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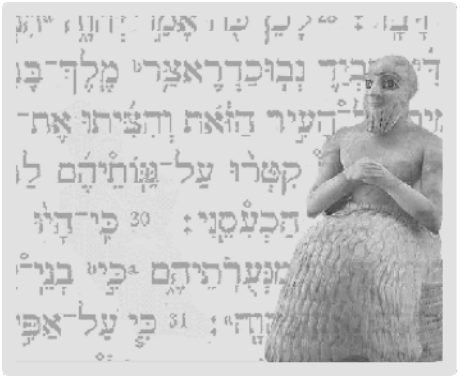
NAVA NERIYA-COHEN



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THE REFLECTIVE PASSAGES AS THE CORE OF QOHELETH: CONTENT AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

NAVA NERIYA-COHEN
BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

1. INTRODUCTION

The Book of Qoheleth is a notable work of the literary genre of wisdom literature, the common and essential root of which is the premise of a world governed by order that can be deciphered through wisdom.[1] Didactic wisdom urges mortals to understand the way in which the world is ordered and to act and work accordingly in an effort to reap its benefits and favorable recompense.[2] Wisdom literature develops two main conceptual frameworks to explain how this world order operates: the first one, a conceptual framework based on natural law, and the second one, based on divine law.[3] The first views human existence as an integral part of a

[1] Y. Hoffman, "Biblical Wisdom Literature," in Z. Talshir (ed.), *Biblical Literature: Introductions and Research* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi, 2012), 328–29. He writes: "The essential and shared root of all wisdom literature, the basis upon which it is uniquely defined, is the premise of order. It wholly revolves around one main axis-world order: order in the realms of the universe, in the biological and botanical realms, in the social realm and in the relationship between man and his God. The assertion that the world is not an insoluble anomaly but rather possesses an intrinsic logic that is discernible through wisdom is the driving force of wisdom literature."

[2] Wisdom's self-confidence and the certainty of its path resonate forcefully in the words of Eliphaz: "See, we have inquired into this and it is so; hear it and accept it" (Job 5:27 NJPS). The sages were aware that mortals, ignorant of what the future holds, possessed limited means for the acquisition of knowledge. Nonetheless, their fundamental belief was that there was logic to what would result from certain actions, and that this could be deciphered through wisdom and wisdom traditions.

[3] I will not address the question of the relationship between these two conceptual frameworks in the context of this article. This is a question that has been extensively treated in the scholarly literature. For the purpose of this article I accept Fox's view that both conceptions stem from the same principle. In effect, both are underpinned by the conception of order according to which retribution derives from an action that transpires in a manner that is legal and automatic and thus inflexible. At times

logical system that is entirely based on the existence of a deed-consequence nexus: natural and inextricable interdependence between cause and consequence, between labor and product and between action and outcome. In other words, the reward or punishment for an action is automatically derived, and the relationship between the action and its outcome is natural and obvious. This conceptual framework generated such sayings as: "He who tills the land shall have food in plenty but he who pursues vanities is devoid of sense" (Prov 12:11).[4] According to the second conceptual framework, God created a world that is governed by his design and which conforms to his will.[5] A person is responsible for his actions, which determine his achievements, but God is responsible for rewarding or punishing him for his conduct. This conceptual framework is termed "divine retribution" and it finds expression in sayings such as: "When the Lord is pleased with a man's conduct, he may turn even his enemies into allies" (Prov 16:7).[6]

As mentioned above, the Book of Qoheleth, as a part of wisdom literature, also deals with world order.[7] However, it focuses on the instances when world order is not attained and shows how humanity is often unable to depend on world order in attaining advantage and benefit.[8] Is it possible to detect a systematic structure to Qoheleth concerning this concept? Through the ages, many

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the causal relationship is formulated as natural and at other times as a divine act. M.V. Fox, *The Book of Qoheleth and its Treatment of Wisdom Thought* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1972), 64–65.

[4] These sayings rely on the principle of natural retribution that underpins the pragmatic conception of the deed-consequence nexus; K. Koch, "Is there a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," in J.L Crenshaw (ed.), *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (trans. T.H Trapp; IRT, 4; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 57–87; T. Forti, "The Concept of Reward in Proverbs: Divergent Paradigms of Thinking," *Beit Miqra* 53 (2008), 105–23 (Hebrew); *idem*, " 'The Race is not won by the Swift': Sage and Prophet Confront the Principle of Cause-Consequence Nexus," in Y. Shamir (ed.) *A Light unto Meir: Studies in Bible, Semitic Language, Rabbinic Literature, and Ancient Civilizations submitted to Meir Gruber on the Occasion of his Sixty Fifth Birthday* (Be'er Sheba: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2010), 317–29 (Hebrew).

[5] M.V. Fox, *The Concept of Divinity in Didactic Wisdom Literature* (Be'er Sheva, 1973), 169 (Hebrew).

[6] Koch, "Doctrine of Retribution."

[7] This classification was apparent to the Tannaitic sages and it informed their decision to include the book in the biblical canon (Tosefta, Yadayim 2:14; Avot D'Rabbi Nathan 1:4); Hoffman, "Biblical Wisdom Literature," 328–29; A. Rofe, *Introduction to Psalmic Poetry and Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2004), 408 (Hebrew).

[8] Scholars have discerned points of congruence and conflict between the book of Qoheleth and preceding wisdom literature and have explored its complex conversation with other wisdom traditions; see J. Loader, *Polar Structures in the Book of Qoheleth* (BZAW, 152; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 276–79; H. Gese, "The Crisis of Wisdom in Koheleth," in Crenshaw (ed.), *Theodicy*, 139–51.

have wondered as to the coherence of the Book of Qoheleth,[9] and over the years, scholars have posited a number of structural analyses.[10] In this article I will follow Coppens in my proposed answer to this question. In a 1967 article Coppens suggested that the Book of Qoheleth is comprised of two main literary patterns:[11] collections of proverbs and exhortations,[12] and reflective passages formulated as first-person monologues.[13] The reflective passages are textual units that are found in a variety of expressive modes in the autobiographical narrative as well as the observations, reflections and emotions of the author of Qoheleth. In addition to these two main literary patterns, the author incorporates three lyrical poems into the narrative sequence.[14] Coppens claims that the reflective passages form the core and initial phase in the composition of the book of Qoheleth. He believed the book was authored in three

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[9] As Zimmerli, writing in 1974, aptly articulated in his celebrated article: is the book of Qoheleth a loose compendium of aphorisms or a corpus with both a clear stance and a well-ordered structure? Cf. W. Zimmerli, "Das Buch Kohelet: Traktat oder Sentenzensammlung?," *VT* 24 (1974), 221–30.

