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ABSTRACT

This paper is a text research designed to provide a critical introduction to the wisdom corpus to which Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) belongs. Some introductory issues about Qoheleth are also considered before the literary features of the pericope are analyzed. Sequel to this, some deductions are made from the passage before the conclusion is drawn. The thesis of this paper is that understanding the poetic and literary features of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 would serve as a veritable medium of correctly interpreting and applying the passage to contemporary believers. This author employs the terms Qoheleth and Ecclesiastes interchangeably.

Key words:

*Ecclesiastes; Literary Forms;
Qoheleth; hermeneutic; Hebrew;
Etymology; parallelism; philosophy;
Solomon*

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INTRODUCTION

There is probably no book of the Bible capable of giving readers a hard time in understanding as the books of the Wisdom corpus. [Reitmer \(1994\)](#) noted that these books possess the potential to disrupt complacency in the reader. According to [Wright \(1994\)](#), they touch on the “seeming inequalities of providence”. Out of these books, Ecclesiastes stands out in a class of its own. [Sandmel \(1968\)](#) asserts that Ecclesiastes has enjoyed vigorous debates by scholars of different persuasions. The other two are Job and Proverbs. Regarding the distinct, difficult-to-determine nature of Ecclesiastes, whereas [Whybray \(1982\)](#), for example, see it as affirming joy, [Watson \(1994\)](#), in the context of promoting a theological hermeneutic for Scripture, describes Ecclesiastes as ‘rigorously hope-less’.

An Overview of Wisdom Writings

In ancient Israel particularly, and the ancient Near East generally, the concept of wisdom was not conceived as being synonymous with knowledge or education or science. Rather, according to [Merrill \(1988\)](#), wisdom has to do with the ability to live life in a skillful way; an ability exclusively possessed by

those who knew and feared God. Hence, [Grabbe \(1995:186\)](#) asserts that “Wise men and women are found in different strata of society and walks of life. The farmer and the potter have their own special sort of wisdom which ultimately derives from God”. Since wisdom is often attached to devotion to God or a divinity, this probably accounts for the Old Testament dichotomy between the wise person and the fool as well as between the righteous person and the sinner.

Wisdom, however, transcends this general classification. It has an especial use with regards to the intelligentsia of society. Evidence of Solomon’s rich intellectual background included his composition of over three thousand proverbs and over one thousand songs dealing with mundane things of life including trees, animals, birds and fishes (1 Kgs. 4:32-33). As noted by [Grabbe \(1995:186\)](#), “the intellectual tradition is a primarily a learned tradition, and only those with the leisure and means can gain the required educational background and have the opportunity to pursue it”.

In addition to their distinctive vocabularies, [Whybray \(1989\)](#) submits that the Wisdom books are primarily concerned with man and his world: in particular with the potentiality and limitations of the individual. Taking this a step further,

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Brueggemann (1972:20) claims that “the wisdom corpus announces the joyous news that God trusts people to steer their own lives” and has therefore given them sages to instruct them in the how-to. Crenshaw (1985:369) similarly asserts that Israelite wisdom upheld “the sufficiency of human virtue to achieve well-being in this life, apart from divine assistance”.

The foregoing submissions evidently tend to uphold the self-sufficiency of human intellect and reasoning above divine enablement. This is against the very heart of the wisdom corpus, whose emphasis is trust in the Lord. Jepsen (2002) highlights this: man must not have confidence in himself and must not trust in his own strength. In line with this, Nel (1982:127) argues that the ethos of wisdom “does not result from the goodness of man or the superior functions of human reasoning” .

Wisdom writings primarily seek to establish a fact of experience and the summary of such in a descriptive way. Often, contradictory experiences confirm one another by their discrepancy and are reflected proverbially. The contrasting experiences are summed up and established as a fact in aphoristic statements. Similarly, wisdom writings seek to order the stated experiences. This is clearly illustrated by the *number proverb* as exemplified in Proverbs 30:21. According to Stolz (1974:79), “The number proverb first sums up what is common to the phenomena which are afterwards listed, giving the number of things mentioned; then follows the description of every individual phenomenon”.

