

Meteorological Views in Qohelet 1:6-7

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ABSTRACT

Qohelet 1:4-7 is intended to demonstrate that permanent phenomena exist on earth, and thereby crystallize the question posed in 1:3. The context of Aristotle's Meteorology provides a convenient framework for explaining the meteorological references in vv. 6-7. Within this context, v. 4a represents the beat of time; v. 6a serves double duty, referring to both sun and wind; v. 6b deals with change in wind direction associated with sun's movement to its solstices; and, v. 7 might have in its background an evaporation process. It is likely that Qohelet was familiar with views that were similar to those of Aristotle in Meteorology. If he shared these views, then he adopted positions that were at variance with the normative biblical perceptions.

A INTRODUCTION

At the very beginning of his book Qohelet poses the major question that he intends to discuss: "What profit does man have in all his toil at which he labors under the sun?" The unit Qoh 1:4-7 which follows, however, appears completely unrelated to this question.¹ In 1:4-7 Qohelet essentially makes statements about the cyclical nature of some natural phenomena. He notes the cyclical nature in human existence, the inertness of the earth, the rising and setting of the sun, the cyclical nature of winds, and the flow of rivers to the sea. In particular, with respect to winds and flow of rivers Qohelet says:

*Southward blowing, turning northward
Ever turning blows the wind;
On it rounds the wind returns.
All the streams flow into the sea
Yet the sea is never full;
To the place [from] which they flow
The streams flow again. (NJPS)*

הוֹלֶךְ אֶל-דָּרוֹם וַסְׁבַּב אֶל-צְפֹן
סְׁבַּב | סְׁבַּב הוֹלֶךְ הַרוֹחַ
וְעַל-סְׁבִּיבָתָיו שָׁב הַרוֹחַ
בְּלִיהְנְחָלִים הַלְּכִים אֶל-הַיִם
וְהַיִם אֲנִינוּ מְלָא
אֶל-מָקוֹם שְׁהַנְּחָלִים הַלְּכִים
שֶׁם הֵם שָׁבִים לְלִכָּת

Commentators explicitly or implicitly tried to suggest that the unit 1:4-7 alludes to the thesis that Qohelet is about to propose in his book, in response to the question that he posed. Just as the "endless, wearisome repetitions" of the movements of wind and streams flowing to the sea accomplishes nothing, so

¹ Pierre Auffret, "Rien du tout de nouveau sous le soleil": Etude structurelle de Qoh 1,4-11," *FO* 26 (1989): 145-166. Auffret discusses the structure of 1:4-7 within the larger unit 1:4-11. Cf. also Oswald Loretz, "Anfänge jüdischer Philosophie nach Qoheleth 1,1-11 und 3,1-15," *UF* 23 (1991): 223-244.

too man's toil achieves nothing.² Is this indeed the case? Was this the only purpose that dictated Qohelet's choice of the particular examples in the unit? If Delitzsch is correct, and "Die Beispiele sind sinnen gewählt und geordnet," what is the underlying thematic logic?³ For instance, one notes that in v. 4 Qohelet deals with *earth* (הָרָץ), in v. 5 with *fire* (הַשְׁמֶשׁ), in v. 6 with *air* (הַרוֹחַ), and in v. 7 with *water* (הַנְּחָלִים). Was his choice of the examples in 1:4-7 guided by the four elements: *fire, air, water* and *earth*? Aristotle also begins his book *Meteorology* mentioning the four elements.⁴ Did Qohelet allude in this choice to his intent to adopt a scientific approach? Was he familiar with Aristotle's work? Did he in 1:4-7 try to sharpen his major question, allude to the answer, or both?

Whybray argued that the examples in 1:4-7

are not intended to show the futility of these phenomena, but only their regularity—or, more precisely, the limitations imposed on them by their allotted natures and functions, which necessitate their constant cyclical repetition. Not a word is said about their futility: on the contrary, the reader is implicitly invited to regard their activity with wonder and admiration.⁵

While Whybray might be right that Qohelet's intent is demonstration of regularity, he fails in not providing a contextual relevance for this regularity. Also, one may well question the purpose of eliciting "wonder and admiration" at this point in the book.