[10] T. Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary* (trans. O. Dean; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 5–8; F.J Backhaus, *"Denn Zeit und Zufall trifft sie alle": Studien zur Komposition und zum Gottesbild im Buch Qoheleth* (BBB, 83; Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1993), 78. Neither of these suggestions was universally adopted. Nevertheless, intense scholarly interest in this area has led to the complete negation of the approach that views the book as a compendium of discrete and random sayings; see O. Loretz, *Qoheleth unde der alte Orient: Untersuchungen zu Stil und theologicher Thenatik des Buches Qoheleth* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 212–17; M.V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 14–147; C. Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB, 18C; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 39.

[11] J. Coppens, "La structure de l'Ecclesiaste," in M. Gilbert (ed.), *La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* (BETL, 51; Gembloux: Leuven University, 1979), 288–92, note 7.

[12] This literary form typifies didactic wisdom and appears in the book of Proverbs, Sirach and Egyptian didactic wisdom writings; see Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 9. The collections of proverbs and exhortations are not collated thematically but rather according to stylistic criteria such as key words and/or associative connection; R. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes and Esther* (FOTL, 13; Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1981), 4–6.

[13] The reflective passages, formulated as a first-person monologue, constitute a literary form similar to theoretical wisdom that exposits the complexity and disharmony of human existence through lengthy, well-plotted and logical lectures, monologues and dialogues. A feature of this literature is the wisdom discussion that articulates different points of view via external and internal dialogue; Fox*, Time,* 17; Seow*, Ecclesiastes*, 42; Y. Klein, *World of the Bible Encyclopedia: Ecclesiastes* (Jerusalem: Revivim, 1988), 163 (Hebrew).

[14] The poem in ch. 1, vv. 3–11, which addresses the recurring character of life and nature, the "song of the seasons" (3:1–9) and the allegory of old age (11:7–12:7).

phases: during the first phase the author collected proverbs while in the second, with the skills that he had acquired, he wrote the reflective passages that represented the basic core of the book. During the final phase he interposed the aphorisms and poetic segments within the reflective sections. He notes that the reflective passages manifest a content-driven process, yet he offers only a brief remark on this.

Over the years, scholars have studied the reflective passages in detail.[15] Some have proposed criteria according to which they might be categorized;[16] some addressed their rhetorical facets;[17] while others sorted them into sub-genres.[18] However, up until now,

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[15] Already in 1936 Zimmerli noted the conspicuous first person aspect of the narration in Qoheleth; W. Zimmerli, "Das Buch der Predigers Salomo," in H. Ringgern and W. Zimmerli (eds.), *Sprüche/Prediger* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 24. The overwhelming predominance of the first person formulated reflective passages within the book precipitated Fish's argument that, to paraphrase Montaigne's words, "I have drawn my own self-portrait"—Qoheleth might assert "I myself am the subject of my book"; H. Fish, *Biblical Poetry: Testimony and Poetics* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 158 (Hebrew). Christianson observed the stylistic divergence of the autobiographical reflective narratives in Qoheleth, acknowledging that they convey the narrator's innermost reflections; see also E. Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup, 280; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 35. For Salyer, who studied Qoheleth's use of rhetoric, the autobiographical passages are foundational. He asserts that the frequency of Qoheleth's use of the form is unrivaled in biblical literature. According to Salyer, Qoheleth's intensive use of the first person is a technique intended to establish intimacy with the reader. He argues that the narrative framework, articulated in the autobiographical passages, engulfs the wisdom style aphorisms interspersed throughout the text and they are therefore perceived by the reader as part of Qoheleth's overarching narrative; G.D. Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric: Private Insight and Public Debate in Ecclesiastes* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 173. Qoheleth's extensive use of the autobiographical passages prompted some commentators to view the book as the author's personal autobiography and to elucidate its contents on the backdrop of the author's life; F. Zimmermann, *The Inner World of Qoheleth* (New York: KTAV, 1973), 8. This perception shifted once scholars recognized the autobiographical passages as reflecting a literary device rather than historical material; Loretz, *Qoheleth und der alte Orient*, 64; O. Loretz, "Zur Darbietungsform der 'Ich-Erzahlung' im Buche Qoheleth," *CBQ* 25 (1963), 46–59. Over the course of time, those who read Qoheleth as a biography depicting historical events lost ground to those who posited a fictional interpretation; Christianson, *Time to Tell*, 244; Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 146, 165–72.

[16] Commentators divided the autobiographical passages into sub-types based on form and content alike; see F. Ellermeier, *Qoheleth I/1. Untersuchungen zum Buche Qoheleth* (Herzberg: Jungfer, 1967), 66–79; M. Schubert, "Die Selbstbetrachtungen Kohelets: Ein Beitrag zur Gattungsforschung," *Theologische Versuche* 17 (1989), 23–34.

[17] Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 173; Christianson, *Time to Tell*, 35.

[18] Ellermeier, *Qoheleth*, 66–79. As Murphy posits, genre analysis is less critical than the recognition of the salience of the term itself; R. Murphy,

the reflective passages have not been researched as an independent composition from the perspective of their content and structure. In this article, I wish to follow Coppens' lead by arguing that isolating the reflective passages from the other literary patterns of the book and exposing their semantic fields and distribution are key to uncovering the author's systematic and organized basic argument against the conception of world order. I will begin by delineating the reflective passages from the book's remaining two literary patterns (collections of proverbs and exhortations and lyrical poems). I will then proceed by describing the semantic fields and the content of the reflective passages. Finally I will seek to demonstrate the method of their distribution.[19]

2. FORM ANALYSIS AND DELINEATION OF THE REFLECTIVE PASSAGES IN QOHELETH

The Book of Qoheleth is characterized by fluid boundaries,[20] interlinking units,[21] and connecting passages.[22] Therefore, demarcation is a difficult and complex task. That said, the demarcation of borders is an indispensable and crucial undertaking in order to understand the book.[23] Based on a careful reading, we can identify thirty

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Ecclesiastes (WBC, 23A; Dallas: Word, 1992), 32.