The third essential function of wisdom writings is to provide admonition. In many cases, a reason is given for the admonition introduced by the preposition *ki*, if it is a positive exhortation. However, if it is a negative exhortation, it is introduced by the prohibitive preposition *pen*, which gives warnings about consequences of the offence. Stolz (1974) observes that the distribution of this form of wisdom is striking and it is considered as an independent type of Israelite wisdom discourse which derives its content in part from apodictic rules and receives considerable stimulus from Egyptian wisdom in both significance and content.

A fourth basic function of wisdom in ancient Israelite writing is to pose questions. These can be in form of riddles, by means of which a wise man’s wisdom is put to test such as in the case of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The same is also used in Job’s questioning of God; and also in the wise man’s rhetorical questioning in Proverbs 23:29ff.

Aside from making use of similes and metaphors directly deduced from nature, Old Testament Wisdom corpus provides much insight into human character and personality. The Wisdom writings were able to decipher the basic human drives and emotions and therefore offered counsels derivative from the moral and ethical nature of God himself.

Introduction to Ecclesiastes

Etymologically, the word *Ecclesiastes* is the Greek variant of the Hebrew *Qoheleth*. Stolz (1974) observes that the Greek translators used the term *Ecclesiastes* to render the Hebrew

Qoheleth which is a participle related to the noun *qahal* meaning “assembly, congregation”. Hence, Anderson (1975:542) submits that the Hebrew word refers to “one who speaks in an assembly,” that is, a speaker or preacher. In this wise, it can be deduced that the word *Qoheleth* is not a proper name; rather it is a description of a function. Along with Ruth, Song of Solomon, Esther, and Lamentations, Ecclesiastes stands with the Old Testament books of the Megilloth, or “five scrolls.” Anderson (1975) notes that later rabbis read these books in the synagogue on 5 special occasions during the year—Ecclesiastes being read on Pentecost.

The authorship of Ecclesiastes has lent itself to diverse criticism, and so is its date. While tradition holds that Solomon, the son of David king of Israel is the author of *Qoheleth*, higher criticism has pointed to a post-exilic author as the figure behind the book. However, the autobiographical profile of the book’s writer unmistakably points to Solomon. Some of the internal evidences which buttress a Solomonic authorship include the titles “son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1) and “king over Israel in Jerusalem” (1:12); both of which aptly fit Solomon. Also, the author’s moral odyssey bears a close resemblance to Solomon’s life (1 Kgs. 2–11); while the role of one who “taught the people knowledge” and wrote “many proverbs” (12:9) corresponds to most of what is known of Solomon’s life as Israel’s wise king. All of these point to Solomon, the son of David, as the author (MacArthur, 2007).

The determination of *Qoheleth*’s author is a strong index to its date. A post-exilic authorship would place the book somewhere around 250-200 BC while a Solomonic authorship would place the book around the late 10th century BC (not later than ca. 931 B.C.) in Solomon’s latter years. He wrote primarily to warn the young people of his kingdom, without omitting others, to avoid walking through life on the path of human wisdom; he exhorted them to live by the revealed wisdom of God (12:9–14) (MacArthur, 2007).

Anderson (1975) further argues that the writing of the Book was steeped in the wisdom tradition and background of the day, wherein the sages believed that wisdom based upon the fear of Yahweh would not only show the right course of action to take but would also lead one into understanding the divine plan of creation. Ecclesiastes, however, challenged the popular Judaistic theme alongside its simple Deuteronomism. “Deuteronomism” here refers to the doctrine of Judaism that postulates rewards for the upright and punishment for the evil doer. *Qoheleth* challenged this doctrine throughout his book with the assertion that the end of both the good man and the wicked man is death. Hence, man is enjoined to enjoy himself and have pleasure as much as he could because he would eventually die. This probably informed the position of Anderson in tagging *Qoheleth* as Epicurean in philosophy and positing a post-exilic date and author for the work.

