Introduction (2) plus a proverb
- 2:1-11: Study of pleasure seeding
- 2:12-17: Study of wisdom and folly
- 2:18-6:9: Study of the fruits of toil with a short-long-short-long arrangement
 - 2:18-26: One must leave them to another

- 3:1-4:6: One cannot hit on the right time to act
 4:7-16: The problem of a “second one”
 4:17-6:9: One can lose all that one accumulates
 6:10-11:6: Qoheleth’s conclusions
 6:10-12: Introduction: Man *does not know* what God has done, for man *cannot find out* what is good to do, and he *cannot find out* what comes after.
 7:1-8:17: Man *cannot find out* what is good for him to do critique of traditional wisdom
 7:1-14: On the day of prosperity and adversity
 7:15-24: On justice and wickedness
 7:25-29: On women and folly
 8:1-17: On the wise man and the king
 9:1-11:6: Man *does not know* what will come after him
 9:1-6: He knows he will die; the dead know nothing
 9:7-10: There is no knowledge in Sheol
 9:11-12: Man does not know his time
 9:13-10:15: Man does not know what will be
 10:16-11:2: He does not know what evil will come
 11:3-6: He does not know what good will come
 11:7-12:8: Poem on youth and old age
 12:9-14: Epilogue

Table 6: Wright’s analysis on the structure of Ecclesiastes

As indicated above, Wright divides the book into two major sections: Qoheleth’s investigation of life in 1:12-6:9 and Qoheleth’s conclusions in 6:10-11:6. He highlights the inclusio’s use and the strategic placement of key phrases¹¹ and catchwords. According to Wright, there are changes in Ecclesiastes (e.g. genre, mood, etc) and numerical patterns that may provide clues to the author’s plan. His employment of intricate numerological patterns to solve the mystery of Ecclesiastes has received mixed reactions (cf. Bartholomew, 1999:9).

However, Seow (1997:44) concludes that Wright’s numerology is “clever, but finally unconvincing”.¹² He remarks that “Wright is no doubt correct that there are strong clues that there is a structure in the book, but the book probably does not have the intricate design that he and others proffer” (Seow, 1997:46). In fact, as discussed by Schoors (2013:19), it is not possible to detect a clear and definite literary structure in the book, but there is no doubt that

¹¹ Such phrases end with “all is vanity and a chase after wind”, “does not know” and “cannot find out”.

¹² For a critique of A. G. Wright’s view, see Bartholomew (1998:131-134) and Seow (1997:44-46).

it has a thematic unity.

Bartholomew (2009:83) argues that “the structure of Ecclesiastes is *literary and organic*, as befitted Qoheleth’s experience, rather than logical in a scientific sense”, like Wright argues (italics original). This study supports the views of Bartholomew (2009:83-4) and Crenshaw (1987:47-8), which approaches the structure of Ecclesiastes as frame narrative, illustrated by the following Table 7:

I. Frame Narrative (1:1-11)

- A. The Superscription (1:1)
- B. Motto and Thematic Statement [inclusion] (1:2-3)
- C. A Poem about the Enigma of Life (1:4-11)

II. Qoheleth’s Exploration of the Meaning of Life (1:12-12:7)

- A. The Royal Experiment (1:12-2:26)
- B. The Mystery of Time (3:1-15)
- C. The Problem of Injustice and Death (3:16-22)
- D. Four Problems (4:1-16)
- E. Worship (5:1-7)
- F. Oppression and Profit (5:8-17)
- G. The Gift of God (5:18-20)
- H. Riches and Wealth Continued (6:1-12)
- I. Knowing What Is Good for One (7:1-13)
- J. Moderation in Wisdom and Folly (7:14-22)
- K. Finding the Inaccessibility of Wisdom (7:23-29)
- L. Rulers and Subjects (8:1-9)
- M. The Mystery of God’s Activity (8:10-17)
- N. The Fate of Death and the Gift of Life (9:1-12)
- O. The Example of a City (9:13-18)
- P. A Collection of Proverbs on Wisdom and Folly (10:1-20)
- Q. Living with the Uncertainties of God’s Providence (11:1-6)
- R. Rejoicing and Remembering in Youth (11:7-12:7)

III. Frame Narrative: Epilogue (12:8-14)

- A. Thematic Statement [Inclusion] (12:8)
- B. Epilogue (12:9-14)

Table 7: The analysis on the structure of Ecclesiastes followed by the current study

The structure outline given above will be followed in the rest of this study, since it views Ecclesiastes as a literary unity written by a single author and makes use of the frame narrative approach.

2.5. Canonicity

The canonicity of the book of Ecclesiastes has long been, and still is, a focus of discussion. The debate goes as far back as 90 A.D., when both Pharisaic schools, Shammai and Hillel, came into conflict with each other in the so-called “Council of Jamnia” in order to establish the Hebrew canon once and for all (Bartholomew, 2009:18; Seow, 1997:3). The school of Shammai asserted that Ecclesiastes makes the hands unclean,¹³ whereas Hillel maintained that it does not. Disciples of both groups were active throughout the first century and into the second, although after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., the school of Hillel progressively got the upper hand (Beckwith, 1985:298). Objection to its canonical character surfaced again in the early fifth century in a work by Theodore of Mopsuestia (Crenshaw, 1987:52).

Eventually, Jews read the book of Ecclesiastes in the synagogue on the third day of the Feast of Booths. As Crenshaw (1987:52) argues, we do not know how soon after its completion Ecclesiastes acquired canonicity. Of canonical significance is the verdict that Qoheleth’s sayings served as a critical wisdom guide for the Jewish community when placed with other authoritative writings in the Old Testament (Childs, 1979:588).

Ecclesiastes is today regarded as a canonical book in the Old Testament. However, on the one hand, Ecclesiastes is viewed by some as a “canonical misfit”, a book lacking any good news, while on the other hand, it has been regarded as a vital source for pastoral work, in that it has authoritative canonical status as part of the biblical wisdom books (Johnson, 2012:160). In this regard, Abraham (1998:6-7) maintains the following:

To have a canon of Scripture is to have a sophisticated means of grace which is related to formation in holy living in a host of ways. On this alternative reading, Scripture functions to bring one to faith, to make one wise unto salvation, to force one to wrestle with awkward

¹³ This is a technical expression of obscure origin meaning that the document was not regarded as inspired scripture (Seow, 1997:3).

questions about violence and the poor, to comfort those in sorrow, and to boorish hope for the redemption of the world.

This study affirms that the canonicity of the book of Ecclesiastes is closely related to its message. While some critics have viewed the canonicity of the book with suspicion due to its unorthodox content, one has to take account of the fact that in terms of biblical interpretation “what it says” does not necessarily coincide with “what it means” as a literary feature, as well as “what it meant” is not always in accord with “what it means” as a historical feature. Therefore, it is better to consider arguments such as that of the “Council of Jamnia” not just as part of the process of canonization, but also as the outcome of fresh and sustained efforts in biblical exegesis (Beckwith, 1985:315).

2.6. Message

The message of Ecclesiastes has to do with the search for an answer to the question the author asks in 1:3: “What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?” (Bible [NASB], 1995) According to Schoors (2013:19), “The answer to the question is ‘none’. Thus, the author begins and ends his book with the statement that everything is meaningless [1:2 and 12:8]”. Contrarily, Zuck (1991:48) says, “To conclude that Qoheleth recommended enjoyment of life only to make existence endurable on one’s ‘journey into nothingness’ fails to account for the positive side of the book”.

The words of the main character that are addressed in the first-person sound like “he is an atheist, a pessimist, a sceptic, an Epicurean, on the one hand, but also an optimist, a believing or god-fearing man”, on the other hand (Schoors, 2013:20). In this respect, to summarize Qoheleth’s message is not easy. Bartholomew (2009:93) maintains that “...any attempt to summarize his message is in real danger of the ‘heresy of paraphrase.’ His message unfolds, and needs to unfold, as the journey develops”.

Contradictory facets of human life are interspersed from place to place in Qoheleth’s journey for measuring the value of life. For example, as Longman (1998:29-30) describes, the author could, on the one hand, say that he ‘hated life’ (2:17), while on the other hand, assert that a ‘living dog is better off than a dead lion’ (9:4). The fact that Ecclesiastes is never directly quoted in the New Testament is also one of the difficulties when it comes to interpreting it. In

this sense, early Christian interpreters may have attempted to find the theological message in the text through allegory (Longman, 1998:30), although recent scholars refrain from doing so.

In Bartholomew's (2009:94) argument, it seems clear that the Israelites who lived in the third century, when Ecclesiastes seems to have been written, were exposed to pervasive Greek thought and culture. Moreover, Whybray (1989:54) states that "it would be foolish to deny that in some respects Ecclesiastes has the flavor of Greek rather than Jewish literature". From this perspective, Lohfink (2003:14-17) looks for its message in the special philosophy, such as existentialism, which stemmed from Greek philosophy. Lohfink (2003:14-15) describes this as follows:

Qoheleth analyzes human existence as being in the time that is given only in the now that accompanies human living and that (for individuals) ends at death. It can be experienced as happiness. It is more than a falling into nothingness, because in its individually specific form it originates in the eternity of God, who transcends this world and yet is always at work in each event ... We can rely only on whatever, in each moment, comes to us from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes thus encourages the "Israelites struggling with the nature of life's meaning and God's purposes" to seek genuine wisdom by "allowing their thinking to be shaped integrally by recognition of God as Creator so that they can enjoy God's practical supplies and obey his laws amid the enigma of his purposes" (Bartholomew, 2009:95). Daily necessities from the hand of God are "the enjoyment of life" (Whybray, 1989:64). Ecclesiastes is not a misfit in terms of other biblical texts, which means that biblical intertextuality in relation to Ecclesiastes can be considered, particularly in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament.

There seems to be some contradictions between the claims of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. However, as Zuck (1991:49) maintains, Proverbs observes the opposites in life without noting exceptions, but Ecclesiastes indicates that while a righteous principle in life exists, as affirmed in Proverbs, it is not always evident to man, as he views life under the sun from his limited perspective. As indicated in Job and Ecclesiastes, "both wisdom texts demonstrate exceptions to what Proverbs often states in black-and-white fashion; these wisdom books are not just contradictory but reciprocally complementary" (Zuck, 1991:49). Ecclesiastes' thesis finds expression in the epilogue (12:8-14) of the book; the only answer to the meaning of life is to fear God and enjoy one's lot in life.

Regarding the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes, Kidner's (1976:107) comment resonates with his readers: "To fear God is a call that puts us in our place, and all other fears, hopes and admirations in their place".

2.7. Conclusion

Chapter 2 sought to outline the main characteristics of the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole as a preliminary stage for the study of the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 in terms of the concept "wisdom" and "toil". It was shown that the way we interpret the book of Ecclesiastes depends on the approach the current study adopts.

In addition, grammatical, historical, and literary elements for the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes were dealt with throughout the chapter. In particular, the frame-narrative approach adopted by Bartholomew (1998; 2009) and Fox (1977; 1999) has had a significant influence on the study overall. The reason why this approach is important for the study of the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 in terms of "wisdom" and "toil", is because the intention of the implied author, who employs these two concepts, is best expressed by this approach.

In Chapter 3, we will investigate the meaning and function of the two concepts "wisdom" and "toil" in the ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, as well as in Old Testament and Apocryphal wisdom literature.

CHAPTER 3: “WISDOM” AND “TOIL” IN ANCIENT WISDOM LITERATURE

3.1. Introduction

It would be no exaggeration to say that pivotal words and concepts in a text are so hermeneutically decisive that they govern all subsequent studies of the whole text. This is all the truer of concepts used repeatedly and frequently in the text.

Two repetitive concepts that are pivotal for the interpretation of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 are the concepts “wisdom” and “toil.” As Chapter 1 revealed, the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” occur 17 and 15 times respectively in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 of Hebrew bible. Consequently, for a valid interpretation of the passage, in-depth research on these concepts is compulsory.

This chapter aims to determine the meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. To do this, major dictionaries will be consulted (cf. Brown *et al.*, 2000 (BDB); Botterweck and Ringgren, 1980 (TDOT); Harris *et al.*, 1999 (TWOT); Koehler and Baumgartner, 2000 (HALOT); Jenni and Westermann, 1997 (TLOT); VanGemeren, 1997 (NIDOTTE)) to gather lexical data on the occurrence and use of these words in general. The findings of these major dictionaries will be weighed against the findings of more recent studies.

Subsequently, the study will move on to the occurrence and use of these concepts in ancient wisdom literature, viz. the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, and the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature, to determine whether they shed light on the possible interpretation of the concepts in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

A caveat, however, is in order. It should be kept in mind that the two words “wisdom” and “toil” themselves as linguistic elements do not provide us with all that we need for interpreting the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 or exploring the message of the passage. For that, thorough exegesis of the passage is necessary, which will be done in Chapter 4. The goal of this chapter is to determine the gist of what the author attempts to say with these two concepts in the pericope which will enable a more detailed interpretation of the passage in Chapter 4.

3.2. “Wisdom” (חָכְמָה)

3.2.1. Lexical data

First, the concept “wisdom” (חָכְמָה) will be discussed according to the following major dictionaries: Brown *et al.*, 2000 (BDB); Botterweck and Ringgren, 1980 (TDOT); Harris *et al.*, 1999 (TWOT); Koehler and Baumgartner, 2000 (HALOT); Jenni and Westermann, 1997 (TLOT); and VanGemeren, 1997 (NIDOTTE). These dictionaries will provide us with a deeper understanding of the meaning of the concept “wisdom” (חָכְמָה). A brief summary (sometimes by means of tables) and relevant references to חָכְמָה of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 in each dictionary will be given. Conclusions that can be drawn from this lexical data will be given before the occurrence and use of the concept in ancient wisdom literature is investigated.

3.2.1.1. Brown, Driver and Briggs (BDB)

BDB (2000:314-315) gives examples and translations of the root חָכְמָה in the Old Testament.