[19] The premise that underpins this article is that most literary works explicitly or implicitly manifest some sort of formal design that is functional to their aesthetic effect or to the construction of their meaning and often to both. I agree with the following statement of Weiss, who formulated the basic guidelines for exposing the structure of literary works: "Formal analysis of the story does not involve divesting the form of content but rather its concretization, addressing its affinity to the content, the interrelationship between the two, or put differently: viewing the formal design of the story as responsible for its visibility, its character, the organizing stratagem of the narrative"; M. Weiss, *Scriptures in their own Light: Collected Articles* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1987), 337 (Hebrew). Fox describes the discussion of structure that fails to articulate the work's deeper content and to shed new light upon it as being akin to a "ghost in the attic": see Fox, *Time*, 149. Alter stresses that programmatic form is not necessarily the consequence of conscious premeditation. Many factors coalesce within the author's mind on a subconscious level and structure can unwittingly assume formal coherence; R. Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 153.

[20] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 33–36; see also M. Perry, "Literary Dynamics," *Hasifrut* 28 (1979), 6–46 (Hebrew).

[21] J. Grossman, *Ambiguity in the Biblical Narrative and its Contribution to the Literary Formation* (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2006), 6 (Hebrew).

[22] T. Forti, "The Charm of the Snake Charmer and the Snake with No Charm: Towards the Meaning of בעל הלשון in Ecclesiastes 10:11," *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 18 (2008), 43–56 (Hebrew).

[23] As Weiss suggests, the difficulty in demarcating the literary units should not deter the exegete but rather advise him or her to proceed with caution; M. Weiss, *The Bible From Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1987), 72 (Hebrew).

reflective passages throughout the book.[24] Their length and scope are fixed, yet their identification relies on the manifestation of a vital structural element—an opening formula that employs the first person singular as a linguistic conveyance of the author's personal experience.[25] For example "I said to myself . . . " (2:1), and "I have further observed" (9:11).[26] The opening formula marks the start of a theoretical discussion of the events of the world, as well as a discussion pertaining to the attitude of mortals toward the deity and toward fellow human being.[27] Below is the proposed demarcation of the reflective passages, including the opening formula that typifies each passage. Appearing in grey are the collections of proverbs and exhortations as well as the lyrical poems interspersed throughout the book.[28]

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[24] Delineating the reflective passages of the "integrated" category poses an issue: Does the passage relate to the "integrated" category or is it perhaps a self-standing collection of traditional wisdom-style aphorisms? In this article, my stance is that insofar as the content of the aphorisms agrees with the content of the reflective passage with which they are associated, the overall passage is defined as an "integrated model" and the boundaries are accordingly demarcated.

[25] As is well known, the identification of formal constructions greatly facilitates the demarcation of textual units and, as such, they comprise the basis of structural exposition. Biblical narratives rely on recurring opening constructions such as "sometime later" (Gen 22:1) and on concluding formulae such as the editorial conclusion "and the land was tranquil forty years" (Judg 3:14). In wisdom literature, an opening such as "The word of King Lemuel" (Prov 31:1) denotes the start of a new literary unit; see Murphy, *Wisdom Literature,* 4–6; D. Michel, *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qoheleth* (BZAW, 183; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 24–28 and 35–38. Ward and Yoreh argued that one should view the opening constructions as a marker for delineating the boundaries of the book's literary units and for exposing its overarching structure; J. Waard, "The Structure of Qoheleth," in *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1982), 57–64 (Hebrew); T. Yoreh, "And What Becomes of Happiness (Eccl 2.2)?," *Beit Miqra* 46 (2001), 35–54 (Hebrew). Yet their proposal as it pertains to the entire book is problematic in that this marker seems to be found not only in Qoheleth. In most of the book's chapters, the author's reflections, formulated in the first person singular, are intertwined and interwoven with aphoristic clusters that recall the clusters of wisdom sayings in the book of Proverbs.

[26] Often, the opening formula is accentuated by attending first person constructions such as "I further observed" (4:1). It is also often accompanied by the verb ראה"ה "I have also noted" (4:4); B. Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth With Special Emphasis on the Verbal System* (Studia Semitica Upsaliensa, 10; Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), 39–78.

[27] R. Johnson, *Form Critical Analysis of the Sayings in the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1973), 76.

[28] The reflective passages follow two paradigms: the first is a "simple model," in which the author formulates his inquiries, his experiences and his reflections using the first person singular throughout. The second is an "integrated model," in which the author intersperses adages in the style of the traditional wisdom of the book of Proverbs to bolster or corroborate

Table 1: Delineation of the Reflective Passages in Qoheleth

The poem about life and nature: 1:3–11	
1st passage: 1:12–15	"**I set** my mind . . . "[29]
2nd ": 1:16–18	"**I said** to myself . . . "[30]
3rd ": 2:1–2	"**I said** to myself . . . "
4th ": 2:3–11	"**I ventured** . . . "[31]
5th ": 2:12–16	"Then **my thoughts** turned . . . "
6th ": 2:17	"And so **I loathed** . . . "[32]
7th ": 2:18–19	"So too, **I loathed** . . . "
8th ": 2:20–23	"And so **I came** to view . . . "[33]
9th ": 2:24–26	"There is nothing . . . even that **I noted**. . . "[34]
The "song of the seasons": 3:1–9	
10th ": 3:10–11	"**I have observed** . . . "
11th ": 3:12–13	"Thus **I realized** . . . "
12th ": 3:14–15	"Thus **I realized** . . . "[35]

his reflections. The length and scope of the interpolated aphorisms are inconsistent, ranging from one proverb to a cluster of proverbs.

[29] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 12; Fox, *Time,* 170–74.

[30] Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 134; G.S. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 34–37; C. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 121–27.