In tandem with most biblical Wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes contains little narrative apart from the author’s own personal pilgrimage. Ecclesiastes represents the painful autobiography of Solomon who, for much of his life, squandered God’s blessings on his own personal pleasure rather than God’s glory. The key word is “vanity,” which expresses the futile attempt to

be satisfied apart from God. This word is used 37 times expressing the many things hard to understand about life. All earthly goals and ambitions when pursued as ends in themselves produce only emptiness. Solomon's experience led him to view life as "chasing after the wind." He asked, "What profit has a man from all his labor ...?" (1:3), a question he repeated in 2:24 and 3:9. The wise king gave over a considerable portion of the book to addressing this dilemma. But the reality of judgment for all, despite many unknowns, emerged as the great certainty. In light of this judgment by God, the only fulfilled life is one lived in proper recognition of God and service to Him. Any other kind of life is frustrating and pointless (MacArthur, 2007).

Ecclesiastes chronicles the author's inquiries and suppositions concerning man's lifework, which combine all of his activity and its potential outcomes including limited satisfaction. The role of wisdom in experiencing success surfaces repeatedly, particularly when Solomon must acknowledge that God has not revealed all of the details. This leads him to the conclusion that the primary issues of life involve divine blessings to be enjoyed and the divine judgment for which all must prepare (MacArthur, 2007).

The book has over the time posed some interpretive challenges to interpreters, particularly in the translation and interpretation of the word *hebel* which was translated "vanity" or "futility" in the book. *Hebel* is used in at least 3 ways throughout the book and each case looks at the nature of man's activity "under the sun." The first use considers man's lifework as "ephemeral," and it has to do with the vapor-like or transitory nature of life. The second has the connotation of "vain" or "futile," focusing on the execrable state of the cosmos and the devastating effects it has on man's earthly experience; while the third implies "perplexing" or "mysterious," which gives consideration to life's unanswerable questions. All the three meanings were drawn upon and employed variously by the author of Ecclesiastes.

While the context in each case will determine which meaning Solomon is focusing upon, the most recurring meaning of vanity is "incomprehensible" or "unknowable," referring to the mysteries of God's purposes. The author's conclusion to "fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13, 14) is more than the book's summary; it is the only hope of the good life and the only reasonable response of faith and obedience to the sovereign God. He precisely works out all activities under the sun, each in its time according to His perfect plan. He also discloses only as much as His perfect wisdom dictates and holds all men accountable. Those who refuse to take God and His Word seriously are doomed to lives of the severest vanity.

Literary Features of Ecclesiastes

This passage is perhaps the best known in the entire book of Ecclesiastes. The passage introduces pairs of contrasts all of which are total opposites of one another. Each contrasting pair was introduced by the phrase "a time." Olyott (1992) notes that this expression, in the original language, implies a pre-determined occurrence. By implication, everything in the universe is part of a grand scheme and all that takes place

occurs at its appropriate, pre-determined time. This assertion, however, presupposes that Ecclesiastes advocates pre-determinism and fatalism.

Although this chapter is usually interpreted as dealing with the timeliness or appropriateness of human actions, when considered within the context of the entire book it would be discovered that it, in fact, deals with God's sovereignty (cf. 2:24-26; 3:14). In interpreting the book of Ecclesiastes it is very important that its satiric nature based on the two key phrases "all is vanity" (i.e., transitoriness of human life and effort) and "under the sun" (i.e., physical life, earthly life viewed apart from God, i.e., agnostically) be put into consideration. In advocating sovereignty, the chapter establishes that the central answer to a meaningless and frustrated life is found in:

1. Faith and obedience (cf. 12:13-14);
2. The simple pleasures of life as provided by God (cf. 2:24; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18; 6:12; 8:15; 9:7). Ecclesiastes is one of the books of the Bible that must be interpreted in its totality as proof-texting any portion of the book would culminate in a hermeneutical disaster.

The Text of Ecclesiastes

1. There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven
2. A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.
3. A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear down and a time to build up.
4. A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance.
5. A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.
6. A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep and a time to throw away.
7. A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak.
8. A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace

Literary Features of the Passage

There are two main literary features in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 namely, generic introduction and parallelism. The first verse employs the generic introduction literary genre. This literary feature is one which makes an introductory statement which doubles as the summary of all that is to follow. Scholars like Westermann (1992) and Holladay (1998) submitted that similar literary technique was used in Genesis 1:1 where the verse introduces and summarizes the creation acts that followed in verse 2 forward (See Westermann, (1992) *Genesis 1-11*; Holladay (1988), *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon* for more on the discussion). To this end, the statement, "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven" is seen as a generic introduction to the series of events described as taking place at specific times.