3.2.1.1.1. Summary

Table 8 below can be used to compare usages of the root חָכְמָה in other books in the Old Testament with usages of the root חָכְמָה of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

Word	Part of speech		Translation	Verses in the Old Testament
חָכְמָה	Verb	Qal	be or become wise, act wisely	Prov. 23:15; Zech. 9:2; Prov. 9:12 ^(x2) , etc. + 3 times. Prov. 9:9; 21:11; 1 Kgs. 5:11; Prov. 20:1; Prov. 13:20; Prov. 19:20; Eccl. 7:23; Job 32:9; Prov. 27:11; Prov. 6:6; 23:19; 13:20; Prov. 8:33; Deut. 32:29; 1 Kgs. 5:11; Job 32:9; Prov. 6:6; 8:33; 9:9, 12 ^(x2) ; 13:20; 19:20; 20:1; 21:11; 23:19; 27:11; Eccl. 2:15; 7:23; Zech. 9:2; Prov. 23:15; Eccl. 2:19

Table 8: Brown, Driver and Briggs’ (2000:314-315) analysis of derivatives of חָכְמָה

Word	Part of speech		Translation	Verses in the Old Testament
חָכַם	Verb	Piel	make wise, teach wisdom	Ps. 105:22; Job 35:11; 119:98
		Pual	made wise	Ps. 58:6; Prov. 30:24
		Hiphil	make wise the simple	Ps. 19:8
		Hithpael	let us deal wisely, make thyself wise	Ex. 1:10; Eccl. 7:16
חָכָם	Adjective		wise, skilful, shrewd, crafty, cunning	Deut. 4:6 + 67 times; Isa. 3:3 + 9 times; Deut. 1:13 + 39 times; Ex. 28:3 + 4 times; Isa. 19:12, etc. + 8 times; 2 Sam. 14:2; 20:16; Ex. 35:25; Je. 9:16; Judg. 5:29; Prov. 14:1
חָכְמָה	Noun	feminine	wisdom, skill, shrewdness	Ex. 28:3 + 106 times; Ex. 35:35 + 15 times; Eccl. 2:9, etc. + 25 times; Ps. 49:4; Prov. 1:20; 9:1; 24:7; Prov. 14:1

Table 8: Brown, Driver and Briggs' (2000:314-315) analysis of derivatives of חָכַם

3.2.1.1.2. Relevance to חָכַם of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

This dictionary gives an index so that readers can briefly see the usage of the root חָכַם in the OT. It seems that it does not provide us with a de facto theological interpretation of the concept “wisdom”, but only deals with lexeme and grammatical elements. It is the same when it comes to the interpretation of these words in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

3.2.1.2. Botterweck and Ringgren (TDOT)

TDOT (4: 364-385) deals with various kinds of ANE documents referring to the concept “wisdom”, and the data it provides is so extensive that this study cannot discuss all of it. TDOT will therefore be examined only in areas related to the biblical-theological use of the concept “wisdom”, specifically in Ecclesiastes.

3.2.1.2.1. Summary

According to Eccl. 2:9, someone needs to maintain his חָכְמָה even if he owns a lot of wealth.

Consequently, **הַכְּמָה** is more valuable than wealth. In Eccl. 2:19, the root **חכ** appears to mean a good head for trade and business, which brings riches. “Wisdom” is not only greater than wealth but also produces that wealth. **הַכְּמָה** is not personified in Ecclesiastes as in the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs, the term **הַכְּמוֹת** is used to refer to “Lady Wisdom”. It may be because the book of Ecclesiastes deals with speculative “wisdom,” as opposed to the book of Proverbs, which teaches “wisdom” by giving positive instruction. According to Eccl. 1:13; 7:23 and 8:16, all attempts to find order in the universe take place in the human mind. However, there is no guarantee that it will succeed. The fear of God in relation to **הַכְּמָה** has an explicit religious dimension that allows humans to discover the order in the universe (cf. Eccl. 12:13). The antonym of **חכ**, namely **סְקִלּוּת** (foolishness), is only found in Eccl. 1:17 and 2:12.

3.2.1.2.2. Relevance to **חכ** in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

One of the features of TDOT is that it is possible to study synonyms and antonyms of the root **חכ** as well as forms and meanings of the word in relation to its usage in the book of Ecclesiastes. In this regard, the links between **חכ** and **זקן** (old man/elder) and between **חכ** and **צדק** (righteousness) provide us with considerable insight into the interpretation of the root **חכ** in Ecclesiastes in general, but also in 1:12-2:26. This will be covered in detail in Chapter 4.

3.2.1.3. *Harris, Archer and Waltke (TWOT)*

TWOT (1999: 282-284) hardly addresses the use of the root **חכ** in the book of Ecclesiastes but describes the meaning and usage of the root in other biblical texts. Nevertheless, it is meaningful to survey the root **חכ** in TWOT for the sake of comparison with other theological dictionaries that discuss the occurrence and use of the root **חכ** in Ecclesiastes.

3.2.1.3.1. Summary

According to TWOT (1999:282), the verbal form of חָכַם is used 26 times in the OT and most of the passages occur in the Qal, with the meaning of “to be wise” or something similar. The meaning of the Piel is “making wise” or “teaching”. Of all the words denoting intelligence, the ones most frequently used are this verb and its derivatives, which occur some 312 times in the Old Testament. About 60% of the occurrences are in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

The essential idea of חָכָם represents a manner of thinking and attitude concerning life’s experiences, including matters of general interest and basic morality. These concerns relate to prudence in secular affairs, skills in the arts, moral sensitivity, and experience in the ways of the Lord.

The ways in which חָכָם is used affect a whole range of human experiences. Wisdom is seen in the skill of technical work in making garments for the high priest (Ex. 28:3), craftsmanship in metalwork (Ex. 31:3, 6), as well as the execution of battle tactics (Is. 10:13). Wisdom is required from government leaders and heads of state for administration (Dt. 34:9; 2 Sam. 14:20), including pagan leaders (Ez. 28:4–5). The Messiah will demonstrate wisdom and discernment in his function as the leader of his people (Is. 11:2). Prudence, an aspect of wisdom, is demonstrated by those who speak with wisdom (Ps. 37:30; Prv. 10:31), and who use the time carefully (Ps. 90:12). This kind of wisdom in the practical affairs of life is revealed by God (Is. 33:6).

3.2.1.3.2. Relevance to חָכַם in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

TWOT tends to see the concept חָכָם as a product of human experience. At first glance, TWOT may seem to view wisdom as “pragmatic” rather than “theological”. A closer investigation, however, reveals that TWOT suggests a closer relationship between the two: wisdom enables humans to make practical yet pious choices at the crossroads of life. This view of wisdom might be informative for our interpretation of the Royal Experiment in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

3.2.1.4. Koehler and Baumgartner (HALOT)

HALOT (2000: 314-315) organizes usages of the root חכּם according to part of speech, such as verb, adjective, and abstract noun. In addition, it provides an overview of the various words derived from the root חכּם and its occurrences and translation.

3.2.1.4.1. Summary

Root	Verb		Word form	Translation	Verses in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha
חכּם	Qal	pf	חָכְמוּ חִכְמֹתַי חִכְּמוּ	To be wise	Deut. 32:29; 1 Kgs. 5:11; Job 32:9; Zech. 9:2; Eccl. 2:15
		impf	אֲחַכְּמָה יִחְכַּמְ/כָּ יִחְכְּמוּ	To become wise	Prov. 6:6; 8:33; 9:6,12; 13:20; 19:20; 20:1; 21:11; 23:15,19; 27:11
		impv	חָכְמוּ חִכְמֹ/כָּ וְחִכְּמוּ	To act wisely	Eccl. 2:19; 7:23.
	Piel	impf	חָכַם חִכְּמוּ/נִי יִחְכַּם	To teach	Ps. 105:22
			חָכַם חִכְּמוּ/נִי יִחְכַּם	To make wise	Ps. 119:98; Job 35:11; Sir. 6:37
	Pual	part	מְחֻכָּם מְחֻכָּמִים	Trained, experienced	Ps. 58:6; Prov. 30:24
	Hiphil	part	מְחַכְּמֵת	To make wise	Ps. 19:8
	Hitpael	impf	נִתְחַכְּמָה תִתְחַכְּם	To deal wisely, shrewdly	Ex. 1:10; Sir. 10:26; 32:4; 35:4
			נִתְחַכְּמָה תִתְחַכְּם	To show oneself to be wise	Eccl. 7:16

Table 9: Koehler and Baumgartner's (2000:314-315) analysis of verb of the root חכּם

Root	Part of speech	Word form	Translation	Verses in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha
חכם	Adjective and Noun	חֲכָמִי חֲכָמִים חָכֵם חָכְמָה חֲכָמוֹת	Skilful	Isa. 40:20; Ezk. 27:8; Jer. 9:16; 10:9; 1 Ch. 22:15; 2 Ch. 26:12; Ex. 28:3; 31:6; 35:25; 36:4
		חָכֵם חֲכָמָה	Clever, experienced	2 Sam. 13:3; 1 Kgs. 2:9; 2 Sam. 14:2; 20:16
		חֲכָמִים חֲכָמִי חָכֵם	The wise men	Isa. 19:11,12; Jer. 50:35; 51:57; Ob. 1:8; Jer. 10:7; Gen. 4:18; Deut. 1:13, 15; Gen. 41:33,39; Isa. 5:21; Ex. 7:11; Isa. 44:25; Est. 1:13; Deut. 16:19; Jer. 4:22; 8:8; Job 37:24; Prov. 30:24
		חָכֵם	“Wise” in contrast with “foolish” or “evil”	Prov. 12:15; 17:28; Deut. 3:26; Prov. 3:35; Eccl. 2:19; 1 Kgs. 5:21; Ezk. 28:3; Isa. 31:2
		חָכֵם חֲכָמָה	Pious and wise man (who knows and observes the law)	Ps. 107:43; Prov. 1:5; Job 15:2; Eccl. 7:19; 2 Ch. 2:11; Judg. 5:29; Prov. 11:30; 1:41; 1:20; Eccl. 8:1, 17; Est. 6:13

Table 10: Koehler and Baumgartner’s (2000:314-315) analysis of adjective and nouns of the root חכם

Root	Part of speech	Word form		Translation	Verses in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha
חכּם	Abstract noun	sg	חִכְמָה חִכְמַת	Skill in technical matters	Ex. 28:3; 31:3,6; 35:26,31; 36:1; 1 Kgs. 7:14
			חִכְמָתָהּ	Experience, shrewdness	2 Sam. 20:22; 1 Kgs. 2:6; Isa.10:13; Job 4:21
			חִכְמָתוֹ חִכְמָתֵי		
			חִכְמָתָּהּ	The worldly wisdom	1 Kgs. 5:10; Isa. 47:10; Jer. 49:7
			חִכְמָתֶּךָ	The pious wisdom of Israel	Ps. 90:12; Prov. 1:2; Job 12:2
			חִכְמָתָּהּ	God's wisdom	1 Kgs. 3:28; Jer. 10:12; 51:15; Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19; 2 Sam. 14:20; Deut. 34:9; Isa. 11:2
		חִכְמָתְּךָ חִכְמָתָם			
pl	חִכְמוֹת	Wisdom personified	Job 28:12, 18, 20, 28; Prov. 8:1-36; 9:1-6; 1:41; Eccl. 8:1; Dan. 1:20		
			Wisdom	Prov. 1:20; 9:1; 24:7; 14:1; Ps. 49:4; Sir. 4:11; 32:16; 35:16	

Table 11: Koehler and Baumgartner's (2000:314-315) analysis of abstract noun of the root חכּם

3.2.1.4.2. Relevance to חכּם in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

HALOT provides a detailed overview of the occurrence and grammatical classification of the root חכּם. However, this dictionary, like BDB, does not provide a theological reflection on the biblical concept "wisdom". Consequently, HALOT is very useful for the lexical study on the root חכּם in the OT, but it has limitations when it comes to the theological interpretation of the concept. HALOT does not specifically provide theological discussion of the use of חכּם in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

3.2.1.5. Jenni and Westermann (TLOT)

TLOT (1997: 418-424) provides abundant information on the occurrence and use of חכּם in the OT. Moreover, it doesn't employ many technical terms, which makes it easy to read and to follow.

3.2.1.5.1. Summary

OT	חָכָם	חֲכָם	חֲכֻמָּה	חֲכֻמוֹת	Total
Genesis	-	3	-	-	3
Exodus	1	9	8	-	18
Deuteronomy	1	5	2	-	8
Judges	-	1	-	-	1
2 Samuel	-	4	2	-	6
1 Kings	1	3	17	-	21
Isaiah	-	9	5	-	14
Jeremiah	-	11	6	-	17
Ezekiel	-	3	5	-	8
Hosea	-	2	-	-	2
Obadiah	-	1	-	-	1
Zechariah	1	-	-	-	1
Psalms	4	2	6	1	13
Job	2	8	18	-	28
Proverbs	13	47	39	3	102
Ecclesiastes	4	21	28	-	53
Esther	-	2	-	-	2
Daniel	-	-	3	-	3
1 Chronicles	-	1	1	-	2
2 Chronicles	-	6	9	-	15
Total	26	138	149	4	318

Table 12: Jenni and Westermann's (1997: 418-424) analysis of occurrences of derivatives of חָכָם in the Old Testament

With the concentration of occurrences of חֲכֻמָּה in Ecclesiastes, TLOT (1997: 418-424) indicates that it refers to the “wisdom” of the “wise” in the more limited sense, specifically to educational wisdom. TLOT (1997:418-424) indicates that broader use of the concept “wisdom” is also found in Ecclesiastes. “Wisdom” is often praised: it illuminates a person’s countenance (8:1); through it, the wise will obtain life (7:12). On the other hand, because wisdom is such a precious thing, it is to be acknowledged (1:17, 8:16) and sought (7:25). It is valuable and should be applied properly (10:10).

3.2.1.5.2. Relevance to חכּ in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

TLOT is practical in providing a table showing occurrences of derivatives of the root חכּ in the Old Testament. This theological lexicon also gives a practical interpretation of the root חכּ in the OT. Likewise, it provides discussion of the use of the root חכּ in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

3.2.1.6. *VanGemeren (NIDOTTE)*

NIDOTTE (1997:2:130-134) presents its readers with a translation of the usage of the root חכּ not only in the Old Testament but also in Ecclesiastes according to Hebrew verb conjugation as well as the part of speech.