In particular, commentators are divided on whether in v. 6 the flow of the wind is fixed or meandering, and whether v. 7 presents a *unidirectional* or *cyclical* flow of rivers. Does Qohelet say that the winds meander but in main flow in a fixed direction? Or, does he imply that the prevailing winds have a

² So do, for instance, Moses Stuart, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1851), 112; George A. Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908), 71; Robert Gordis, *Koheleth, the Man and his World: A Study of Ecclesiastes* (3rd ed.; New York: Schocken, 1968), 206.

³ Franz Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth* (BKAT 4; Leipzig: Dorffling & Franke, 1875), 230.

⁴ Aristotle, *Meteorology* Book I, Part 2, lines 1-2. (trans. E.W. Webster; c. 350 B.C.E.; [accessed 30 March 2012].) Online: <http://clasics.mit.edu/Aristotle/Meteorology.html>. Aristotle says: "We have already laid down that there is one physical element which makes up the system of the bodies that move in a circle, and besides this four bodies owing their existence to the four principles, the motion of these latter bodies being of two kinds: either from the centre or to the centre. These four bodies are fire, air, water, earth."

⁵ Roger N. Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.4-7 and the Wonders of Nature," *JSOT* 41 (1988): 105.

fixed north-south direction? Does Qohelet say that the rivers flowing to the sea accomplish nothing by emptying their waters into the sea? Or, does he imply a process that maintains a continuous flow of waters into sea without causing overflow? What is the role of cyclical in Qohelet's perception of natural phenomena? Understanding Qohelet's thinking on these natural phenomena would certainly be helpful for the interpretation of the Qohelet text.

The unit 1:4-7 is generally understood as dealing with the futility of human life, which Qohelet compares to the equally futile endless repetitions observable in nature. The purpose of this paper is to suggest that such a perspective of 1:4-7 can be questioned. In particular, it delves into Qohelet's understanding of the wind motion and the constant flow of streams into the sea vis-à-vis the traditional biblical view of these phenomena, showing that Qohelet was more attuned with Aristotle's theory in *Meteorology*, than the normative biblical views.

B ANALYSIS

1 Wind

Qohelet states that the wind blows from the north to the south and from the south to the north. Most commentators note that this statement cannot possibly reflect the situation in Judea. For instance, Barton observes: "The Palestinian winds are mostly from the west, and are quite as likely to be from the east as from the north or south."⁶ Judean farmers were probably intimately familiar with the wind patterns in their land. Chaplin reported:

In no country are the health and comfort of the inhabitants, and the fruitfulness of the soil, more immediately and obviously influenced by the character and direction of the wind than in Palestine. The north wind is *cold*, the south *warm*, the east *dry*, and the west *moist*; and the winds from the immediate quarters partake of these characteristics in a degree corresponding to their nearness to the cardinal points; the north-east wind is cold and dry, the north-west is cold and moist, the south-east hot and dry, and so on.⁷

Indeed, in the ancient near-east the direction of the winds served for a long time in lieu of the "cardinal" astronomical directions North, East, South, and West.⁸

⁶ Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 71.

⁷ Thomas Chaplin, *Palestine Exploration Fund: Quarterly Statement* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, January 1883), 23.

⁸ Jehuda Neumann, "The Winds in the World of the Ancient Mesopotamian Civilizations," *Bull. Amer. Meteor. Soc.* 58/10 (1977): 1050–1055. Neumann says: "The ancient Mesopotamian civilizations (Sumer, Akkad, Assyria, and Babylonia), reaching back to before 3000 B.C., did not develop or possess the notion of the 'cardinal'

Were the wind patterns in Jerusalem predominantly from north to south and *vice versa*? That has been proven not to be the case. Goldreich notes that: "Ganor (1971) in a study for Jerusalem reported that about 70% of the winds are westerly (43.1%) and north-westerly (26.3%). Northerly winds have a 2.6% frequency."⁹ Why did Qohelet make a statement that he likely knew was incorrect?