Another prominent feature of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 is parallelism. All the verses within the pericope are characterized by one or more forms of parallelism, notably antithetic. Similarly, there are some metaphoric expressions within the text which invariably lend themselves to deeper allegorical interpretation. Apart from verse 1, other verses of this pericope demonstrate both antithetic parallelism and synonymous parallelism. The first lines of each verse reflect antithetic parallelism while each succeeding line introduces a synthetic-synonymous parallelism. In some of the verses, the second line repeats the thoughts of the first while in others the second completes the thoughts of the first.

Verse 1: *There is an appointed time for everything.
And there is a time for every event under heaven.*

This verse demonstrates the two main literary features identified with the passage, generic introduction and parallelism. It is the general introduction to the passage as well as a summary of what is to come in subsequent verses. Also, the verse reflects the synonymous type of parallelism albeit inversely. The second line answers to the first. In addition, the use of the conjunction “and” introduces the element of synthetic parallelism while the addition of the phrase “under heaven” is a reflection of climactic parallelism, wherein the phrase introduces the climax of the statement.

Verse 2: *A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.*

In the above verse, there is antithetic parallelism within the strophe of the first line while the second line answers to the first line in synonymous parallelism, even as it contains antithetic parallelism within its own strophe. The phrase “a time to die” answers antithetically to the phrase “a time to give birth” in the first line and likewise in the second line, “a time to uproot” answers antithetically to “a time to plant.” However, the entire second line “A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted” answers synonymously to the first line “A time to give birth and a time to die.” “A time to plant” in the second line is synonymous to “A time to give birth” in the first and “a time to uproot” in the second line is synonymous to “a time to die” in the first line.

Verse 3: *A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.*

As in verse two above, the first and second lines of verse three reflect antithetic parallelism within their individual strophes while the second line answers to the first line in synonymous parallelism. The phrase “a time to heal” answers antithetically to the phrase “a time to kill” in the first line and likewise in the second line, “a time to build up” answers antithetically to “a time to tear down.” However, the entire second line “A time to tear down and a time to build up” answers synonymously to the first line “A time to kill and a time to heal.” “A time to tear down” in the second line is synonymous to “A time to kill” in the first and “a time to build up” in the second line is synonymous to “a time to heal” in the first line.

Taking verses 2 and 3 together, however, it can be seen that the lines of verse three answer to corresponding lines in verse two antithetically. Hence, the first line of verse three, “A time to kill, and a time to heal” answers antithetically to the first line of verse two, “A time to give birth, and a time to die.” In this comparison, “a time to kill” is antithetic to “a time to give birth” and “a time to heal” is antithetic to “a time to die.” The same goes for the second line of verse three, “A time to tear down and a time to build up” which answers antithetically to the second line of verse two, “A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.”

Verse 4: *A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.*

In verse 4, the first line has two strophes answering antithetically to one another. The phrase “a time to laugh” relates in antithesis to the phrase “a time to weep” in the first line while the phrase “a time to dance” in the second line also answers antithetically to “a time mourn.” In the same vein, the entire second line “A time to mourn and a time to dance” relates synonymously with the first line “A time to weep and a time to laugh.” “A time to mourn” in the second line is synonymous to “A time to weep” in the first and “a time to dance” in the second line is synonymous to “a time to laugh” in the first line.

One can also advance the evidence of climactic parallelism in the verse wherein the second line becomes the climax of the first line. Mourning could be regarded as the climax of an experience of which weeping is an initial manifestation. Similarly, the dancing in line 2 could be said to be the climax of a joyous experience of which the laughing in line 1 is the initial manifestation.

Also the phrases “a time to laugh” and “a time to dance” of verse 4 could be chiasmic responses to the phrase “a time to give birth” in verse 2. This would follow the natural order as laughing and dancing are likely attendants to the joyous occasion of the arrival of a new baby (Brentius, 112).