[31] N. Cohen, "Structure and Meaning in the First Sequence of Reflective Passages in Qoheleth (2:12–26)," *Beit Miqra* (2013), 47–82 (Hebrew). The thematic connections between passages 2:1–2 and 2:3–11 led Rashbam to suggest that these two passages should be conflated. Other commentators also tend to this view; see R. Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World. A Study of Ecclesiastes* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 148–49; T. Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 86; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 152; M.V. Fox, "Qoheleth and His Contradictions," *HUCA* 18 (1989), 182–86.

[32] The autonomy of passage six (2:17) that incorporates an opening construct (2:17a) and a distinctive theme—the loathing of life—should be noted; Cohen, "Structure," 47–82. Longman, Seow and Fox append vv. 2:17 to passage five (2:12–16); Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 94–100; Seow*, Ecclesiastes,* 152; Fox, "Qoheleth and his Contradictions," 182–86.

[33] Murphy and Ogden conflate passage seven (2:18–19) and passage eight (2:20–23); Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 20–27; Ogden, *Qoheleth,* 43–45.

[34] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 47; Fox, "Qoheleth and his Contradictions," 179; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 149–57.

[35] Murphy and Seow conflate passages 10 (3:10–11), eleven (3:12–13), and twelve (3:14–15) into one thematic unit; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 31; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 169.

13th ": 3:16–17	". . . **I have observed** . . . "[36]
14th ": 3:18–22	"So **I decided** . . . "[37]
15th ": 4:1–3	"**I** further **observed** . . . "[38]
16th ": 4:4–6	"**I have** also **noted** . . . "[39]
17th ": 4:7–12	"And **I have noted** this further . . . "[40]
18th ": 4:13–16	". . . **I reflected** about . . . "[41]
Collection of proverbs and exhortations: 4:17–5:11	
19th ": 5:12–16	"Here is a grave evil **I have observed**"[42]
20th ": 5:17–19	"Only this **I have found**, is a real good"[43]
21st ": 6:1–6	"There is an evil **I have observed**"[44]
Collection of proverbs and exhortations: 6:7–7:14	
22nd ": 7:15–22	"**I have seen** both these things . . . "[45]
23rd ": 7:23–29	"All this **I tested** . . . "[46]
Collection of proverbs and exhortations: 8:1–8	
24th ": 8:9–14	"All these things **I observed**"[47]

[36] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 45.

[37] Murphy and Seow conflate passage thirteen (3:16–17) and passage fourteen (3:18–22) into one thematic unit; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 125; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 175.

[38] Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 186–87; Krüger, *Ecclesiastes*, 95.

[39] Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 187; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 32; Krüger, *Ecclesiastes,* 96.

[40] Krüger, *Ecclesiastes,* 98–99; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 188–91; Lohfink and Ogden distinguish between the reflections (4:7–8) and the traditional wisdom-style statements (4:9–12); N. Lohfink, *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary* (trans. S. McEvenue; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 70–71; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 68–69.

[41] Krüger, *Ecclesiastes,* 102–5.

[42] Krüger, *Ecclesiastes*, 120–22.

[43] Krüger, *Ecclesiastes,* 122–24.

[44] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 48; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 93.

[45] Krüger, *Ecclesiastes*, 139–42; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 192–98; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 266–67.

[46] Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 270; Krüger, *Ecclesiastes*, 143–49; Ogden and Longman believe these to be two distinct passages; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 118; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 199.

[47] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 84; Fox, *Time*, 274; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes,* 283. For a discussion of other delineations, see Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 293.

25th ": 8:15	"**I** therefore **praised** . . . "[48]
26th ": 8:16–17	"For **I have set my mind** . . . "[49]
27th ": 9:1–10	"For all this **I noted** . . . "[50]
28th ": 9:11–12	"**I have** further **observed** . . . "[51]
29th ": 9:13–10:4	"This thing too **I observed** . . . "[52]
30th ": 10:5–7	"Here is an evil **I have seen** . . . "[53]

Collection of proverbs and exhortations: 10:6–11:6

The allegory of old age: 11:7–12:7

Analysis of the thirty reflective passages reveals a clear distinction between the passages that appear at the book's "extremities" and those that are found at its "core." The first six reflective passages that initialize the sequence (1:2–15; 1:16–18; 2:1–2; 2:3–11; 2:12–16; 2:17) as well as the concluding two passages (9:13–16; 10:5–7), diverge substantially from the remaining twenty two passages that are featured within the main body of the book. The first six passages function as a prelude to the book in which the author depicts the process of inquiry he conducted and the conclusions he reached from his trials and investigations.[54] The final two passages (9:13–16; 10:5–7) are in keeping with the message transmitted by a long sequence of traditional wisdom style sayings at the end of the

[48] Seow and Krüger conflate the passage with the preceding passage; Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 294; Krüger, *Ecclesiastes,* 158–62.

[49] Krüger*, Ecclesiastes*, 163; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 221.

[50] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 89–90; Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 224–31.

[51] Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 232–33; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 88.

[52] Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 233–34.

[53] Longman, *Ecclesiastes,* 241.

[54] The first passage (1:13–15) introduces the overall research objective and its scope and the author reports its successful implementation to his readers. As such, the passage does not address the specific research methods and directions. The second and third passages outline the two practical methods that the author will employ to translate his general intentions into practice. The second passage (1:16–18) details one of these methods: cognitive inquiry towards familiarization with both knowledge and foolishness. The third passage (2:1–2) depicts the second method: experimentation with happiness and sensual pleasure. The fourth and fifth passages report the author's successful implementation of his intentions; in the fourth passage (2:3–11) he elaborates his unqualified success in terms of work and productivity, in this manner fulfilling his original intention of fully experiencing the pleasure and happiness that life can bestow (2:10), while in the fifth passage (2:12–16) he offers his conclusions based on observation of wisdom on the one hand and foolishness and depravity on the other—the inquiry defined as his objective in the second passage. In the sixth passage the author succinctly reasserts that all that goes on under the sun is futile and the pursuit of the wind. The loathing of life that it embodies derives from the inquiry and experimentation detailed in the five foregoing passages and constitutes its emotional consequence (1:12–2:16); Cohen, "Structure," 47–82.

book that laud wisdom and the wise ruler and condemn foolishness and the foolish ruler (9:13–10:20).[55]

3. SEMANTIC FIELDS AND CONTENTS OF THE REFLECTIVE PASSAGES IN QOHELETH

The twenty-two reflective passages featured in the main body of the book fall into two content-related groups. Those can be discerned by tracking the semantic fields to which they relate: labor versus pleasure; human versus divine endeavors.