It is possible that knowledge of the wind directions in Judea compelled the Versions (Septuagint, Targum, Peshitta, and Vulgate) to understand v. 6a as referring to the sun instead of to the wind.¹⁰ Rashi (1040-1105) adopts this view, taking *רוח* as "will, intention" (of the sun).¹¹ Rashbam (c. 1085-1174) follows in the steps of his grandfather, but understands *רוח* as "direction."¹² Kara (second part of 11th century- first part of 12th century) notes that the opinion of Jewish sages is that v. 6a describes the sun.¹³ However, Ibn Ezra (1089-c. 1164) who notes the view that v. 6 refers to the sun flatly rejects it, and so does Ramban (1194-1270). Among more modern exegetes Graetz stands out in his adherence to the view of the versions. He says:

astronomical directions—N, E, S, and W—until the relatively late date of about 700 B.C., in contrast to the Creek and Hebrew civilizations of antiquity. Instead, orientation was determined by the directions of four principal winds, namely, the 'regular wind,' the 'mountain wind,' the 'cloud wind,' and the 'Amorite wind.' In terms of our notation, these could be described as, respectively, a NW, a NE, a SE, and a SW wind or as winds from the northwesterly, the northeasterly, etc., quarters. Even astronomical features were indicated (mainly before 700 B.C.) in terms of the directions of the principal winds. In the Assyro-Babylonian language the same word designated a principal wind and the direction from which that wind blows."

⁹ Yair Goldreich, *The Climate of Israel: Observation, Research, and Application* (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2003), 222. Cf. Eliezer Ganor, "איתור איזור תעשייה" ב"ירושלים בהתאם למושט רוחות הקרה" *Meteorologia BeIsrael* 8 (1971): 6-21; Efraim Orni and Elisha Efrat, *Geography of Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translations, 1964), 101-4.

¹⁰ The Septuagint has ὁύτος ἀνατέλλων ἐκεῖ πορεύεται πρὸς Νότον καὶ κυκλοῦ πρὸς Βορρᾶν; Targum, referring to the sun, explains אָזֵל כִּל סְטֵר דָּרָמָה בִּימָמָא וּמְחוֹר לְסְטֵר צְפּוֹנָא בְּלִילְיָא; and the Vulgate renders *gyrat per meridiem et flectitur ad aquilonem lustrans universa*.

¹¹ Rashi explains: *רוחו של שמש טלנט* (talant, Fr.) בלא"ז.

¹² Sara Japhet and Robert B. Salters, *The Commentary of R. Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on Qoheleth* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 72.

¹³ Berthold Einstein, *R. Josef Kara und sein Kommentar zu Kohelet* (Berlin: Ud. Mampe, 1886), Hebrew Part B, 5-6. Kara says:

זה שאינו נראה בלילה לפי שהולך אל דרום אפיו ביום קצר וסובב אל צפון בלילה מאחורי כיפה למעלה בדברי חכמי ישראל ולדברי חכמי אומות העולם מאחורי כיפה ולמטה לפיכך לא נראה בלילה.

He apparently alludes to b. 'Erub. 56a, b. B. Bat. 25b, y. 'Erub. 87:5, and b. 'Erub. 85.

Die Sonne, welche abends untergeht (בָּא), kehrt zu ihrem Oststande zurück und geht dort wieder auf, geht dann zum Süden und kreist zum Norden: הַוְלֵךְ אֶל דָּרוֹם וּסְבוּב אֶל צָפֹן. Bis zum Worte in diesem Verse beziehen O. [Septuagint] und Syr. [Peshitta] Mit Recht auf die Sonne und erst die Wörter סְבוּב סְבוּב auf den Wind.¹⁴

It is now generally accepted that v. 6 is a case of delayed introduction of the subject (wind), and the entire verse refers to the wind. Ginsberg explains that by saying "north to south" Qohelet does not necessarily mean these two "astronomical" directions,

...because most of the winds in Eretz Israel blow to the east (westerly winds) and turn to the west (easterly winds); but south and north are favored by the author, see 11:3. Perhaps, with regard to winds it was the practice to say 'south and north' instead of 'east and west' (and the rarity of the north and south winds minimized the possibility of error); indeed we find in Prov 25:23 'a north wind produces rain,' however, in Eretz Israel rain is produced only by the sea wind (west).¹⁵

This explanation is certainly forced. How can we deduce from two verses an indication of favoritism, or of general practice? Why would it be the practice for people to incorrectly rotate the directions of the wind? Ginsberg does not explain. There are many examples in the Tanach where this practice is not adhered to (Exod 10:19, Jonah 1:4, Jer 49:36, Ezek 42:19, 37:9, Ps 89:13).