3.2.1.6.1. Summary

In Ecclesiastes 7:16, Qoheleth warns his readers against excessive righteousness. He argues that it ruins a person because it has no real benefit. In this sense, חכּמה is described as the ability to respond skillfully to situations. Physical skills are associated with mastered crafts or other occupational skills, while mental skills are related to intellectual wisdom. In Ecclesiastes, both aspects seem to be considered. The concepts opposite to חכּמה appear in two-word forms, סכּל (“fool”) and פּסיל (“foolish”), and they occur in Ecclesiastes 2:19 and 6:8 respectively.

3.2.1.6.2. Relevance to חכּ in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

According to NIDOTTE (1997:2:130-134), it seems like Ecclesiastes 1:17 indicates that the place where wisdom resides is a person’s heart (לב). Wise men know the times and the appropriate way to respond in each circumstance. However, 2:19 says they also suffer the same thing that a סכּל (“fool”) undergoes.

3.2.1.7. Conclusions drawn from lexical data חכּ

The root חכּ appears 182 times in the Wisdom Literature in the OT (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes), accounting for 57% of the Occurrences of the root in the OT. Therefore, the concept “wisdom” is not only important but an indispensable concept in biblical wisdom books.

The usages of the root חכּ are extensive and varied, forming various derivatives. Broadly speaking, in the OT “wisdom” is used in both “practical” and “intellectual” domains, and sometimes intertwined. Wisdom is an inner ability of human beings; it is something that can be acquired through experience. The seat of “wisdom” (חכּמָה) is the “heart” (לֵב) of man.

3.2.2. In the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature

What does the concept “wisdom” imply in the ancient Near Eastern world outside the Old Testament? It is an undeniable fact that “Biblical wisdom literature belongs to a broader tradition found in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian writings”. (Washington, 2010:961) The study will consequently discuss the concept “wisdom” in the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, such as the Sumero-Akkadian Wisdom Literature and Egyptian Wisdom Literature.

3.2.2.1. “Wisdom” (חכּמָה) in the Sumero-Akkadian Wisdom Literature

The Sumero-Akkadian (Mesopotamian) Wisdom Literature covers documents from the 3rd millennium (ca. 2800 B.C.) and particularly the 3rd dynasty of Ur (ca. 2112-2004 B.C.), to the end of the Neo-Babylonian period (ca. 626-539 B.C.) (Perdue, 2008:30). As in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, the wisdom literature generally consists of certain genres, such as proverbs, didactic poems, instructions, and disputations. However, two other genres are also found in Sumero-Akkadian Literature, i.e. laments and dialogues. Among the above, the genre of proverbs is most appropriate for finding the meaning of the concept “wisdom”. The Akkadian maxim in *ANET* “I will praise the Lord of Wisdom” (Pritchard, 1974:434-437) states that:

The day is sighing, the night is weeping. The month is silence, mourning is the year.... Wherever the earth reaches, the heavens are spread out. The sun shines, the fire glows, water flows, the wind blows.... I prayed to my goddess, but she did not raise her head. The diviner through divination did not discern the situation.... Marduk removed the incantation of the one hounding me, turned back his lumps. He saved me from distress. He took me....He revived me....The sun shines...Fire glows...Water flows...The wind blows... Creatures endowed with breath...as many as there are, glorify Marduk!

As the excerpt above shows, Sumero-Akkadian Wisdom Literature is a distillation of the knowledge of the natural world, the gods, religion, and observation of life (Purdue, 2008:30). Through the reason of nature, the writer lamented his situation and suffering and hoped for god's protection. Pritchard (1974:434) uses the following subtitle for this maxim, "Akkadian observations on life and the world order". This Akkadian maxim is an indication that "wisdom" in life can be obtained through observing the reason of nature and through god's help.

An anonymous Akkadian proverb in *ANET* (Pritchard, 1974:425) is also worth mentioning:

My cistern has not gone dry, so my thirst is not excessive. The net is loosened, but the fetters were not remiss. I have obtained a pawn, but the loss does not stop. If I myself had not gone, who would have gone at my side?...My friend, my secret knowledge is not safeguarded by an enemy: on the contrary, by a son or a daughter, my friend, is my secret knowledge safeguarded. Fruit in the spring of the year is the fruit of mourning. A canal in the direction of the wind brings water in abundance....As long as a man does not exert himself, he will gain nothing.

Pritchard (1974:425) classifies this saying as "Akkadian Proverbs and Counsels". The Akkadian writer probably tried to explain the fruits obtained through the experience of life and the principles of all things that can be learned through the suffering of life. For the ancient Sumero-Akkadian, wisdom would boil down to working hard in nature to reap its fruits and to sanctify themselves in the companionship of gods. However, even for a wise man, his piety is limited, because human life is sometimes an extension of the tightrope between godliness and pleasure.

Moreover, in the Mesopotamian world, the reference of the concept "wisdom" is "usually to

skill in the cult and magic lore, and the wise man is the initiate in these fields” (Fohrer, 1976:65). One document defines Gilgamesh, a hero of flood stories parallels to biblical explanations, as someone who received the secret wisdom of the gods from Utnapishtim, a hero of flood stories parallels to biblical explanations (Crenshaw, 2010:218).

In fact, it would be fair to say that Mesopotamian literature does not contain a word that corresponds to the biblical Hebrew word חכמה (Fohrer, 1976:64). But Crenshaw (2010:251) adds that although there are differences between Israelite wisdom and that of its neighbor to the east, decisive similarities also abound. In this respect, we need to heed Von Rad’s (1972:15) words:

...The situation in Mesopotamia is no different; one needs to think of the wise minister Ahikar on whose counsel all Assyria depended (as the narrative stresses in stereotyped fashion) and of his teachings which he directed towards his successor in office and nephew. This again reminds us of ancient Israelite circumstances, of David’s adviser Ahithophel, for example. When he gave advice, it was “as if one consulted God himself” (2 Sam. 16:23).

Consequently, the concept “wisdom” can also be considered an instrument for awakening the ancient people who lived in Mesopotamia to a sense of aspects of life such as the natural world, religion, rituals, and moral living.

3.2.2.2. “Wisdom” (חכמה) in the Egyptian Wisdom Literature

The Egyptian term *maat* may be a central word to mediate the concept “wisdom”. This term is also the name of the Egyptian goddess of wisdom. It is said that *maat* was born to her father, the god of the sun *Re*, who, though a male god, was also hermaphroditic. He gave birth to four daughters, one of whom is *maat*. The meaning of the concept *maat* is not perspicuous or easy to translate. However, it is usually rendered as “truth”, “better right”, “rightness”, “primal order” and “cosmic order”.

According to the perception of the ancient Egyptians, there is only one order that is achieved equally throughout the world. In other words, there is no distinction between divine and human or heavenly and earthly right and order. The purpose of wisdom teachings is, thus, to level the *maat* (the order) which comes from the gods (Fohrer, 1976:66). *Maat* is also the

word for the Egyptian ideal of righteousness and truth (Murphy, 1998:27).

In *The Instruction of Amenemopet* worship and living morality is at the centre of the instruction (Pritchard, 1974:421-425). Such religious and ethical motivation transcends selfish concerns, for right conduct is enjoined due to love for god (Crenshaw, 2010:259). It differs from earlier Egyptian Wisdom Literature in its humbler, more resigned, and less materialistic outlook (Pritchard, 1974:421). There is, however, no way to know the way of god in the Instruction of Amenemopet, even if the god has given *maat* for the order of life (Crenshaw, 2010:259). In this respect, *The Instruction of Amenemopet* is considered closely related to the Book of Proverbs, particularly Prov. 22:17-24:22. *Maat* comes from god, but it is not the ability to penetrate every order of the universe. The Egyptian teachers constituted a worldview based on the concept *maat*, calling on their students to assume such attitudes as “hearing” and “keeping”. According to Perdue (cited by *ANET*, 2007:41) Ptahotep teaches his son:

Justice is great, and its appropriateness is lasting; it has not been disturbed since the time of him who made it, (whereas) there is punishment for him who passes over its laws. It is the (right) path before him who knows nothing. Wrongdoing has never brought its undertaking into port. (It may be that) it is a fraud that gains riches, (but) the strength of justice is that it lasts, and a man may say: “It is the property of my father”.

Instructions like this are obviously intended for “the training of young men for court life, and the ideals propounded in the teaching have marked similarity to those of Proverbs: diligence, honesty, reliability, self-control, etc. The setting seems to be obvious: the court school” (Murphy and Carm, 1987:11).

As Crenshaw (2010:251) rightly points out, the biblical notion of חֵכְמָה is less appropriate than the descriptive term “instruction” when applying the concept “wisdom” to Egyptian Wisdom Literature. Würthwein (1976:119) describes four elements of the existential understanding of the Egyptian wisdom instructions:

- a. Life proceeds according to a fixed order.
- b. This order is teachable and learnable.
- c. Man is thereby handed an instrument with which to determine and secure his way through life, because,

- d. God himself must pattern himself according to this order, this law.

In conclusion, there is no exact matching term for the concept “wisdom” in Egyptian Wisdom literature. However, as in the case of *maat*, one can regard the concept of “wisdom” as an instrument for perceiving the pious principle in all things that encompass both divine and human dimensions.

3.2.3. The concept “wisdom” (חָכְמָה) in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament

The study will now focus on the concept “wisdom” (חָכְמָה) in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, specifically in Job and Proverbs.

3.2.3.1. Job

There are no Israelite characters in the book of Job, though all the speakers (Job, his three friends, and Elihu) are monotheists. There is no reference to covenantal history or the nation of Israel (Alter, 2010:21). Nevertheless, the concept “wisdom”, which is referred to in the Book of Job, presupposes “fear of God” parallel to that of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Berlin (2010:290) notes that:

Though not an Israelite, he is nevertheless God-fearing and blesses Yahweh, the God of Israel (1:21). The adjectives that describe him, is “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (v. 1) means that he is morally perfect. The same adjectives will be used by God (1:8; 2:3), confirming the narrator’s description and adding that there is no one else on earth like Job. “Greatest of all the people of the east” (v. 3) may refer to Job’s wealth or wisdom; the men of the East were known for their wisdom, as was Job. Making Job a non-Israelite is to add to the theoretical nature of his character, and the point of making him a man of the East is to epitomize his wisdom.

A close reading of the pivotal Chapter 28 of the Book of Job reveals that “the author (not Job or his ‘friends’) raises one of the essential questions, namely, ‘where can wisdom be found?’ And we can also find that the answer is ‘in God’ (vv. 23-27), and human wisdom is to be found in the fear of the Lord (v. 28)” (Fee & Stuart, 2002:127). Hartley (1988:517) articulates the following in his substantial commentary on the Book of Job:

Job has proven that a person can preserve his integrity despite grave misfortune and the severest suffering. Adverse circumstances do not have to tarnish one's faith in God, for the basis of a person's relationship with God is his "fear of God" and his shunning of evil, not his health and his wealth....Since Job is not knowledgeable enough to discover why things take place on earth as they do, he is left with a decision either to trust Yahweh, believing that he wisely rules his created world, or to pursue the complaint that exalts himself above Yahweh.

In annotating Chapter 28 of the Book of Job, Clines (2006:924) correctly points out the following regarding "fear of God":

It may be that the speaker (and this observation fits well if we correctly identify him as Elihu) refers only to wisdom in the religious and ethical domain, that is, that he is not propounding a view about epistemology. But it would fit even better if the statement that the fear of God is wisdom means not that wisdom consists of the fear of God or that wisdom and the fear of God are the same thing, but rather that to fear God is a very wise thing to do, an act that is full of wisdom.

In the Book of Job, the theological term "fear of God" is a core idea that can explain the concept "wisdom". However, in both spiritual and practical respects to Job's situation, the concept "wisdom" would also be a means of making the pious choice, considering that the root *חכמ* also is "skill, to be skillful" according to the lexical data.

3.2.3.2. Proverbs

The declaration of Proverbs 1:7 indicates that wisdom is implied in God's creative order. Although the book's teaching is based on practical advice and observations and seems removed from the theological concerns of the bulk of the OT, the conclusion that the Book of Proverbs is not theological is wrong (Longman, 2006:56-57). Longman (2006:57-58) states:

Proverbs is not rightly understood if it is taken as a book of practical advice with an occasional nod of the head to YHWH. The book is thoroughly and pervasively theological...The bottom line is that there is no wisdom apart from a relationship with YHWH. The very concept of wisdom is a theological concept, and it runs throughout the book. The pervasiveness of the theological perspective of the book is underlined by the role of Woman Wisdom.

One of the characteristics of Solomon's Proverbs is that the concept of "wisdom" is personified in the text, specifically with the voice of a woman. Waltke (2004:83) notes: "The abstract noun **חָכְמָה** is feminine and accordingly becomes personified as a woman, just as 'folly,' **סְכֵלְוֹת**, another feminine abstract, is personified as a woman in 9:13-18". Regarding this feature of Proverbs, Fox (2009:916) argues that "the editors of the Book of Proverbs (as distinct from the various collections) chose the feminine to convey the principle bridging the divine and the mundane realms". If we want to know how the world works and successfully navigate our lives, we should know God's wisdom and God himself (Longman, 2006:59).

If this is true, the concept "wisdom" in Proverbs can be called an instrument for solving questions that encompass both the divine and the human domains. Prov. 16:1 involves God's crucial interaction with human beings. "God is a part of the human thought processes itself and human beings have to remember the divine aspect of their decision-making process" (Dell, 2006:112).

The Book of Proverbs does not identify God's revelation as the source of wisdom. Rather, Prov. 3:19-20 says that God appropriated wisdom as an instrument to create the world, not as an instrument to reveal wisdom (Waltke, 2004:81). In other words, as Miller (2004:52) asserts, wisdom is the characteristic of God himself as Creator: "By his knowledge, the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew" (Prov. 3:20) (Bible, 2011). Thus, the concept "wisdom" in Proverbs is both a theological and a practical means for devout life; they are two sides of a coin.

3.2.4. The concept "wisdom" (**חָכְמָה**) in the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature

The study will now address the concept "wisdom" (**חָכְמָה**) in the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature in the books Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon.