3.1. The "Labor Versus Pleasure" Passages

Nine passages include words associated with the semantic field of labor and its products: labor/wealth/oppression/riches and property/poverty, and with the semantic field of happiness/good/enjoyment or, antithetically, anger/lack of goodness/lack of enjoyment. These sematic fields address the various aspects related to labor and to the question of humanity's ability to enjoy its fruits. *Table 2* below exposits the nine passages and their defining *leitworts*.

The nine passages dealing with labor and the question of humanity's ability to enjoy its fruits examine reality through the natural law conceptual format. Reviewing their content reveals that they can be divided into two main categories. In four passages (4:1–3; 4:4–6; 4:7–12; 4:13–16), the author demonstrates how factors *within* a person's control impair his ability to enjoy the product of his labor or to allow others to do likewise. These factors include oppression of the poor (4:1–3), sloth and foolishness (4:4–6)[56], envy-driven labor, greed (4:7–12)[57] and grasping at the hope of external change (4:13–16). In all these cases, if the person chooses to adopt these negative attributes, he personally prevents his and others' ability to experience gratification and enjoyment. An undue emphasis on wealth, honor and the good life as the pinnacle of success might set in motion an uncompromising pursuit of these

[55] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 175.

[56] Fox*, Time*, 101–2; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 179.

[57] Traditional wisdom enshrines industriousness as a supreme and absolute value and as the vehicle through which wealth can be attained. It accentuates labor's worth and advantages and repeatedly stresses its results. The laborer who knows no rest and who toils strenuously, "A bit more sleep, a bit more slumber, a bit more hugging yourself in bed," will know not want "and poverty will come calling upon you and want, like a man with a shield" (Prov 24:33–34). The earnest laborer who is "skilled in his work" will achieve success and attain high positions: "See a man skilled at his work, he shall attend upon kings" (Prov 22:29). In a departure from traditional wisdom that prizes industriousness and perceives it as an absolute value, the author's view of industriousness is qualified and hinges on circumstances. Therefore, when envy is the basis and driving force behind skilled and industrious human labor, then industriousness is detrimental.

things.[58] This pursuit derives from the inability to see that enjoyment is labor's goal, rather than "products." In all these passages the author opposes the classification of "gain" as labor's objective since this designation threatens to disrupt labor itself and to rob man of pleasure.

Table 2: "Labor Versus Pleasure" Passages-Semantic Fields

	Labor and its products	**Pleasure/lack of enjoyment**
(1) 7th pass. (2:18–19)	*The wealth* . . . that I was gaining . . . *the wealth* . . . *that I had gained.*	So too *I loathed*
(2) 8th pass. (2:20–23)	*All the wealth that I gained by toil* . . . *whose fortune was made* . . . who did not *toil for it* . . . *for all the toiling and the worrying*	*To view with despair* . . . grief and *heartache*
(3) 15th pass. (4:1–3)	*The oppression* . . . *the oppressed* . . . *their oppressors*	*The tears*
(4) 16th pass. (4:4–6)	*Labor* . . . *labor*	*Envy* . . . a handful of *gratification*
(5) 17th pass. (4:7–12)	*Amasses wealth* . . . *riches* . . . *amassing* . . . *earnings*	Denying himself *enjoyment*
(6) 18th pass. (4:13–16)	*Pauper*	*Acclaim*
(7) 19th pass. (5:12–16)	*Riches* . . . *riches* . . . *his wealth*	Much *vexation* and grief and anger
(8) 21st pass. (6:1–6)	*Riches, property*	Through his *wealth* . . . his fill of *enjoyment*
(9) 28th pass. (9:11–12)	*Wealth*	

In another four passages (2:18–19; 2:20–23; 5:12–16; 1:1–6), the author shows how factors beyond humanity's control impair the causal relationship between labor and enjoyment. These include death (2:18–19),[59] unforeseen circumstances referred to as "a grave

[58] Wisdom, aware of this pitfall, cautions mortals to resist ambition "Do not toil to gain wealth; have the sense to desist" (Prov 23:4), and the pursuit of wealth that will incur punishment: "But one in a hurry to get rich will not go unpunished . . . a miserly man runs after wealth . . . he does not realize that loss will overtake it" (Prov 28:21–22). However the expository sentences that attend the exhortation cite the loss of wealth as the reason why mortals should avoid ambition in the first place: "You see it then it is gone; it grows wings and flies away" (Prov 23:5) and not deprivation of pleasure and profit.

[59] Death compels the laborer to bequeath his wealth to the next generation; a generation that is unknown to him and lies beyond his influence. Man's constrained ability to forestall or even to foresee death prevents him from planning his life and directing it based on the principle of natural retribution; Forti, "Cause-Consequence," 319.

evil" (5:12–16),[60] and God himself (2:20–23; 1:1–6). All of these may prevent man from enjoying his wealth.[61] The natural order is therefore disrupted: humanity may labor wisely while studying wisdom and following its dictates, yet still does not attain lasting gains nor experience pleasure.[62] The reflections in these passages suggest that the premise of natural retribution upon which humanity would rely does not stand the test of experience.[63] Death impairs and controverts the regulated order of reality, and factors beyond a person's control nullify and subvert his ability to reap the benefits of his labor in his lifetime.[64] By casting doubt upon the causal relation between labor and enjoyment, the author undermines the function of didactic wisdom in instructing humanity to harmonize their behavior with the tenets of causality.[65]

The concluding reflective passage (9:11–12) recapitulates the theme of humanity's inability to rely with confidence on natural order due to the unstable correlation between labor and the ability to enjoy its results.[66] The message of this passage is that there is no requisite relationship between cause and consequence.[67] The pas-

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[60] It is possible that the evil is intrinsic to the wealth itself; instead of being propitious for man, it might be beget misfortune or cause his death. The evil might also inhere in the loss of the wealth itself; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 252; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 206.

[61] Seow, *Ecclesiastes,* 210; Ogden, *Qoheleth,* 90–91.