Verse 5: *A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.*

Like the verses before it, verse 5 also has two lines both of which demonstrate antithetical parallelism within their individual strophes; unlike other verses, however, the two lines of verse 5 do not have any parallelismic relationship with one another. Both lines have been said to be metaphoric; the first reflecting an agricultural metaphor of one removing stones from a field in preparation for ploughing and the other referring to sexual connotations (Utley, 1982:75).

In line 1, the statement “a time to gather stones” is antithetic to the initial statement “a time to throw stones.” Likewise, in line 2 the statement “a time to shun embracing” is antithetical to “a time to embrace.” There appears to be no parallelismic relationship between the two lines because stone-gathering apparently has no link with embrace. Utley (2008) however disagrees with this as he reiterates that both lines are metaphoric expressions having sexual connotations and they by

implication mean that “there is a time, levitically speaking, when men could have sexual relations and a time when they could not because of a woman’s menstrual cycle or their military commitments” (78). If Utley’s assertion is to be followed, then the two lines answer to each other synthetically. Utley’s assertion is, however, still a subject of hermeneutical conundrum; far from being agreed upon as a consensus.

Verse 6: *A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.*

In tandem with previous verses, verse 6 introduces another set of contrasting pairs. In line 1, “a time to give up as lost” stands in apposition to “a time to search” while in line 2, “a time to throw away” is an antithesis of “a time to keep.” Taking the two statements as metaphors for romantic relationship, it could be deduced that both lines answer synthetically to one another. One keeps what he has labored to get after a period of searching while what one loses is as good as being thrown away.

Verse 7: *A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.*

The first line of verse 7, while exhibiting antithetic parallelism within its strophe is in synthetic-climactic relationship with the previous four lines of verses 5 and 6. The verses in question reflect a contrast of joy and sadness, rejoicing and mourning, and love and hatred. The second line presents a contrast between a time of silence and a time of expressing one’s opinion. This line can also be said to be in synonymous parallelism with the previous lines because silence can be synonymous with mourning while speaking can be synonymous with joy. A mourning individual can be silenced by the severity of his experience while a joyous person can be excited to much speaking by the excitement of his experience.

Verse 8: *A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace*

Following the patterns of previous verses, verse 8 contrasts between love and hatred and war and peace. Line 1 of verse 8 can be linked synonymously with line 1 of verse 7 and the four lines of verses 5 and 6. Line 2 of verse 8 however appears to bear a synonymous relationship with the second strophe of verse 2 line 1 “a time to die” and the first strophe of verse 3 line 1 “a time to kill.” The link is in the factor of war as a likely cause of death.

Interpretive Deductions from Ecclesiastes

“There is an appointed time for everything”: The “appointed time” seems to refer to the common events of human life. The “appointed time” does not speak of the advantageous human time, but of the divinely appointed time. The emphasis of this chapter is on divine appointment. It speaks of the mystery of human effort “under heaven” when compared with the sovereignty of God. In Wisdom Literature “appointed time” is often “appropriate time.” This appointed time is not to be interpreted in the light of determinism or fatalism as opined by

the likes of [Stolz \(1974\)](#); rather it should be seen from the perspective of God’s sovereignty over all of creation.

“A time to give birth, and a time to die”: There is a series of events which refer to the cycle of human development. In between this two enclosures of life are series of events that cause joy and sadness, building up and tearing down, and embracing and casting away. This verse establishes one of the dominant themes of Qoheleth, that is, the inevitability of death. Bearing in mind that the final end of *kol-ha-adam* (translated everyone) is death, would serve as a constant reminder to men to fear God and enjoy as much as possible the *yitron* (fruit) of their *‘amal* (labour) while on earth. According to Enns (2008: 142), “we are all destined to die and no notion of an afterlife will change that fact”.

“A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted”: This speaks of the annual harvest or in a more general sense the principle of labour and reward. It implies that one is to labour at the right time in order to be rewarded afterwards. In the light of this, it becomes clear that Ecclesiastes is not a proponent of living life for pleasure alone as supposed by some, rather the preacher reiterates honest labour and admonishes men to eat from that for which they have labored.