3.2.4.1. *Ecclesiasticus*

Ecclesiasticus is also called "The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach", or "Ben Sira" as one of the Apocryphal Wisdom books. This book was originally written originally in Hebrew and

then translated into Greek by the author's grandson. Scholars tend to date the book of Sirach between 190 and 180 B. C. (Slager, 2008:1-2). Ecclesiasticus, like other canonical Wisdom Literature, searches for the root of wisdom in "fear of the Lord". Phrases such as "the fear of the Lord", "fear the Lord", or "God-fearing" appear 57 times in the book of Ecclesiasticus (Slager, 2008:8). This is a pivotal concept for Ben Sira. The concept "wisdom", namely σοφία appears about 64 times in this book. Slagger (2008:9) proposes understanding the concept "wisdom" in Ecclesiasticus as follows:

"Wisdom" is the principal term, and translators will do well to find a term in their language that can be used for this idea. It refers to the quality possessed by a person who is perceptive about people and about situations, who has insight into them whether from experience or intuition. A person with wisdom will exercise good judgment. For Ben Sira, wisdom also includes knowledge of facts. It is broader than the term "knowledge", however. When Ben Sira uses terms with similar meanings (synonyms), translators will be correct in finding synonyms in their language and using those that seem most appropriate to the context.

Ecclesiasticus, like Proverbs 8, treats the concept of "wisdom" as a personality trait, and this "wisdom" manifests specifically as the voice of a woman. However, the author of this book does not see "wisdom" as an actual person. It is just a figure of speech. This book, like the Book of Proverbs, calls for comparing "wisdom" with various examples; for example, as in Ben Sira 6:12, "thinking and acting as God would have us do is like (a comparison with) a woman who is radiant and unfading" (Slagger, 2008:2). In Proverbs 8, Solomon loves "wisdom" and even wants to take it as a bride (in his youth). He also introduces "wisdom" as an indispensable instrument for rulers.

3.2.4.2. The Wisdom of Solomon (Bible NRSV, 1989)

Although in the Latin translation this book is titled "The Book of Wisdom", and is referred to by this name in most Catholic sources, the Greek translation is entitled "Wisdom of Solomon", and this is the title usually used in Protestant circles for this apocryphal book (Bullard & Hatton, 2004:1). There is little consensus regarding its date, but most scholars estimate it was written approximately between 200 B.C. and 50 A.D. Recent opinion seems to be inclined towards a date at the end of this time span (Bullard & Hatton, 2004:1).

The concept "wisdom", σοφία in Greek, appears as a key concept of this book, since it is

found about 39 times in the book. As in the Book of Proverbs and Ben Sira, this book often mentions “wisdom” as if it is a woman. This is very clear in the central section, Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-9:18. However, in other places “wisdom” sometimes appears as a concept. Bullard and Hatton (2004:2) describe the meaning of the concept of “wisdom” in Wisdom of Solomon as follows:

The wisdom writers of the Old Testament had several terms to use for wisdom. Sometimes these terms have distinctive meanings, but sometimes for practical purposes, they have essentially the same meaning. The principal term is “wisdom”. It refers to the quality possessed by a person who is perceptive about people and about situations. He has insight into them, whether from experience or intuition. A person with wisdom will exercise good judgment. Wisdom also includes knowledge of facts. Often in this book, a Greek term is used (παιδεία) which is often translated by such terms as “instruction”, “discipline”, and “education”. In this book it usually has the meaning “instruction”, and seems at times to refer to the content of instruction, that is, knowledge or information. In some languages it will be impossible to use an abstract noun for “wisdom”, but translators will use the verbal phrase; for example, “thinking and acting as God would have you do”.

Consequently, according to this book, as in Proverbs and Job, the root of wisdom can be found in God. For wisdom means that man discerns God’s thoughts and deeds and follows them. Thus, the concept of “wisdom” is an instrument for making godly choices.

3.2.5. Conclusions

Chapter 3.2.1 examined the lexical data on the concept “wisdom”, (the root חכּוּן in Hebrew) in the OT, referring to six major theological dictionaries (BDB, TDOT, TWOT, TLOT, HALOT, and NIDOTTE). The meaning and usage of the concept in the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature (the Mesopotamian and Egyptian Wisdom Literature) was discussed in Chapter 3.2.2, the Canonical Wisdom Literature (Proverbs and Job) in Chapter 3.2.3 and the Apocryphal Wisdom books (Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon) in Chapter 3.2.4.

Up to this point of the investigation, it can be confirmed that the concept “wisdom” (חכּוּן) is one of the key terms in the documents discussed above. This shouldn’t strike us as strange, since the concept of “wisdom” is at the very heart of the aptly named “wisdom literature”.

The latter reflects on “wisdom” as a kind of “competence” in life, striving to obtain it, understand it and teach it to others. Based on these various investigations, it becomes clear that the concept “wisdom” was recognized in the OT and cognate literature as a positive instrument for the success or failure of almost all fields encompassing human life and religion. Especially in the Canonical Wisdom Literature, “wisdom” seems to be regarded as an instrument to lead people on the path of godliness.

This broad conclusion seems to be consistent with the use of the concept “wisdom” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.3. “Toil” (עָמַל)

3.3.1. Lexical data

In this section of the chapter, the concept “toil” (עָמַל) will be investigated according to the following major dictionaries: Brown *et al.*, 2000 (BDB); Botterweck and Ringgren, 1980 (TDOT); Harris *et al.*, 1999 (TWOT); Koehler and Baumgartner, 2000 (HALOT); Jenni and Westermann, 1997 (TLOT); and VanGemeren, 1997 (NIDOTTE). These dictionaries will provide us with a deeper understanding of the meaning of the concept “toil” (עָמַל). A brief summary (sometimes by means of tables) and a short review of each dictionary will be given. Conclusions that can be drawn from this lexical data will be given before the occurrence and use of the concept in ancient wisdom literature is investigated.

3.3.1.1. Brown, Driver and Briggs (BDB)

BDB (2000:765-766) provides us with examples and translations of the root עָמַל in the OT.

The table below can be used to compare usages of the root עָמַל in other books of the OT with usages of the root עָמַל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

3.3.1.1.1. Summary

Word	Part of speech		Translation	Verses in the Old Testament
עָמַל	Verb	Qal	Labour, toil	Eccl. 2:21; Pr. 16:26; Jon. 4:10; Eccl. 2:11 + 2 times; Ps. 127:1; Eccl. 1:3 + 3 times; <i>labour</i> (very late): in building, with עָמַל Ps. 127:1; tillage, with עָמַל Jon. 4:10; with עָמַל Eccl. 2:21, with עָמַל Prov. 16:26; Eccl. 5:15, with עָמַל 8:17; 1:3; 5:17; 2:11, 19, 20.
עָמַל	Noun	Masculine	Trouble, labour, toil	Jer. 20:18; Ps. 10:14; Deut. 26:7, Ps. 25:18; 90:10; Num. 23:21; Job 5:6; 7:3; Isa. 53:11; Ps. 73:16; Job 3:10; 16:2; 5:7; Ps. 73:5; Job 11:16; Gen. 41:51; Prov. 31:7; Judg. 10:16; Prov. 24:2; Ps. 94:20; Hab. 1:13; Ps. 7:17; 10:7; 55:11; Isa. 10:1; 59:4; Hab. 1:3; Ps. 7:15; Job 4:8; 15:35; Ps. 140:10; Eccl. 2:10 ^(x2) , 21, 24; 3:13; 4:4, 6, 8, 9; 5:14, 18; 6:7; 8:15; 10:15; 1:3; 2:11, 19, 20; 5:17; 2:18, 22; 9:9; Ps. 105:44; 107:12
			Labourer, sufferer	Judg. 5:26; Prov. 16:26; Job 3:20; 20:22
עָמַל	Adjective		Toiling	Eccl. 2:18, 22; 3:9; 4:8; 9:9

Table 13: Brown, Driver and Briggs' (2000:765-766) analysis of derivatives of עָמַל

3.3.1.1.2. Relevance to עָמַל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

As in the case of the root חָכַם, the dictionary provides an index which enables a reader to see at a glance the biblical usage of the root עָמַל including the usage of עָמַל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. This dictionary, however, merely deals with lexemes, and does not appear to provide an in-depth theological discussion or interpretation of the root עָמַל.

3.3.1.2. Botterweck and Ringgren (TDOT)

TDOT (11:196-202) investigates various ANE documents that refer to the concept “toil”. Due to the sheer amount of information this dictionary provides, the current study will focus its investigation on TDOT’s discussion of the root עָמַל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

3.3.1.2.1. Summary

The basic meaning of the root עמל is “to be (become) tired”. From this basic meaning a series of semantically related meanings are derived: on the one hand, עמל denotes what makes people tired; on the other, it refers to the condition of someone who is exhausted. In addition, it can denote the positive result of toil, namely, “earn” or “gain”.

Ecclesiastes understands the concept “toil” (עמל) in a different sense than Proverbs and Job, This links on to Ecclesiastes’ critical stance toward traditional wisdom. In Ecclesiastes, “toil” is not just a concept used to reveal the misery of human labor. Ecclesiastes seems to say something else with respect to the concept “toil”. Qoheleth is of the opinion that all the toil that human beings toil under the sun is chasing after the wind therefore in vain. He also emphasizes that everything that is happening on the earth has already happened in the past and this it is very troublesome. He seems to be very pessimistic.

However, he does not stop at such empty opinions but advises readers to settle on ideas that can only be reached by human beings through wisdom. Qoheleth says that the reality he is facing is the portion that God has given him. Therefore, in Eccl. 2:24, he asserts that what is most fitting is “to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil (עמל) with which one toils under the sun all the days of the life God gives one, for this is one’s portion” (Bible NIV, 2011).

3.3.1.2.2. Relevance to עמל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

TDOT seems to interpret the concept “toil” as coexistent in both a negative and a positive sense. However, whether it is negative or positive should be judged differently depending on the context in Ecclesiastes. While the words “earn” or “gain” can have positive connotations in the lexical dimension, whether owning something is ultimately a positive concept deserves further survey. Therefore, it seems important to know how the meaning of עמל in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 is used in a positive or negative sense. This will be explored in Chapter 4.

3.3.1.3. *Harris, Archer and Waltke (TWOT)*

TWOT (1999:675-676) arranges the derivatives of the root עמל by its part of speech and provides us with a wide range of English words with which the derivatives can be translated.

3.3.1.3.1. Summary

The main meanings of the concept עמל are “labor, work, and toil” (TWOT 1999:675-676). TWOT seems to regard the concept “toil” as referring to the dark side of labor. It may be because all the work that human beings have to do is done by painful “toil”. TWOT (1999:675) states “a biblical view of labor based on the concept עמל alone would be defective, but this aspect of work should be included in a full induction”.

The root עמל is used in several Hebrew forms, especially in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. It can be seen the concept “toil” has various effects on human life in many ways. Qoheleth, for example, concludes that all human toil under the sun is futile, but at the same time declares that it is the gift of God that everyone eats and drinks and sees good in all his toil.

3.3.1.3.2. Relevance to עמל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

In Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, the meaning of human life that Qoheleth wants to find through the Royal Experiment lies in the contradiction of “vanity” on the one hand and “gift” from God on the other hand. Here the concept “toil” is used as the most appropriate instrument for the experiment. In that sense, it is noteworthy that TWOT links the word עמל to the word הבל (“vanity” or “transitory”) which can be regarded as the keyword in the book of Ecclesiastes.

3.3.1.4. *Koehler and Baumgartner (HALOT)*

HALOT (2000, 845-846) organizes usages of the root עמל according to the part of speech, such as verb, noun, and adjective. In addition, it provides us with word form and translation of words derived from the root עמל in the Old Testament and some of the Apocryphal books.

3.3.1.4.1. Summary

Root	Verb		Word form	Translation	Verses in the Old Testament
עמל	Qal	pf	עָמַל עָמְלָה עָמְלָתָּ עָמְלָתִי עָמְלוּ	To exert oneself	Jon. 4:10; Ps. 127:1; Eccl. 2:11, 21; Prov. 16:26;
		impf	יַעְמַל		Eccl. 1:3; 2:19; 5:15, 17; 8:17

Table 14: Koehler and Baumgartner's (2000:845-846) analysis on the verbs of the root עמל

Root	Part of speech	Word form	Translation	Verses in the Old Testament
עמל	Noun	עָמְלוֹ עָמְלָנוּ עָמַל עָמְלוּ	Trouble	Gen. 41:51; Deut. 26:7; Isa. 53:11; 59:4; Jer. 20:18; Ps. 25:18; 73:5, 16; 90:10; 107:12; Prov. 31:7; Job 3:10; 5:7; 11:16; 15:35; 16:2; Eccl. 2:24; 3:13:5:18
		עָמַל	Acquisition	Ps. 105:44;
		עָמְלוֹ עָמְלִי עָמַל עָמְלָם עָמְלָה עָמַל	Care, anxiety	Eccl. 1:3; 2:10, 18-22; 4:4, 6, 8; 5:14,17; 6:7; 8:15; 9:9; 10:15
		עָמְלוֹ עָמְלָנוּ עָמַל עָמְלִי	Need	Deut. 26:7; Judg. 10:16; Jr. 20:18; Ps. 25:18; 107:12; Job 7:3; 20:22; Is. 10:1; Hab. 1:3; Ps. 10:7; 94:20
		עָמַל עָמַל עָמְלוֹ	Harm	Num. 23:21; Hab. 1:13; Ps. 7:15, 17; 10:14; 55:11; 140:10; Prov. 24:2; Job 4:8; 5:6; Ps. 10:7; 90:10; Num. 23:21; Jer. 20:18; Ps. 10:14; Ps. 73:5; Eccl. 6:7; Ps. 105:44

Table 15: Koehler and Baumgartner's (2000:845-846) analysis of nouns of the root עמל

Root	Part of speech	Word form	Translation	Verses in the Old Testament
עמל	Adjective and noun	עִמָּל	Burdened with grief	Job 3:20;
			Becoming anxious	Eccl. 2:18, 22; 3:9; 4:8; 9:9
			Workman, worker	Prov. 16:26; Judg. 5:26; Job 20:22

Table 16: Koehler and Baumgartner's (2000:845-846) analysis of adjectives and nouns of the root עמל

3.3.1.4.2. Relevance to עמל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

HALOT provides readers with the most detailed analysis of biblical usages and grammatical classifications of the root עמל. However, as BDB, HALOT does not provide theological discussion of the concept “toil” in the Old Testament. Thus, this lexicon is useful for the study on the root עמל as a lexeme, but there are some limitations to the study of the concept “toil” for the theological interpretation of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

3.3.1.5. Jenni and Westermann (TLOT)

TLOT (1997: 924-926) provides abundant theological discussion of the concept “toil” as expressed by the root עמל. Rather than focusing on its grammatical usage, it focuses on the root's meaning in the corresponding biblical text.