[62] Fox, *Book of Qoheleth,* 62. The premise of order gave the sages a sense of security and certainty in the existence of a world order that is just and beneficial to man. There is no disputing the fact that the sages were aware of their conception's vulnerabilities and they spoke of the inability of mortals to prognosticate, yet ultimately, their conviction was predicated upon the belief that sooner or later order would prevail.

[63] Fox, *Time*, 36–37.

[64] Fox, *Time,* 48–49.

[65] The wisdom sayings of the book of Proverbs are grounded in the assumption that wisdom can bestow wealth and happiness and guarantee their endurance, on the condition that mortals acquire wisdom and adhere to its principles. Whoever conforms to the laws of wisdom and acts in accordance with the universal order, will merit supreme remuneration: a long and happy life along with material prosperity, honor and a fine reputation. Whoever acts in contravention of and in dissonance with these rules and logic will not flourish. "For he who finds me find life and obtains favor from the Lord. But he who misses me destroys himself; all who hate me love death" (Prov 8:35–36); W. Zimmerli, "Concerning the Structure of Old Testament Wisdom," in J.L. Crenshaw (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (New York: KTAV, 1976), 175–207 (176–80).

[66] On the structure of the passage, see Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 155; T. Forti, *Animal Imagery in Wisdom Literature: Rhetorical and Hermeneutical Aspects* (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 2000), 12 (Hebrew).

[67] This testimony diverges from the premises of traditional wisdom that were optimistic regarding human aptitude for success in the areas of wisdom and skills: "Good sense wins favor; the way of treacherous man is unchanging" (Prov 13:15) "Do not love sleep lest you be impoverished; keep your eyes open and you will have plenty of food" (Prov 20:13); Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 93.

sage closes with a metaphor that likens humans to weak animals that become entangled in nets and snares. In the same manner that suddenness characterizes the ensnarement of fish and birds, unexpected death forcibly undercuts the premise of world order.[68]

In examining the "Labor versus Pleasure" passages in sequence, we may note that the inclusio contains passages that describe how factors over which man exerts no control subvert the relationship between labor and enjoyment. The center contains passages depicting how human factors impair a person's ability to enjoy the fruits of his labor. The following outline demonstrates this distribution.

Table 3: The "Labor Versus Pleasure" Passages-Examination of the Sequence

7th passage: 2:18–19	Factor beyond human control, Death
8th ": 2:20–23	Factor beyond human control, God
15th ": 4:1–3	Human-controlled factors, Oppression
16th ": 4:4–6	Human-controlled factor, Envy
17th ": 4:7–12	Human-controlled factor, Greed
18th ": 4:13–16	Human-controlled factor, False hope
19th ": 5:12–16	Factor beyond human control, Unforeseen circumstances
21st ": 6:1–6	Factor beyond human control, God

3.2. "Human versus Divine" Endeavors

Nine additional passages feature the word "God" (*Elohim*). The *leitwort* of these passages is the root ע"שה.[69] The *leitwort* "God" (*Elohim*) and the root ע.ש.ה reflect the content of the nine passages, which deal with the disparity between human and divine endeavors, as well as the question of divine retribution. The nine passages and their distinguishing *leitworts* are outlined in the following table.

[68] Forti likens this passage to Amos 2:14–15, since both passages describe occasions that convey the abruption of the causal relationship; see Forti, "Cause-Consequence," 317–20.

[69] The root ע.ש.ה also appears in two passages that are not included in this group. Passage fifteen (4:1–3) "that goes on . . . the miseries," and in the sixteenth passage (4:4–6) "skillful enterprise." The word *Elohim* appears outside this group in passage twenty one (6:1–6) "that God sometimes grants a man."

Table 4: The "Human Versus Divine" Passages-Semantic Fields

	The noun "God" (*Elohim*)	**The root ע.ש.ה**
(1) 10th pass. (3:10–11)	*God* gave . . . *God* brings to pass	עשה . . . המעשה אשר עשה
(2) 11th pass. (3:14–15)	*God* . . . and *God* . . . and *God*	יעשה האלוהים
(3) 13th pass. (3:16–17)	*God* will doom . . .	ועל כל המעשה שם
(4) 14th pass. (3:18–22)	From the *divine beings* . . .	האדם במעשיו
(5) 22nd pass. (7:15–22)	One who fears *God*	אשר יעשה
(6) 23rd pass. (7:23–29)	He who is pleasing to *God*	עשה האלוהים
(7) 24th pass. (8:9–14)	Those who revere *God*	מעשה . . . נעשה . . . נעשה . . . מעשה . . . מעשה
(8) 26th pass. (8:16–17)	All that *God* brings to pass	אשר נעשה . . . המעשה אשר נעשה
(9) 28th pass. (9:1–10)	*God*	נעשה . . . נעשה . . . מעשיך . . לעשות בכוחך . . . עשה כי אין מעשה

These nine passages that deal with the various facets of the relationship between divine and human action present the author's view of reality from the perspective of the divine-law conceptual format that correlates closely with the principle of divine retribution. A close reading of their contents reveals that they fall into two main classifications.

In four passages (3:10–1; 3:14–15; 3:16–17; 8:16–17), the author depicts the various realms within which the discrepancy between divine and human endeavors is exposed. These include the temporal realm: God's view of eternity versus humanity's finite perspective (3:10–11),[70] the realm of action and enterprise: Divine permanence versus human transience (3:14–15),[71] the realm of law and justice: God's righteous judgment versus humanity's corruption (3:16–17),[72] and the realm of reason: Divine inscrutability versus human limitation of apprehension (3:16–17). These passages reveal that humanity in general, and the wise man in particular, is unable to decipher the logic behind divine endeavors and divine will. The chasm between the absolute, immutable, just, yet inscrutable endeavors of God and human endeavors cannot be bridged.[73] This divide casts a heavy shadow on the authority of didactic wis-

[70] Fox, *Time*, 209–10; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 163; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 55.
[71] Fox, *Time*, 213; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 174; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 35.
[72] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 36; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 125.
[73] Fox, *Time*, 288–89; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 298; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 86.

dom and undermines its preconception regarding a mortal's ability to comprehend divine actions.[74] The "comfortable" perception of God as subject to logic that is coherent to the wise is transformed, in the author's outlook, into one marked by fear and trepidation of an omnipotent, distant, capricious and inscrutable ruler.