A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to tear down, and a time to build up

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance

These verses primarily express the idea that there is usually occasion for the expression joy and sadness. Since war is mentioned in v. 8 the killing referred to here seems to have another focus. Some have assumed that it refers to capital punishment within the nation of Israel or to the defense of one’s home, or person, in the event of an attack. In the same vein, the “time to tear down” and “time to build up” may be metaphoric expressions denoting the same idea. Some scholars believe that the lines of verse 4 refer to both funerals and weddings or to other regular social events which may be attended by the opposite emotions of joy and sadness necessitating weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing.

A time to throw stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing”

This verse has often been assumed to be an agricultural metaphor of one removing stones from a field. [Constable \(2008\)](#) notes that the casting of stones probably refers to the ancient practice of destroying a farmer’s field by throwing stones on it while the gathering of stones may refer to the clearing of stones from a field in preparation for cultivation (<http://www.soniclight.com/> 2008:14).

[Utley \(2008\)](#), however, observes that this could be a construction metaphor of using stones for a rock fence or a home. It has been the consensus among Jewish commentators that this has sexual connotations and this probably informs the translation “making love” by the Today’s English Version. This is stated specifically in the Midrash. The context of v. 5b

“A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing” seems to reinforce this understanding. From the perspective of sexual relations, this could refer to: sexual love within marriage; sexual love outside of marriage; a family’s caring love for each other; or friends kissing one another on the cheek, which was common in the Near East. This would mean that there is a time, Levitically speaking, when men could have sexual relations and a time when they could not because of a woman’s menstrual cycle or their military commitments (38).

“A time to search, and a time to give up as lost”

The first term “search” is a Piel infinitive construct which means “to seek after something.” The implication of this is that there is a time in one’s life when he seeks after the actualization of numerous dreams and he pursues them vigorously. However, there comes a time in life where it becomes obvious that some things, dreams, and/or aspirations cannot be obtained, hence, one must forge ahead with life in contentment and gratitude.

A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together; A time to be silent, and a time to speak.

This may refer to some of the mourning practices of the Jews. At times of mourning, whether over individual calamities such as the loss of a loved one or during national calamities like devastation by war or famine, the Jews showed their anguish, sorrow, bitterness of heart and sorrow for sin by a number of mourning practices. One of such practices is that they would rip the front of their robe at the neckline about five inches as exemplified passages like I Sam. 4:12; II Sam. 1:2; 13:31; 15:32; II Kgs. 18:3;7; and Jer. 41:5 among others. When the mourning was, however, over they would sew it up again. Similarly, the act of keeping silent is another mourning practice which is often associated with friends and relatives who have gone to mourn with a dear one over some loss that have befallen him. This can be seen in the case of Job’s friend who came to mourn with him and sat with him in silence for seven days.

A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace

This verse may probably be interpreted from the perspective of national identity where nations would be at peace with one another at a time when mutual love existed between them. At other times, seeds of discord and hatred may sprout over political or economic issues thus resulting in war between them. This application to national Israel is the dominant view of most Jewish commentators about the entire pericope and about verse 8 in particular. However, treating the pericope within the broader scope of its immediate context, it seems that vv. 9-11 define these verses in light of a personal, rather than corporate, emphasis.

In summary, the use of polar opposites in a multiple of seven by the writer and the beginning of his list with birth and death is highly significant. The numerical symbolism of the number seven in Jewish numerology implies the idea of completeness or perfection and the use of polar opposites suggests totality.

The pericope of consideration has an important connection with the overall theme of the book as well as the sovereignty motif of wisdom generally; it also relates closely to what precedes and to what follows.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the general overview of Hebrew wisdom literature with particular emphasis on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. The literary features of generic introduction and parallelism with taints of metaphors were discovered to be employed by the writer and these were analyzed as they occurred in the pericope. It was discovered that the treatise of Qoheleth in chapter 3 is not dualism as opined by the likes of Bernard; neither is it pre-determinism as submitted by Stolz (1974). Rather, it is evident that the imperative which the Preacher was driving at is the sovereignty of God over all creation. Invariably, the counsel is for man to live his life day by day as ordered by the hand of God. Man should come to the realization that God has a fitting time for each thing to be done as established in verse 1. The significance of this section is that man is responsible to discern the right times for the right actions; and when he does the right action according to God’s time, the outcome is ‘beautiful’ (v. 11).

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