3.3.1.5.1. Summary

The root עמל occurs most often in Ecclesiastes (35 times). The substantive עִמָּל primarily indicates the process of work (almost exclusively in Ecclesiastes). However, when עִמָּל is used in speech directed towards God, it is sometimes used to confess to God the hardships that the speaker experiences in his life. עִמָּל becomes a definition of the human condition when referring to the transience of the life of a human being. In Ecclesiastes 12:12, עִמָּל expresses “exertion”, especially that of writing a lot of books. Toilsome labor is generally viewed negatively, but the positive significance of toil stands in the background in

Ecclesiastes 3:13; 5:17; 8:15; 9:9.

3.3.1.5.2. Relevance to עמל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

This theological lexicon refers both to the positive and negative aspects of the concept “toil” in Ecclesiastes, helping its readers to get a good grasp of the meaning of the concept “toil” in the book. The positive aspects of the concept “toil” in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.3.1.6. *VanGemeren (NIDOTTE)*

NIDOTTE (1997:3:435-437) presents its readers with abundant lexical data and a theological interpretation of the root עמל in Ecclesiastes.

3.3.1.6.1. Summary

Thirteen of the sixteen OT occurrences of the verb עמל appear in Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes 1:3 describes all the affairs of human beings as a laborious task. The cliché “all his labor at which he toils under the sun” is found in Ecclesiastes 1:3; 2:18, 19, 20, 22; 5:18; and 9:9. In Ecclesiastes 2:11, עמל describes the toil of producing something with one’s own hand and of accomplishing tasks. However, something different is found in Ecclesiastes 8:17. Here עמל does not merely refer to laborious life, but a persistent human effort to understand the ways of God.

3.3.1.6.2. Relevance to עמל in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

In addition to insight gathered from other dictionaries, NIDOTTE indicates that the conventional concept of “toil” is viewed in a different way in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, namely as the struggle of humans to comprehend the way of God.

3.3.1.7. Conclusions drawn from lexical data

From the above it becomes clear that the concept “toil”, expressed in the root עמל, is used

most frequently in Ecclesiastes (35 out of 75 occurrences in the OT), and it is used in both a positive and negative sense in Qoheleth's Royal Experiment in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

3.3.2. In the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature

What does the concept "toil" imply in the ancient Near Eastern world outside the Old Testament, such as the Mesopotamian Wisdom Literature and Egyptian Wisdom Literature? This is the question that the current section of the chapter wants to investigate.

3.3.2.1. "Toil" (לָמַד) in the Sumero-Akkadian Wisdom Literature

In *ANET*, especially in Akkadian Didactic and Wisdom Literature, the following proverbs appear (Pritchard, 1974:594):

The strong man makes his living by the work of his arms, but the weak man by selling his children... My knees are in constant motion, my feet are tireless, yet a dull-witted person pursues me with trouble... And a man, so long as he does not toil, will have nothing. Who will give him something for...? He who has neither king nor queen – who is his master? He is either an animal or one who lies down...

In this document, the concept "toil" seems to describe the condition a man must sustain in order to get something. This also teaches that if a man does not work hard, he will be forced to sell his family. It seems that working hard, or toil, was a crucial condition or instrument for living in the ancient Near East as it is as nowadays. This concept is also illustrated in the ancient Babylonian Story of the Flood in which the lower gods (Igigi) rebel against working, and humans are created for this purpose. Perdue (2008:132-133) describes it as follows:

"The Babylonian Story of the Flood" in the myth of Atra-ḥasīs also resonates with the poetic Job, for both possess the important feature of human revolt, occasioned by the harshness of their forced labor and divine mistreatment. The first line of the initial section of the Akkadian myth reads: "When the gods like men bore the work and suffered the toil".

It is clear in the ancient Babylonian story that even the gods cannot avoid the suffering of toil. It also appears that "toil" is something that is imposed by someone who has a comparative advantage (even if it is the gods) on a subordinate being as a kind of result of their inferiority. The story says that the higher gods created human beings to suffer the toil in order to

alleviate the difficulties of the lower gods.

However, when we consider that the opening words of the Atra-ḥasīs epic are “When the god-like men bore the work and suffered the toil...”, it is clear that “the themes of the Epic – creation, flood, the increase of humanity, human accomplishments, judgment – are concerned more with human beings before the gods than with happenings between the gods themselves”. (Westermann, 1992:69) It would be safe to say that “toil” or “work” is the miserable privilege of only humans. It is known that Ecclesiastes has in common with the Gilgamesh epic the theme of death and the vanity of life, and concern for one’s name and memory (Murphy, 1992:43).

In the Epic of Gilgamesh in *ANET* (Pritchard, 1974:73-99), Gilgamesh is both a human and a god. To be exact, two-thirds of him is god, and one-third of him is human. He is the king of Uruk. Gilgamesh goes through a lot of things: refusing Ishtar’s courtship, fighting Enkidu, befriending Enkidu who will die in his place, traveling to find Utnapishtim for eternal life, and eventually not getting eternal life. The spouse of Utnapishtim says to him (Pritchard, 1974:96):

“Gilgamesh has come hither, toiling and straining. What wilt thou give him that he may return to his land?” At that time, he, Gilgamesh, raised up his pole, to bring the boat nigh to the shore. Utnapishtim says to him, to Gilgamesh: “Gilgamesh, thou hast come hither, toiling and straining. What shall I give thee that thou mayest return to thy land?”

Gilgamesh wants to and claims to return to the state of his youth. But he fails because of his own fault. On his way back to Urk, he cries out to the boatman, Urshanabi (Pritchard, 1974:96-97):

“For whom, Urshanabi, have my hands toiled? For whom is being spent the blood of my heart? I have not obtained a boon for myself. For the earth-lion have I affected a boon! And now the tide will bear it twenty leagues away!”

In this myth, we hear something of the lament of Qoheleth, who looks back on his life and speaks of the futility of human life. “What do people gain from all their labours at which they toil under the sun?” (Eccl. 1:3)

3.3.2.2. “Toil” (עָמַל) in the Egyptian Wisdom Literature

Much of Egyptian Wisdom Literature consists of kings’ instructions to their successors. Therefore, the texts which deal with the concept “toil”, which was far removed from Egyptian Pharaohs’ lives, are not plentiful. But in the sixth chapter of *The Instruction of Amenemopet* the following admonition is to be found (Pritchard, 1974:421):

Who determines the boundaries of the arable land? Plow in the fields, that thou mayest find thy needs, that thou mayest receive the bread of thy own threshing floor. Better is a measure that the god gives thee than five thousand taken illegally. They do not spend a day in the granary or barn. They make no provisions for the beer-jar. The completion of a moment is their lifetime in the storehouse. Better is bread when the heart is happy than riches with sorrow.

These proverbs certainly urge the recipient to live by the days’ worth of “toil”, plowing the field according to the portion he received from the god, rather than dreaming of a fortune or enriching himself through injustice (Waltke, 2005:229). It can be argued that this is parallel to Proverbs 13:23 in the Old Testament: “The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice” (Bible, 1989). In ancient Egypt, likewise, it seems that the “toil” of the poor was to be recognised and people were to accept their legitimate portion, regardless of rank.

However, as the current study indicates in 3.3.1.3.1, the root of עָמַל also relates to the dark side of labour, the grievous and unfulfilling aspect of work. More than anything else, it should be remembered that Israel was a slave nation in Egypt. For Israelites, Egypt was a place where forced labour was commonplace. Ancient Egypt built pyramids using forced labour. Moses encountered a situation of forced labour and had to flee when he killed an Egyptian. In the extra-biblical evidence, many people were mobilised to build cities in Egypt. Collins (2014:111) states:

The existence of Semitic slaves in Egypt in the late second millennium B.C. is well attested. More specifically, there is evidence that Habiru or Apiru worked on the construction of the capital city of Ramesses II. (Papyrus Leiden 348 contains an order: “Distribute grain rations to the soldiers and to the Apiru who transport stones to the great pylon of Ramesses”.)

With their “toil”, the city construction would have been completed, but what good does it do them, what do they get in return for the effort? What benefits will the city provide for them, who are the masters of the effort? They were just slaves. Among Egyptian secular songs and poems in *ANET*, attention should be paid to *the Songs of the Common People*. These working songs are antiphonal, with a leader and a chorus. Below is an excerpt (Pritchard, 1974:469-470):

Workers in the field

Over the Plowmen

A good day – it is cool.
The cattle are pulling,
And the sky does according to our desire –
Let us work for the noble!

Over the Reapers

This good day has come forth in the land;
The north wind has come forth,
And the sky does according to our desire –
Let us work as our hearts may be bound!

The “toil” of the common people in ancient Egypt, also applied to the nobility. Qoheleth (Eccl. 1:12-2:26) says that all the “toil” he did for himself was meaningless and futile. Would it not have been even more so for labourers? In Egypt, the concept of “toil” was necessary for building their cities and buildings, but for the providers of the “toil”, it would have been meaningless.

3.3.3. The concept “Toil” (עָמַל) in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament

The concept “toil” (עָמַל) in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, specifically in Job and Proverbs, will now be studied.

3.3.3.1. *Job*

In the Old Testament, Job is a biblical figure represented as a man of hardship. His “toil” and pain are so severe that he curses his life (Job 3:1-13) (Hartley, 1988:89). The concept “toil”

(עֲמָל) is used by Job as a keyword for his plight in several verses (Job 4:8; 5:6, 7; 7:3; 11:16; 15:35; 16:2) (Hartley, 1988:95). Job also uses the word “toil” (or trouble) frequently to describe his pains and sorrows (e.g., Job 3:10) (Hartley, 1988:202). A synopsis of this can be seen in the following table (Bible NIV, 2011):

Text	Chapter	Verse	Content
Job	3	9-10	May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble [עֲמָל] from my eyes.
		20	Why is light given to those in misery [עֲמָל], and life to the bitter of soul?
	4	8	As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble [עֲמָל] reap it.
	5	6	For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble [עֲמָל] sprout from the ground.
		7	Yet man is born to trouble [עֲמָל] as surely as sparks fly upward.
	7	3	So, I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery [עֲמָל] have been assigned to me.
	11	16	You will surely forget your trouble [עֲמָל], recalling it only as waters gone by.
	15	35	They conceive trouble [עֲמָל] and give birth to evil; their womb fashions deceit.
	16	2	I have heard many things like these; you are miserable [עֲמָל] comforters, all of you!
20	22	Amid his plenty, distress will overtake him; the full force of misery [עֲמָל] will come upon him.	

Table 17: Verses in Job using the concept “toil” עֲמָל

The concept “toil” in the book of Job seems to be used as an instrument to explain the hardship that Job is suffering, as well as the reason for his suffering. Zophar and Eliphaz use this concept in the section of the book where Job and his friends debate about his suffering. However, one must not forget that Job is “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1), and in the middle of the test that God has given him. The “toil” he is suffering is not punishment as a result of his misbehavior. He is enduring God’s test. Berlin (2010:290) notes that:

Job's exaggerated piety is exemplified by his “preventative” offerings for his adult children (who should be responsible for their own sin-offerings), just in case they may have thought, not uttered, blasphemy while they were feasting. The idea of cursing God, the antithesis of fearing God, is central to the test.

But this great Eastern man is cursing the day he was born (Job 3:1-26). “Toil” in the book of Job seems to be harsh, driving even the most perfect person to make a mistake.

3.3.3.2. Proverbs

The concept “toil” appears only three times in the book of Proverbs: twice in 16:26 and once in 24:2 (Bible NIV, 2011):

Text	Chapter	Verse	Content
Proverbs	16	26	The appetite of laborers [עֲמָל] works [עֲמָלָה] for them; their hunger drives them on,
	24	2	For their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble [עֲמָל].

Table 18: Verses in Proverbs using the concept “toil” עֲמָל

In 16:26, the reason workers suffer toil, is given as their desire to eat. They are even urged to satisfy their appetite from their mouths (פִּיהֶם). Here, cognizance must be taken of 16:24, where נַפְשִׁי is translated as “soul”, but changes to “appetite” in v. 26. Koptak (2003:420) states that:

The repetition of the word “נַפְשִׁי” from 16:24 suggests that we compare the overflowing sweetness of the honeycomb with the intense hunger that motivates a worker. A similar intensity of motivation should drive the quest for wisdom. If there is a way that leads to death (16:25), there is a course of action that leads to life. While some scholars look for help in the toil passages of Ecclesiastes 3:9; 4:7-8; 6:7, the reverse picture of the sluggard of Proverbs 6:6-11 may be in view, for it is also followed by the portrait of the scoundrel (6:12-19).

From the above description, it can be inferred that the concept of “toil” does not only have a negative meaning, as a tool to feed hunger, but also a positive meaning, namely as an

instrument in the quest for wisdom. Regarding the “toil” (עֲמָל) used in Proverbs 24:2, however, Waltke (2005:268) argues that “עֲמָל frequently designates the evil, mendacious, outrageous, violent deeds of the enemy without being specific”. Fox (2009:743) also explains the meaning of עֲמָל as follows:

Proverbs 24:2. Violence [שֹׁד], trouble [עֲמָל]: The reason that one should not envy the wicked is implicit in v2, for “destruction” can point to the affliction the evildoers will suffer (compare 21:7), and עֲמָל too hints at the misery awaiting the schemers. This word, which usually means “toil”, can also mean misery and futility (e.g., Job. 7:3; Jeremiah 20:18) or deceit and evil (e.g., Isaiah 10:1; Psalms 7:15; Habakkuk 1:13).