In another four passages (3:18–22; 7:15–22; 7:23–29; 8:9–14), the author confronts humanity's struggle with the divine-human gap and the implications of this difficulty for human understanding and moral life. These difficulties include ignorance of the fate of human beings after death, the lack of advantage afforded to humankind over animals in this respect (3:18–22),[75] an imbalanced approach to divine retribution with humans either "overdoing righteousness" or "overdoing wickedness" (7:15–22), a failed attempt to understand evil in the world including wickedness, folly, foolishness and madness—despite much investigation (7:23–29), and lack of motivation for moral living due to the apparent inconsistency of divine justice, i.e., the disconcerting reality of wicked men prospering and righteous ones suffering (8:9–14).[76]

The concluding reflective passage (9:1–10) recapitulates the notion that the divine-human gap both cannot be bridged and is incomprehensible to mortals, as are the repercussions of this difficulty for human conduct. Since death does not discriminate between those who worship God and those who do not, a person cannot know if he is loved or hated by God. As a result, humans may have little incentive for performing worthy acts.[77] Qoheleth's conclusion is that the causal relationship between human action and divine retribution has no basis in experience.

In all these passages the author discusses the human struggle to fathom the relationship between divine and human endeavors, with the spotlight now cast on the problem of divine retribution. The conclusion is that all attempts to harmonize human behavior and divine will for human gain are doomed to failure. The emphasis on man's inability to fathom divine endeavors and how they relate to human actions challenges the assumption of didactic wisdom, according to which God's ways, while exalted above those of man, constitute a clear and consistent response to human action.

Turning our attention to the "divine law" sequences, we discover that the *inclusio* contains passages dealing with the gulf between humanity and God in various realms. The center consists

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[74] These ideas are articulated in Proverbs, among other writings: "My son, heed and take in my words and you will have many years of life" (Prov 4:10). The wise men promise their audience a smooth and clear road to divine knowledge, success and tranquility: "My son if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments. If you make your ears attentive to wisdom and your mind open to discernment . . . then you will understand the fear of the Lord and attain knowledge of God" (2:1–6).

[75] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 176; Longman*, Ecclesiastes*, 128.

[76] Fox, *Time*, 283–86; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 85–86. For discussion of the nature of the situation depicted in the passage, see Fox, *Time*, 283.

[77] Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 150; Forti, *Animal Imagery*, 124.

of those passages focusing on man's attempts to wrestle with this disparity (collectively labeled "the difficulty"). The following outline demonstrates this distribution.

Table 5: "Human Versus Divine" Passages-Examination of the Sequence

10th passage: 3:10–11	Divine-human gulf, Temporal
12th ": 3:14–15	Divine-human gulf, Enterprise
13th ": 3:16–17	Divine-human gulf, Justice
14th ": 3:18–22	The difficulty
22nd ": 7:15–22	The difficulty
23rd ": 7:23–29	The difficulty
24th ": 8:9–14	The difficulty
26th ": 8:16–17	Divine-human gulf, Reason

3.3. The "Exhortation to Enjoy Life" Passages

Four additional reflective passages combine characteristics of the two semantic fields mentioned above. They contain, on the one hand, words associated with the semantic fields of labor and enjoyment, while at the same time they reference "God" (*Elohim*). *Table 6* below exposits the passages and their characteristics.

These unique passages are classified by scholars as Qoheleth's "exhortation to enjoy life"-*Carpe Diem*.[78] In these passages, the author encourages man to live for the moment and to maximize

[78] Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 106. There are two other places where we find similar ideas (9:7–10; 11:7–10), but the recurring elements set forth above do not appear in the same order; or, alternatively, we find elements that do not appear in the four calls cited above; see Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 27. Biblical exegetes are divided as to the meaning of these exhortations and their function within the whole discourse. One exegetical direction interprets these exhortations as reflecting the author's contention that humanity should relish the meager and transient pleasures of a world governed by absurdity. Proponents of this reading believe that these exhortations articulate a pessimistic approach and constitute "pain relief" for a pain-ridden existence; see Fox, *Time*, 129–31, 186, 239–40, 287; J.L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary* (OTL; Westminster: John Knox Press, 1987), 27; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 35, 121–22, 168. In contrast to this perspective, another exegetical approach posits that Qoheleth's essential and consistent conclusion is that these exhortations must be viewed as fundamental, all-embracing and applicable to all humankind; see Gordis, *Koheleth,* 13; N. Lohfink, "Qoheleth 5:17–19: Revelation by Joy," *CBQ* 52 (1990), 625–35; Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 49 and 22; R. Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *JSOT* 23 (1982), 87–98; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 157. Some even feel that these exhortations obfuscate the main message of the book; Salyer, *Vain Rhetoric*, 292; W.H.U. Anderson, *Qoheleth and its Pessimistic Theology: Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997), 72–73.

the offerings of the present. To eat and drink, to enjoy his work: "afford himself enjoyment with his means" (2:24); "get enjoyment out of all his wealth" (3:13); "get pleasure with all the gains he makes under the sun" (5:17); "for the only good a man can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy himself" (8:15).

Table 6: The "Exhortation to Enjoy Life" Passages-Semantic Fields

	"God"	**Labor and its products**	**Pleasure and happiness**
9th pass. (2:24–26)	Comes from *God* . . . pleasing to *God*	With his *means*	Afford himself *enjoyment* . . . to *enjoy* himself
11th pass. (3:12–13)	It is a gift of *God*	His *wealth*	*Enjoy* themselves . . . get *enjoyment*
12th pass. (5:17–19)	That *God* . . . by *God* . . . that is a gift of *God* . . . because *God*	With all the *gains* he *makes* . . . *riches and property* . . . get pleasure from his *gains*	Get *pleasure* with all the gains. . . get *pleasure* from his gains . . . *enjoying himself*
25th pass. (8:15)	That *God* has granted him	That much can accompany him in *exchange for his wealth*	*Enjoyment*

Examination of their distribution reveals that Qoheleth's exhortations to enjoy life appear within or adjacent to the passages that depict the realms to which man is subject by virtue of the absoluteness of God's governance of the world, namely the inclusio passages, i.e., those dealing with factors beyond man's control. The following table sets out the passages and their distribution.