In Proverbs 24:2 עֲמָל is used meaning “evil”, surpassing the concepts of “toil”, “trouble” or “hardship”. The reason can be found in the context of Chapter 24. The negative use of עֲמָל is probable; given that Proverbs 24 consists of admonitions about the wisdom of distinguishing the righteous from the wicked.

3.3.4. The concept “Toil” (עֲמָל) in the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature

The concept of “toil” (עֲמָל) in the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature, namely, the books Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon will now be considered. The concept plays a fairly important role in the two books.

3.3.4.1. Ecclesiasticus (Bible NRSV, 1989)

In the Greek version of Ecclesiastes found in the LXX, the concept of “toil” (עֲמָל) is translated as μόχθος in Greek. However, in Ecclesiasticus as well as in the Wisdom of Solomon, μόχθος never appears to express the concept the Hebrew “toil” (עֲמָל). Thus, in the book of Ecclesiasticus, the concept “toil”, (עֲמָל) is expressed by other Greek words like πόνος, κόπος, θλίψις, ἐργάζομαι, and κοπιάω.

Word	Translation	Verses in Ecclesiasticus
πόνος, ου, ό	1. work that involves much exertion or trouble, (hard) labour, toil	3:27; 14:15; 28:15; 31:20; 38:7
	2. experience of great trouble, pain, distress, affliction	
ἐργάζομαι	1. to engage in activity that involves effort, work (intransitive)	7:20; 24:22; 33:26
	2. to do or accomplish something through work (transitive)	
κόπος, ου, ό	1. a state of discomfort or distress, trouble, difficulty	14:15; 22:13; 28:15; 29:4; 34:2; 34:28
	2. to engage in activity that is burdensome, work, labor, toil	
θλίψις, εως, ή	1. trouble that inflicts distress, oppression, affliction, tribulation	2:11; 3:15; 6:8, 10; 22:23; 35:26; 37:4; 40:24; 51:3, 10
	2. inward experience of distress, affliction, trouble	
κοπιάω	1. become weary/tired	6:19; 11:11; 16:27; 24:34; 31:3, 4; 33:18; 43:30; 51:27
	2. to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually, work hard, toil, strive, struggle	

Table 19: Greek words in Ecclesiasticus related to the concept “toil” תַּבָּיִץ in Hebrew (BDAG)

The verses in which these words are used have in common that there is some reward for such “toil”. For instance, in 28:15 where πόνος is used, there is “the fruit of their toil”, similar to “cause” and “consequence”. “Toil” is the cause, and “fruit” is the result. In 6:19, where κοπιάω was used, “to toil” is compared with “to eat of her produce”. This “toil” can be positive in one context and negative in another at the same time. In 31:3 “to toil” corresponds with “to amass a fortune”. In verse 4, which follows immediately, “to toil” is equivalent to “to make a meager living”.

Clearly, in the book of Ecclesiasticus, the words associated with the concept “toil” always require results, whether positive or negative. Thus, it can be inferred that the concept “toil” can be explained as an instrument, the cause which produces results. However, this book also makes it clear that God is the one who plans and coordinates it, whatever the outcome. Commenting on Chapter 11, Slagger (2008:230) describes opinions on the success and failure of Ben Sira as follows:

The author turns now to the problems that go along with working for a living. Always a realist, Ben Sira is frank to recognize that not everyone succeeds, even with hard work. But he does not share the cynicism of the writer of Ecclesiastes. He wants his readers to know that financial success or failure ultimately comes from the Lord, and real success in life depends on one's devotion to the Lord.

In the end, the concept “toil” in Ecclesiasticus would have a positive meaning for the pious, but a negative one for the wicked.

3.3.4.2. *The Wisdom of Solomon (Bible NRSV, 1989)*

In the Wisdom of Solomon, the concept “toil”, לַמְצָוָה in Hebrew, can be expressed in several Greek words: πόνος, κακόμενος, ἀκοπιάτως, and κοπιάω.

Word	Translation	Verses in Wisdom of Solomon
πόνος, ου, ό	work that involves much exertion or trouble, (hard) labour, toil	9:16; 10:10; 15:4
	experience of great trouble, pain, distress, affliction	
κακόμενος, ον	working ill or perversely	15:8
ἀκοπιάτως	untiringly, not getting tired, free from fatigue, without labour	16:20
κοπιάω	become weary/tired	9:10
	to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually, work hard, toil, strive, struggle	

Table 20: Greek words in Wisdom of Solomon related to the concept “toil”, לַמְצָוָה in Hebrew (BDAG)

“Wisdom”, portrayed as a woman in 9:10, stands by Solomon’s side and toils for him. In v. 16, the writer says that there is little we can know by our toil. In 10:10, “wisdom” increases the fruit of the righteous man’s toil. In 15:4, the author of the book argues that neither the evil intent of human art, nor the fruitless toil of painters misleads them. According to 15:8, the workers who are mortals form a futile god from the same clay, referred to as misspent toil. The author says in 16:20: without their toil, the Israelites ate the spiritual food that came from heaven, namely, manna.

In the above passages in which concepts parallel to the Hebrew concept עֲמַל are used, it seems clear that the concept “toil” is an instrument used to accomplish something pious, and an instrument given by God.

3.3.5. Conclusions

In 3.3.1 the study investigated the lexical data on the concept “toil” (the root עמל in Hebrew), making use of six major theological dictionaries (BDB, TDOT, TWOT, TLOT, HALOT, and NIDOTTE). The meaning and usage of the concept in ANE Wisdom Literature (the Mesopotamian and Egyptian Wisdom Literature) was discussed in 3.3.2, in the Canonical Wisdom Literature (Proverbs and Job) in 3.3.3, and in the Apocryphal Wisdom books (Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon) in 3.3.4.

From the investigations carried out above it becomes clear that the concept “toil” is most often used in the OT and cognate literature in a negative sense to refer to “trouble” or “misery”. Sometimes, for some special reason, it is used in a positive sense. Moreover, the concept “toil” is used as an instrument to produce any results in life. For the sake of the current study, it is necessary to investigate whether “toil” is used in a positive or negative sense in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, which will be done in Chapter 4.

3.4. Conclusion

The concepts “wisdom” and “toil” have been investigated in detail in its OT and ANE contexts with the aid of several resources. The current study attempted to discover various nuances of these concepts in order to aid our interpretation of the use of these concepts in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

What has been drawn from the investigation so far is that each of these concepts, whether it has a positive or negative meaning, serves as motivation to produce some practical consequences of life. The concepts “wisdom” and “toil” are considered to be indispensable in human life to get what is needed in life; it is a driving force that leads to practical results. Furthermore, the common role of these two concepts in biblical wisdom literature is that they serve as tools to pass the tests God gives his people in their lives.

In some ancient Near Eastern Wisdom literature, it seems that gods are portrayed as reflecting human desires and as instruments made by humans to overcome human vulnerability and limitations. “Wisdom” and “toil” are considered neutral instruments for the improvement of human life, projected through gods prevalent throughout the natural and religious domains of the ancient Near East.

These concepts “wisdom” and “toil” will be examined more closely by means of exegesis of the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: “WISDOM” AND “TOIL” IN THE ROYAL EXPERIMENT OF ECCLESIASTES 1:12-2:26

4.1. Introduction

The current study has attempted to answer the introductory questions of Ecclesiastes in Chapter 2 and has conducted research on the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature, the Old Testament Wisdom Literature, and the Apocryphal Wisdom Literature in Chapter 3. The study found that the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” play an important role in both Ecclesiastes and in ancient Near Eastern texts. In order to determine the meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 in more detail, in-depth research is required.

In this chapter exegesis of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 is done by selectively using the grammatico-historical exegetical methodology of Douglas Stuart (2009:5-30) as outlined in the first chapter of his book in order to determine the meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in more detail. The reason for selectively adopting his methodology in this chapter is that several fields of the methodology (literary form, structure, lexical data) have already been covered in chapters 2 and 3. Stuart’s adapted methodology is amended by incorporating the exegetical findings of other scholars.

4.2. Exegesis of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

The ‘elements’ of exegesis that the current study has selectively adopted from Stuart’s approach (2009:5-30) in this chapter are as follows: Textual criticism, grammatical data, historical context, literary analysis, biblical context, theology of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 and synthesis of exegesis. At each ‘element’ the purpose of the exegetical investigation will be briefly discussed.

4.2.1. Textual criticism of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

Textual criticism is not accurate science, but a basic process that controls the evaluation of variants in the Bible (Widder, 2013:34). It attempts to decide the most plausible and authentic reading of a biblical text by following a number of text-critical principles.

Widder (2013:81) presents six guiding principles for evaluating OT textual variants:

Principles for evaluating external evidence	Principles for evaluating internal evidence
1. Prefer the reading found in the oldest manuscript.	4. Prefer the shorter reading (<i>lectio brevior</i>).
2. Prefer the reading found in the majority of manuscripts.	5. Prefer the more difficult reading (<i>lectio difficilior</i>).
3. Prefer the reading found in the largest variety of manuscripts.	6. Prefer the reading that best fits the author.

Table 21: Widder's (2013:81) six principles for evaluating textual variants

With the above in mind, the current study will investigate the most important (not all) textual variants indicated by the BHS¹⁴ Apparatus Criticus (Weil *et al.*, 1997:1337-1339). Text critical notes will be discussed one after the other without necessarily making a choice between the variants, followed by a general conclusion on the influence of this investigation for the interpretation of the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

• Ecclesiastes 1:15

1) The verb **תִּקֶּן** (“he made straight”) occurs only in the book of Ecclesiastes 1:15; 7:13; 12:9 in the OT. Murphy (1992: 12) asserts that **לְתִקֶּן** (preposition **לְ** + verb, qal, infinitive construct) means “to be or become straight”; therefore, emendation to the passive form is not necessary. But HALOT (2000b: 2009) suggests that **לְתִקֶּן** in 1:15 should be conjectured to read **לְהִתְקַן** (preposition **לְ** + verb, nipal, infinitive construct).

• Ecclesiastes 1:17

1) **הוֹלָלוֹת** (“madness”) is sometimes used as a variant of **הוֹלָלוֹת**, as is the case in Ecclesiastes 10:13.

2) Both forms **שְׂכָלוֹת** and **סְכָלוֹת** (“folly, delusion”) are also used interchangeably as in Ecclesiastes 2:3, 12, 13; 7:25; 10:1, 13. But **סְכָלוֹת** usually occurs in Ecclesiastes.

¹⁴ This is based on “Leningrad Codex” that is the oldest manuscript of the fully preserved Hebrew Bible. “Leningrad Codex” is therefore viewed as one of the most reliable manuscripts.

• Ecclesiastes 2:1

1) נִסָּה (“be trained”) occurs in the form of אֲנִסְכָּה (“test”) in more than twenty manuscripts in the OT.

2) Qoheleth prefers the term שְׂמֵחָה (“joy”) or שִׂמְחָה (“rejoice”) to express his pleasure rather than the term חֵפְזִי (“having delight”). The root שִׂמַח occurs seventeen times as noun or verb in Ecclesiastes.

• Ecclesiastes 2:3

1) וְלֶאֱחָז (conjunction + “to grasp / to seize”) is suggested to be read as וְלֶאֱחָז.

2) הַשָּׁמַיִם (“the heavens”), which appears in many manuscripts, especially in the LXX and the Peshitta, is replaced by הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ (the sun).

• Ecclesiastes 2:7

1) In many manuscripts represented by the Peshitta לִי (“for me”) is added after קָנִיתִי (“I bought”). In some manuscripts, including the LXX and the Peshitta, הָיָה (“he was”) appears as הָיוּ (“they were”).

2) In almost all manuscripts, מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל (“who they were”) occurs. Some suggest that it should be replaced by מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל (“who he was”), like in Ecclesiastes 1:16; 2:9.

• Ecclesiastes 2:10

1) In several manuscripts, including the Cairo Genizah (Jewish manuscript fragments), מִכָּל (“from all”) is replaced by בְּכָל (“in all”).

• Ecclesiastes 2:12

1) מָה (the interrogative pronoun “what”) should be changed to מַה־יַּעֲשֶׂה (“what he will do”). The note suggests that the appropriate subject and verb must be inserted.

2) In many manuscripts, especially in the LXX, עָשָׂהוּ is translated as ἐποίησεν αὐτήν (“he did/made it”), which suggests that the Hebrew should be read as עָשָׂה הָיָה (“he

did/made it”).

- Ecclesiastes 2:17

1) In more than twenty manuscripts of the OT, including the Peshitta and the Targum, אָנִי (first single pronoun “I”) is added after the verb שָׂנְאֵתִי (“I hated”).

- Ecclesiastes 2:20

1) In many manuscripts, including the Targum, as in Ecclesiastes 2:19, וְשִׂחַחְמֹתַי (conjunction “וְ” + the relative pronoun “שִׂ” + “my wisdom” חֹמֹתַי) occurs after נִשְׁעַמְלֹתַי (the toil that I toiled”).

- Ecclesiastes 2:24

1) In several manuscripts, especially in the Peshitta, בְּאָדָם (“in a man”) is replaced by לְאָדָם (“for a man”).

2) In many Hebrew manuscripts, הִיא (third single feminine pronoun “she”) is substituted by הוּא (third single masculine pronoun “he”).

- Ecclesiastes 2:25

1) מִמֶּנִּי (“from me”) also occurs in the same form in the Targum and Vulgate. However, in some Codices, including the LXX and the Peshitta, it appears in the form of מִמֶּנּוּ (“from us”).

- Ecclesiastes 2:26

1) In the Cairo Genizah, הֶבְרָל (noun, “vanity”) is replaced by הִבְרַל (verb, “be futile”).

- Conclusion

The investigation of these variants has not led to a different interpretation of the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. The investigation did, however, find that references to “wisdom” and “toil” as common instruments for the Royal Experiment occur together in Ecclesiastes 2:19-20 in many manuscripts (including the Targum).

4.2.2. Grammatical data of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

‘Syntax’, along with ‘semantics’, is a set of rules responsible for aspects of grammar that control the validity of a sentence in a language. The “syntax of Hebrew” means the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in the Hebrew texts while “semantics of Hebrew” mainly deals with the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, or texts in the Hebrew language. It is known that Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 has neither much difficulty translating nor quite controversial syntactical issues. However, Qoheleth’s words in the Royal experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 analogous to the royal inscriptions in ANE, have to be investigated grammatically (syntactically and semantically) to see how the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” are used in the passage. In what follows, a number of matters related to the grammar of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 are highlighted and discussed.

• Ecclesiastes 1:12

אֲנִי קֹהֵלֶת הַיְיָתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַם

“I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.” (Bible NIV, 2011)

This introductory self-identification, like ANE royal inscriptions, has a past orientation and is appropriately translated by the present perfect tense (Schoors, 2013:104). Along with this argument, Fox (1999:171) translates 1:12 as follows: ‘I am Qohelet. I have been the king over Israel in Jerusalem’. Seow (1995:280) argues that readers should understand the entire passage of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 against the backdrop of royal ideology because in the ANE “the motif of royal wisdom is standard in royal propaganda”.

• Ecclesiastes 1:13

וְנַתַּתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לְדָרוֹשׁ וְלָתוֹר בַּחֲכָמָה עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה תַחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא עֲנֵן רָע נִתָּן
אֱלֹהִים לְבָנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֲנוּת בּוֹ

“I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind!” (Bible NIV, 2011)

In this verse, the interpretation of the preposition “בְּ” with “חֲכָמָה” usually has an instrumental meaning. That is, it can be said to have a similar meaning to the English preposition “with”. This view is supported by the references to wisdom in Ecclesiastes 2:3, 9. (Murphy, 1992:11). However, Longman (1998:79) maintains that “בַּחֲכָמָה” can also be

rendered as “by wisdom” or “through wisdom” because “בְּחָכְמָה” is actually a prepositional phrase meaning “wisely”. Lohfink (2003:46) argues that “knowledge” rather than the usual “wisdom” is a more accurate translation here for “חָכְמָה”. He also says that sometimes “education and “culture” are more appropriate when considering the content of the book of Ecclesiastes.

• Ecclesiastes 1:14

רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים שֶׁנַּעֲשׂוּ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהֵנָּה הַכֹּל הֶבֶל וְרֵעוֹת רוּחַ

“I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” (Bible NIV, 2011)

In Ecclesiastes, the root ראה in verb form occurs eighteen times, especially in the first person singular of the perfect tense. In this verse, Qoheleth’s royal experiment is also marked by a first-person singular style (רָאִיתִי “I have seen”), and it consists of a report of what has been seen throughout human life (Schoors, 2013:115). מַעֲשֵׂה (“deed, accomplishment”) occurs twenty times in Ecclesiastes and therefore needs to be noted. מַעֲשֵׂה can also be considered a result of the concept “toil” (עָמַל). Qoheleth concludes that all of these things are vanity (הֶבֶל).

• Ecclesiastes 1:16

דִּבַּרְתִּי אֲנִי עִם־לְבִי לֵאמֹר אֲנִי הֵנָּה הַגָּדֹלְתִי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חָכְמָה

עַל כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה לְפָנַי עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם וְלְבִי רָאָה הַרְבֵּה חָכְמָה וְדַעַת

“I said to myself, ‘Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.’” (Bible NIV, 2011)

דִּבַּרְתִּי is an emphatic phrase (piel)¹⁵ frequently used in conjunction with the personal pronoun אֲנִי when Qoheleth states that he has devoted himself to this royal experiment.

הַגָּדֹלְתִי וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חָכְמָה literally means “I became great and I have added to my wisdom.”

But it is also possible that הוֹסַפְתִּי is modified adverbially by הַגָּדֹלְתִי, and that the phrase should be translated as “I greatly increased in wisdom” (Schoors, 2013:125). This would

¹⁵ Cf. Ecclesiastes 2:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 24.

support the interpretation that Qoheleth conducted the Royal Experiment using **הַקְּמָה** as an instrument.

• Ecclesiastes 2:4

הַגְדַּלְתִּי מַעֲשֵׂי בְנִיתִי לִי בְּתַיִם נְטַעְתִּי לִי כְרָמִים

“I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.” (Bible NIV, 2011)

From this verse to verse 8, the text is divided into poetic verse units framed by 2:4a and 9a (Lohfink, 2003:50)¹⁶. Qoheleth emphasizes his commitment to devoting himself in this experiment by repeating **לִי** (“for myself”) in rhyme. By doing so, he subtly reveals that there is no limit to his ability to conduct this experiment (Schoors, 2013:125).

• Ecclesiastes 2:10

וְכָל אֲשֶׁר שָׁאָלוּ עֵינַי לֹא אֶצְלַתִּי מֵהֶם לֹא-מִנְעַתִּי אֶת-לִבִּי מִכָּל-שְׂמֵחָה

כִּי-לִבִּי שָׂמַח מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי וְזֶה-הָיָה חֶלְקִי מִכָּל-עֲמָלִי

“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil.” (Bible NIV, 2011)

It is not clear whether **חֶלְקִי** (“share of booty”) means **שְׂמֵחָה** (“delight”) and whether it is used in a positive or negative sense. However, it seems clear that this is the result of **כָּל-עֲמָלִי** (“all my toil”). Fox (1999, 180) maintains that “**עֲמָלִי** may refer to the immediate source of pleasure, namely Qoheleth’s wealth, or to the farther source, namely his toil”.

• Ecclesiastes 2:15

וְאָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי כְּמִקְרָהּ הַכָּסִיל גַּם-אֲנִי יִקְרַנִּי

וְלָמָּה תִּכְמַתִּי אֲנִי אֲזִי יוֹתֵר וְדַבַּרְתִּי בְּלִבִּי שְׂגִם-זֶה הַבָּל

“Then I said to myself, ‘The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?’ I said to myself, ‘This too is meaningless.’” (Bible NIV, 2011)

The use of the personal pronoun in apposition to the suffix with an emphatic force (**גַּם-אֲנִי**) is quite common in Biblical Hebrew. **יוֹתֵר** (“excessiveness”) is the participial form and this is sometimes used as an adverb. **יוֹתֵר** modifies **תִּכְמַתִּי** (“I

¹⁶ The inner frame is formed by motifs of the “greatness” of the king.

became wise”) meaning something like “especially” or “exceedingly” (Schoors, 2013:186).

• Ecclesiastes 2:20

וְסִבּוֹתַי אֲנִי לִיאֵשׁ אֶת־לִבִּי עַל כָּל־הָעֵמָל נִשְׁעַמְלִיתִי תַחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

“So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.” (Bible NIV, 2011)

According to Whybray (1989:38), סִבּוֹתַי (“I took a turn”) is equivalent to פְּנִיתִי (“I turned”) like in 2:11. If this is the case, סִבַּב may be used here as an intransitive verb without an object. “To take a turn” can mean “to begin”. Schoors (2013:196) rightly points out that “the more common interpretation is that “take a turn” indicates the beginning of a new section or paragraph or a change of subject or approach, or even that it points to the repetitive character of an action”. All these connotations are plausible with the basic meaning of the verb סִבַּב. It is a great pity that כָּל־הָעֵמָל נִשְׁעַמְלִיתִי (“all the toil that I toiled”) is headed for despair because Qoheleth tried to find the meaning of life in this experiment.

• Ecclesiastes 2:24

אִין־טוֹב בְּאָדָם נְשִׂיאֹכֶל וְנִשְׂתָּה וְהִרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בְּעֵמָלוֹ

גַּם־זֶה רְאִיתִי אֲנִי כִּי מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הִיא

“A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God” (Bible NIV, 2011)

In this verse, Qoheleth’s declaration, which can be considered the result of this Royal Experiment, is stated, viz. ‘*carpe diem*’¹⁷ coming from the hand of God. Here, the word טוֹב can be translated as “pleasure” or “happiness” functioning substantively rather than adjectivally (Lohfink, 2003:63). What is the connection between “toil” and “pleasure” then? Schoors (2013: 211) rightly points out that “the expression בְּעֵמָלוֹ can be understood as ‘at his toiling, while he is toiling’, but it may also express means or instrument: ‘with/through his toiling’”.

- Conclusion

Qoheleth, on behalf of all mankind, provides insight into whether life is really worth living or

¹⁷ “Seize the day” in Latin.

not. This he does through the Royal Experiment that cannot be attempted by anyone else than himself. What this grammatical investigation has shown is that the *means* or *instruments* used in this experiment are “wisdom” and “toil”, and that Qoheleth achieved a specific result by using them. His conclusion is to “seize the day” under the sun or heaven as coming from the hand of God. Sometimes this experiment puts life in despair since it leads to the conclusion that life and death are not much different. Qoheleth calls this situation “vanity” (הֶבֶל).

4.2.3. Historical context of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

The current study has already investigated the “dating of the book” in Chapter 2.2, and with this in mind, can proceed with an investigation of the historical context of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. According to the results of Chapter 2.2, this study takes as its departure point the hypothesis that Ecclesiastes was written in the middle of the third century B.C. James Crenshaw (1987:50) suggests that “a date for Qoheleth between 225 and 250 remains most likely”. It would be of great help for the current exegesis of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 to discover the peculiar points of the historical background of that time.

There is, however, no firm consensus among scholars about the historical impact of some cultures (e.g., Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece [Hellenism]) on the writing of Ecclesiastes (Murphy, 1992:42).

Childs (cited by von Rad, 1979:583) states that

“[s]cholars remain divided in their estimate of the theological contribution of the book as a whole. A considerable number tends to view the book in largely negative terms as an example of a growing skepticism within a segment of Israelite society which effected a breakdown of religious tradition”.

On the other hand, Childs (1979:583) cites Driver and argues that if the book of Ecclesiastes is properly evaluated, it should be read in the light of the time in which it was written and the temperament of the author.

Due to the skeptical and pessimistic tendencies of Qoheleth’s writing, some German scholars (Hans-Perter Müller and Bernhard Lang) consider the book of Ecclesiastes to be influenced

by a time when Israel was disenfranchised by the Ptolemaic regime (Sneed, 2004:1). In such a historical environment, “wisdom” and “toil” in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 would have been used as an important instrument of the Royal Experiment.

Qoheleth would have been one step closer to the meaning of life through “wisdom” and “toil” than other human beings. This is because he would have used these concepts to find the meaning of life the ‘king’ of Jerusalem (that is, projecting himself as king of Jerusalem; see Chapter 2 for discussion). However, he concludes that everything is absurd and in vain. Because for Qoheleth who has lost his sovereignty of his country due to the Hellenic Empire, the pleasures and joys of life must have been nothing but futile. Scholars like Zimmermann (1973:13) have attempted to incorporate the results of a psychoanalytic approach to Qoheleth’s personality and thoughts, but this has not gained the support of many scholars.

Rudman (2001:15) focuses on the usage of the Greek agricultural economic terms in the Royal Experiment in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, This includes the use of ἀμπελῶν (“vineyard”) in Ecclesiastes 2:4 (LXX) and παράδεισος (“paradise”, here specifically interpreted as an “orchard”)¹⁸ in Ecclesiastes 2:5 (LXX). He concludes that the use of these words in the Royal Experiment are appropriate within the Ptolemaic period.

- Conclusion

Qoheleth tried to find the meaning of life with “wisdom” and “toil” as instruments within his historical context. The result of Qoheleth’s Royal Experiment is that everything is “vanity” (הַרְבָּה). Qoheleth does, however, consider “enjoying what comes from the hand of God” (*carpe diem*) the best value that people should pursue.

4.2.4. Literary analysis of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

In Chapter 2.3, the current study found that the genre analysis of the book of Ecclesiastes in terms of the “frame narrative” approach of Fox (1977; 1999) provides an important literary viewpoint for understanding the meaning of the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. In Chapter 3, this study surveyed the analogies between ANE literature and Ecclesiastes and investigated the concepts of “wisdom” and “toil”

¹⁸ Cf. the same Persian loanword פַּרְדֵּי־יָרְדֵּן (“parks” and “pleasure gardens”)

in these literary works. What it found in common is that “wisdom” is used as an instrument for recognizing pious principles in all things, and “toil” is perceived as an instrument for all humans to make them share the futility of human life.

Duncan (2017:21), quoting Seow, states the following:

“In features of both language and style, this introductory section (Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26) imitates the royal inscription, a genre amply attested in other cultures of the ancient Near East. Such inscriptions, often written in the voice of the king himself, commemorate the grandeur of his achievements, detailing his great wealth and possessions, his triumphs in war, and his grand-scale architectural works. In addition to such material accomplishments, these records often vaunt the king’s vast learning and wisdom.”

Scholars agree that the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 has the literary form of a royal inscription like others found in the ancient Near East. However, in terms of its purpose and result, there is a difference in that Qoheleth is looking for the meaning of life; he is not providing content that boasts about the king’s great achievements. Rather, he dramatizes his devastating failure in finding the positive side of the meaning of life (Duncan, 2017:22).

There is probably no other ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions that explicitly record a king’s failure. The reason for this is quite simple: no one wants to be known as a failed king by all the generations that will come. Here one can discover the rhetoric of the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. It seems that Qoheleth wanted to teach his students something through the literary technique of empirical paradox. From studying seven passages in Ecclesiastes (2:24a; 3:12; 3:22a; 5:17; 8:15a; 9:7-9a; 11:7-12:1a), Whybray (1994:203-204) gives Qoheleth the title of “Preacher of Joy”. He consequently found a paradoxical message in Qoheleth’s pessimistic and skeptical style.

Fox (1989:10-11) describes Qoheleth’s three main conclusions as follows:

- (1) Qoheleth is not primarily concerned with the value of possessions or the worth of human striving, but rather with the *rationality of existence*. This rationality he denies by calling everything *hebel*. But even in failure, rationality remains an irreducible value, one by which life must be judged.

- (2) Qoheleth does not attack wisdom, the wise, or the doctrines of Wisdom Literature, but expresses his esteem for the value of wisdom and his disappointment that its excellences are not properly compensated.
- (3) Having confronted the failure of meaning, Qoheleth affirms the grasping of inner experience, emotional and intellectual, as the one domain of human freedom. This does not provide the desired meaning either; nevertheless, experience, both emotional and intellectual, is (like reason) an irreducible value, to be embraced for its own sake.