Table 7: Distribution of the "Exhortation to Enjoy Life" Passages

Labor versus Pleasure	
7th passage: 2:18–19	Factor beyond human control, Death
8th ": 2:20–23	Factor beyond human control, God
9th ": 2:24–26	Exhortation to enjoy life
15th ": 4:1–3	Human-controlled factor, Oppression
16th ": 4:4–6	Human-controlled factor, Envy
17th ": 4:7–12	Human-controlled factor, Greed
18th ": 4:13–16	Human-controlled factor, False hope
19th ": 5:12–16	Factor beyond human control, Grave evil
20th ": 5:17–19	Exhortation to enjoy life
21st ": 6:1–6	Factor beyond human control, God
Human versus Divine Endeavors	
10th ": 3:10–11	Divine-human gulf, Temporal
11th ": 3:12–13	Exhortation to enjoy life
12th ": 3:14–15	Divine-human gulf, Enterprise
13th ": 3:16–17	Divine-human gulf, Justice
14th ": 3:18–22	The difficulty
22nd ": 7:15–22	The difficulty
23rd ": 7:23–29	The difficulty
24th ": 8:9–14	The difficulty
25th ": 8:15	Exhortation to enjoy life
26th ": 8:16–17	Divine-human gulf, Reason

As we can see from this Table, the "exhortations to enjoy life" are meticulously and consciously placed in the midst of passages in which the author challenges the human drive to receive rewards in life, either by highlighting factors beyond human control that destroy human aspirations or by underscoring the gap between the absoluteness of God and the limitations of man. We may thus understand these exhortations as the author's instructions for living in a world in which the premise of world order does not operate consistently. In his view, man should rejoice in his present lot without striving for gain and future recompense, which he may, in fact, never enjoy. The author asserts that the experience of enjoyment is intrinsically valuable in and of itself, irrespective of the cause/consequence framework. Additionally, humanity must recognize that their existence is in the hands of a sovereign God who

is unfettered by the laws of causation and can revoke them at will. Divine benevolence is not an action in the realm of cause and consequence but rather an extension of free will.[79] Humanity must thus acknowledge the divine, sovereign power which endows each person with his portion in life and exult in it; to understand this Power, however, or bridge the divine-human gap, is beyond the ability of mortals.

4. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE TWENTY-TWO REFLECTIVE PASSAGES IN THE MAIN BODY OF THE BOOK

Close reading of the distribution of the twenty-two reflective passages contained within the book's core reveals that they are arranged in four sequences throughout the book. The first and third sequences contain passages associated with the "natural law" conceptual format. Those passages deal with labor and humanity's ability to reap its fruits. The second and fourth sequences contain passages relating to the "divine law" conceptual form: the disparity between divine and human endeavors. The preoccupation with these two topics is far from random. On the contrary, it is meticulously arranged. The twenty-two passages may be divided into four passage sequences in which the author repeatedly alternates between treatment of one issue and treatment of the other. Each of the sequences invokes an exhortation to enjoy life's pleasures.[80] The two final reflective passages conclude the discussion of Qoheleth's two main concerns. Passage twenty-seven (9:1–10) recapitulates the theme of divine and human endeavors, while passage twenty-eight (9:11–12) sums up the theme of labor and enjoyment. These two reflective passages embody a number of unique characteristics: both provide numerous examples incorporated as an itemized list, and both include zoomorphic imagery. *Table 8* below demonstrates each of the sequences and their "exhortation to enjoy life."

The book's two-fold thematic discussion is crafted to mimic the movement of a pendulum, oscillating between two poles. This pendulum-like motion reflects the content and the relationship between the two conceptual formats that derive from the premise of world order within wisdom literature. The nine passages dealing with labor and the question of man's ability to enjoy its fruits examine reality through the natural-law conceptual format that supports natural retribution. The nine passages dealing with the relationship between divine and human endeavors examine reality from the perspective of the divine-law conceptual format that supports divine retribution. This pendulum-like motion reflects the shared purpose of the two conceptual formats: to examine the

[79] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes,* 27; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 109.

[80] See also H.L. Ginsberg, "The Structure and Contents of the Book of Koheleth," in M. Noth and D. Thomas (eds.), *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (VTSup, 3; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 139.

premise of world order and to challenge the notion that it is possible to extract gain by relying on this premise.

Table 8: Distribution of the Twenty-Two Reflective Passages

1. First Sequence: Labor and Pleasure

7th passage, 2:18–19

8th ", 2:20–23

9th ", 2:24–26: *Exhortation to enjoy life*

2. Second Sequence: Human versus Divine Endeavors

10th passage, 3:10–11

11th ", 3:12–13: *Exhortation to enjoy life*

12th ", 3:14–15

13th ", 3:16–17

14th ", 3:18–22

3. Third Sequence: Labor and Pleasure

15th passage, 4:1–3

16th ", 4:4–6

17th ", 4:7–12

18th ", 4:13–16

19th ", 5:12–16

20th ", 5:17–19: *Exhortation to enjoy life*

21st ", 6:1–6

4. Fourth Sequence: Human versus Divine Endeavors

22nd passage, 7:15–22

23rd ", 7:23–29

24th ", 8:9–14

25th ", 8:15: *Exhortation to enjoy life*

26th ", 8:16–17

Summary: Human versus Divine Endeavors

27th passage, 9:1–10

Summary: Labor and Pleasure

28th passage, 9:11–12

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have analyzed the content and pattern of distribution of the reflective passages throughout the book of Qoheleth, arguing that they form an independent composition. Zeroing in on the reflective passages, examining their content as well as the manner in which they are distributed, I have sought to demonstrate that, through the twenty-two passages that comprise the book's core, the author develops a systematic line of reasoning concerning the premise of world order and posits an alternative objective and way of life. These findings strengthen the theory that the book of Qoheleth is the result of a compositional process; they also support Coppens' argument that the reflective passages are the core and initial composition of the book of Qoheleth and that they exemplify a content-driven process. However, the question regarding the exact relationship between the various reflective passages in their present sequence still remains. This fascinating question deserves further treatment, but is beyond the scope of the present article.