In the Royal Experiment, Qoheleth's search for the meaning of life is based on his experience of "wisdom" and "toil". What Qoheleth has gained through this experience is that everything is futile; there is nothing new under the sun and nothing but enjoying what comes from the hand of God. The most tragic thing is that the ultimate fate of the wise and the fool are the same, namely death.

However, these realizations do not boil down to failure. Because the rationality of existence gives meaning to experience itself, failure to get what one wants does not mean failure in existence. In this ontological consideration, Qoheleth achieved empirical enlightenment, and the means and instruments for attaining such enlightenment were "wisdom" and "toil".

- Conclusion

The Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, which is a literary genre very similar to the royal inscriptions of the ancient Near East, exposes as empirical paradoxes many aspects of human life that are full of contradictions. "Wisdom" and "toil" are used as instruments of such exposure. Although Qoheleth says "everything is futile", he leaves room for "fear of God" in it. The author of Ecclesiastes exhorts the hearers/readers at the end of the book (12:13) to "fear God and keep his commandments."

4.2.5. Biblical context of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

Part of the final steps of Stuart's (2009:21-22) exegetical methodology is to investigate how the passage under investigation affects the meaning or value of other passages in Scripture in ways that cross literary or historical lines. Put differently, it is to investigate how a passage fits into the broader body of truth found in Scripture.

The current study has already investigated the use of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (Chapter 3), namely in the books of Job and Proverbs. However, it is also investigated how the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 relates to other passages of the Bible.

- 2 Chronicles 9:13-29 and 1 Kings 10:14-25

The Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 can be viewed as making use of a literary technique in which Qoheleth is identified with King Solomon, since King Solomon is understood in the Old Testament as the only person who can fully realize this Royal Experiment. 1 Kings 10:14-25 and 2 Chronicles 9:13-29 are the proof of that. These two paragraphs share the same content: Solomon’s excessive wealth and wisdom.

The author of Ecclesiastes was probably familiar with these books and wrote Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 with them in the back of his mind. In these passages, King Solomon is mentioned as one owning the greatest wisdom and wealth of his time. While the passages in these historical books are explicit in their references to Solomon’s wisdom and wealth, the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 is more implicit about these matters.

It is clear that Solomon was able to accumulate such wealth because of his “wisdom”, and implicitly because of the “toil” of his people. 1 Kings 10:27 records that Solomon made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem, and cedars as abundant as sycamore-fig trees. These records fit the account of Ecclesiastes 2:5-8. This passage describes that Qoheleth dug reservoirs for arboreal forests and accumulated silver, gold, and treasures possessed by the kings of other nations. The Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 is supported by the facts of the historical books in the OT.

- 1 Timothy 6:6-10

⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain.

⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

⁹Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (Bible NIV, 2011).

In the NT, 1 Timothy 6:6-10 arguably comes the closest to the conclusion Qoheleth reached in the Royal Experiment, namely Ecclesiastes 2:22-26. Ecclesiastes 2:22 asserts that “all the toil that people labor under the sun is without gain.” Conversely, 1 Timothy 6:6 declares that “godliness with contentment is great gain.” It seems that both texts convey the same intent in different ways. (A reference to contentment is also found in 1 Timothy 6:8, which states: “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that”. This can be related to *carpe diem* passage in Ecclesiastes 2:24, which refers to being content with what comes from the hand of God).

“The love of money” in 1 Timothy 6:10 can be viewed as being similar to Ecclesiastes 2:25’s reference to indulging in what a person eats and enjoys. It takes “wisdom” and “toil” in the worldly sense to accumulate wealth. Abuse of “wisdom” and “toil” is to fall into temptation and into many foolish and harmful lusts that plunge people into ruin and destruction (1 Tim 6:9). Qoheleth expressed this as הֶבֶל “vanity” with a deeper meaning.

The Hebrew “הֶבֶל” means “vapor”. “Vapor” is fleeting and disappears soon. It cannot be caught and possessed. It is so ephemeral that there is no other way to describe it than “vanity”. One may think that he has a lot, but he finds that it vanishes like “vapor”. Therefore, the pursuit of wealth is no different from chasing after the wind (Eccl 2:17, 26), because as 1 Timothy 6:7 says, “people brought nothing into the world, and they can take nothing out of it.”

When “wisdom” and “toil” are used as instruments for good, a person realizes that everything comes from the hand of God, but when they are used as instruments for the realization of personal desires, nothing but “vanity” remains.

- 1 Corinthians 15:58

⁵⁸ Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (Bible NIV, 2011).

Qoheleth says in Ecclesiastes 2:1 that “pleasure is in vain”, and in 2:19 that “toil is in vain.” However, he maintains that meaning and value can be found from what comes from the sovereign hand of God, rather than concluding that all life is futile and has no meaning or

value. Therefore, it is not that “pleasure” and “toil” in the true sense are in vain, but rather that all “pleasure” and toil outside God’s hands are in vain.

In 1 Corinthians 15:58, Paul asserts that “toil” in the Lord is not in vain. Qoheleth and Paul seem to express the same things in different ways. While Qoheleth uses irony to point out that “toil” outside God’s hands is in vain, Paul confirms that “toiling” for the Lord is not in vain.

- Conclusion

The Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 is based on the life of Solomon in the historical books of the Bible. It presents a conclusion that life outside the hands of God has no meaning and value, and that it can only find its meaning and value from what comes from God’s sovereign hand. Some of the references above imply that the instruments “wisdom” and “toil” – when not abused – should be justly valued. In conclusion, “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, when used for good, can be considered as instruments to help someone reach “Godliness with contentment”.

4.2.6. Theology of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

Stuart (2009:23) states the following about “theology”:

The reason theology is called *theology* [literally, the study of God] is that the better one understands God, the better one understands what life is about, what truths and practices are essential or important, and what values best protect against disobedience to God.

This sub-section will identify the theological issue raised by the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. This is a necessary step in the exegetical process, and it can lead to the “theology” that the pericope seeks to reveal.

The references to God in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 are few and far between. But in the conclusion of the Experiment, God reappears in a powerful way (Greidanus, 2010:53). In Ecclesiastes 2:24, God enables human beings “to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil”. In Ecclesiastes 2:26, “God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy” to the one who pleases him, even taking from the sinner and giving to the one who

pleases him.

Qoheleth struggled with “wisdom” and “toil” to find the meaning of life. In the end of his experiment, however, he concludes that he did not find the meaning of life through “wisdom” and “toil”, but in the realization that God gives meaning to life. Attempting to find the meaning of life solely through “wisdom” and “toil” only led to his conclusion of “vanity” (הַבָּטוּל).

In fact, all of the internal and external materials used in the experiment came from the hands of God. What Qoheleth realized is that God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to anyone who pleases him, regardless of human conditions, and finds the meaning of life in him.

- Conclusion

The theology found in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 is the theology of the sovereignty of God. People try to find the value and the meaning of life with their “wisdom” and the “toil” they toil with under the sun. In all such attempts, they reach the conclusion that everything in life is in vain. However, when the instruments “wisdom” and “toil” are used correctly by keeping God in mind, people realize that they should live contentedly with what comes from the sovereign hand of God.

4.2.7. Synthesis of exegesis

The investigation of textual variants and grammatical issues in Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 shows that in many manuscripts (including the Targum) references to “wisdom” and “toil” appear together as common instruments for the Royal Experiment. Qoheleth achieved a specific result by using them. He was one step closer to the meaning of life through making use of “wisdom” and “toil”. But he concludes that everything is absurd and in vain. For Qoheleth who has lost the sovereignty of his country due to the Hellenic Empire in the historical environment, the pleasures and joys of life must have been nothing but futile.

The current study found that the genre analysis of the book of Ecclesiastes in terms of the “frame narrative” approach of Fox (1977; 1999) provides an important literary viewpoint for understanding the meaning of the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of

Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. This study surveyed the analogies between ANE literature and Ecclesiastes and investigated the concepts of “wisdom” and “toil” in these literary works. As a result, it was confirmed that these concepts were commonly referred to in those documents.

A study of the analogies of the message between Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 and other passages in the Bible (2 Chron 9:13-29; 1 Kings 10:14-25; 1 Tim 6:6-10; 1 Cor 15:58) shows that “wisdom” and “toil” are used as special instruments. “Wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, when used for good, can be considered instruments to help someone chooses “Godliness with contentment”.

The theology found in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 is the theology of the sovereignty of God. What Qoheleth uncovers from this experiment is that people should live contentedly with what comes from the sovereign hand of God.

4.3. The meaning and function of “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

4.3.1. “Wisdom” (חָכְמָה)

Qoheleth conducts this Royal Experiment by projecting himself as king Solomon. Solomon is known as the wisest king of ancient Israel. Although the book of Ecclesiastes was not written by Solomon, the author of the book amplifies the weight of this Royal Experiment by conducting the experiment as the wisest king in Israel. The concept “wisdom” is one of the central issues in Ecclesiastes. חָכְמָה, the Hebrew root for “wisdom,” is found about 318 times in the Hebrew Bible [BHS], of which it occurs 53 times in Ecclesiastes. Moreover, the root חָכְמָה appears 17 times in only Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. This accounts for 32% of the total occurrences in Ecclesiastes. It means that “wisdom” is an important concept in the pericope. In the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, the concept “wisdom” is not only used as the opposite of two-word forms, טֹבֵל (“fool”) and כְּסִיל (“foolish”), but also as an aspect of occupational or mental skills.

In ANE wisdom literature, the current study found that the concept “wisdom” is considered an instrument for awakening the ancient people to a sense of facets of life such as the natural

world, religion, rituals, and moral living. In the Wisdom Literature of the OT, it is both a theological and a practical means for a devout life. Based on various investigations, the concept “wisdom” is regarded in the OT and cognate literature as a positive instrument for the success or failure of almost all fields encompassing human life and religion.

In conclusion, the concept “wisdom” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 can be regarded as an essential tool that allows Qoheleth to carry out this experiment in which he attempts to discover the meaning and value of life.

4.3.2. “Toil” (עָמַל)

עָמַל, the Hebrew root for “toil,” is found about 75 times in the Hebrew Bible [BHS], of which it occurs 35 times in Ecclesiastes. The root עָמַל occurs 15 times in only Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. This accounts for 43% of the total occurrences in Ecclesiastes. Its frequent occurrence indicates how vital the concept of “toil” is in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. The lexical meaning of the root עָמַל is “to be tired,” and it also denotes what makes people tired or the condition of someone who is exhausted.

Qoheleth undertook the Royal Experiment using “toil” as an instrument. In this experiment, he tried to discover the true meaning and value of life. It can be said that the concept “toil” has both positive and negative sides in this experiment because Qoheleth finds through the Royal Experiment that “toil” can be “vanity” on the one hand and a “gift” from God on the other.

When examining ANE wisdom literature, one can discover the negative connotation of the concept “toil”. “Toil” also means toilsome labor used to build an ancient city, and it is also manifested in the narrative that lower gods pass on their toil to humans.

In the canonical wisdom literature, especially in the book of Job, “toil” is used as an instrument to explain the hardship that Job is suffering, as well as the reason for his suffering. However, the “toil” that he is suffering is not punishment as a result of his misbehavior. It can be said that it is God’s providential instrument to lead to the conclusion of “the fear of God”.

In the case of the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26, the concept “toil” is an instrument that leads to “the contentment of what comes from the sovereign hand of God”

4.4. Conclusion

“Wisdom” and “toil” are both concepts that play a very important role in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. What Qoheleth finds from this experiment is that everything is dismissed as **הַבְּרִל** “vanity” In this experiment, which he conducted using “wisdom” and “toil” as instruments, he comes to the conclusion that the meaning and value of life become evident when one recognizes that everything that people eat and drink comes from the sovereign hand of God.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

The current study examined what functions and roles the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” play in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 over Chapters 1-4. This section will come to conclusions that Qoheleth derived from the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26.

5.2. Summary of the results of previous chapters

In Chapter 1, the study began with a statement of the research problem. It was observed that previous approaches have not paid attention to the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. The main research question is: “What is the meaning and function of ‘wisdom’ and ‘toil’ in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26?” The preliminary hypothesis is that the concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 are the means that God uses to make a human being know that man is not to live under the sun but under the sovereignty of God. The research adopted three approaches to solving the problem: “Literature study”, “Word study” and “Grammatico-historical Exegesis”.

Chapter 2 focused on the ‘introductory questions of the book of Ecclesiastes’. In this chapter, the study dealt with “authorship and date”, “genre”, “structure and integrity”, “canonicity”, “and message of the book”. The chapter sought to outline the main characteristics of the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole as a preliminary stage for the study of the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 in terms of the concept “wisdom” and “toil”. It was shown that the way one interprets the book of Ecclesiastes depends on the approach this study adopts.

Chapter 3 investigated the meaning and function of the two concepts “wisdom” and “toil” in the ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, as well as in Old Testament and Apocryphal wisdom literature. What has been drawn from the investigation is that each of these concepts, whether it has a positive or negative meaning, serves as motivation to produce some practical consequences of life. The concepts “wisdom” and “toil” are considered to be indispensable in human life to get what is needed in life; it is a driving force that leads to practical results. The common role of these two concepts in biblical wisdom literature is that they serve as tools to pass the tests God gives his people in their lives.

In Chapter 4, which addressed the grammatico-historical exegetical methodology in order to determine the meaning of “wisdom” and “toil” in more detail, Textual criticism, grammatical data, historical context, literary analysis, biblical context, and theology of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 were adopted. In the last section, the synthesis of exegesis was dealt with.

5.3. Conclusion

As a result, it turned out that “wisdom” and “toil” are both concepts that play a very important role in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26. What Qoheleth found from the experiment is that everything comes down to הַקָּל “vanity”. However, הַקָּל is not a final conclusion, but an intermediate step to realize something. Qoheleth asserts that people should live contentedly with what comes from the sovereign hand of God. Because even the highest level of entertainment cannot fully satisfy people. The theology found in the Royal Experiment of Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26 can be said the theology of the sovereignty of God. What can fully satisfy people come from the sovereign hand of God. When the instruments “wisdom” and “toil” are used correctly by keeping God in mind, people realize that they should live contentedly with what comes from the sovereign hand of God.

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