Many commentators suggested that Qohelet uses the north-south direction for the wind to complement the implied east-west direction of the sun in v. 5. For instance, Ginsburg says: "The *south* and *north* are mentioned, because the east and west have already been referred to in connection with the rising and setting of the sun, and thus all the four quarters of the earth are divided between the sun and the wind."¹⁶ It is difficult to accept that for the sake of divid-

¹⁴ Heinrich Graetz, *Kohelet* (Leipzig: C.F. Winter'sche Verlagshandlung, 1871), 56.

¹⁵ H. Louis Ginsberg, *Koheleth* (Tel Aviv: Newman, 1961), 60.

¹⁶ So do, for instance, Christian D. Ginsburg, *Coheleth* (London: Longman, 1861), 262; Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Smith, English & Co., 1869), 52; Ferdinand Hitzig, and Wiliam Nowack, *Der Prediger Salomos erklart* (2nd ed. KEHAT 7; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1883), 210; Stuart, *Commentary*, 114; Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 71; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 206; Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 70; Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Yale University, 2008), 108; Mordechai Zer-Kavod, "קָהָלָת," in *חַמְשׁ מְגִילּוֹת* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1973), 2. Seow thinks that Qohelet refers to "winds blowing from the north (properly the northwest) and from the south (properly the southeast). The north wind, coming from the Mediterranean (that is, northwest to southeast) is cold and brings rain (Sir 43:20; Prov 25:23; Job 37:9). This wind is typical of the win-

ing the four directions between the sun and the wind Qohelet would consciously introduce an error into his book. Moreover, why should the sun and wind divide the four directions among them? Plumptre says: “‘South and north’ only are named, partly, perhaps, because east and west were implied in the sunrise and sunset of the previous verse, more probably because these were the prevailing currents of air in Palestine.”¹⁷ He was certainly wrong about the prevailing winds in Judea.

Delitzsch says that in the case of the wind the direction of the movement does not have the exclusivity attributed to the sun. The statement about the north-south direction requires the generalization “circling, circling goes the wind” to capture the reality of the occurrence. He says,

Daß der Wind von Süden (דָּרוֹם Region des intensivsten Lichts) nach Norden (צָפֹן v. צָפֵן Region des Dunkels) geht, gilt von diesem doch nicht so ausschließlich wie von der Sonne daß sie von Osten nach Westen geht: diese Aussage bedarf der Verallgemeinerung: ‘kreisend kreisend geht der Wind’ d. h. nach allen Himmelsgegenden, bald nach dieser bald nach sich wendend; denn die Wiederholung will sagen, daß die Bewegung im Kreisbogen alle Möglichkeiten erschöpft.¹⁸

Similarly Wright argues that the clause “circling, circling goes the wind” proves that: “the winds were not conceived by the writer as blowing only from north and south, but as blowing from all quarters of the heaven.”¹⁹ In this case one might wonder why specifically the north-south direction was mentioned. Siegfried seems to suggest that the verse should have included also the east-west direction but the author for some reason did not include it.²⁰ Why then did he include the least frequent wind direction?

Crenshaw argues that Qohelet should be granted a degree of poetical license. He says: “Poetic imagery must not be pressed in so literalist a fashion. The author engages in a little exaggeration for maximum effect. In his view the relentless blowing of the wind was no more effectual than the sun’s daily round

ter season. The south wind, blowing from the desert (that is, from the southeast to the northwest), is dry and hot (Job 37:17; Luke 12:55).”

¹⁷ Edward H. Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes: Or, the Preacher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1881), 106. Plumptre quotes in support of his view Song 4:16, Wis 43:20, and Luke 12:55. However, these verses do not attest to the frequency of winds in Judea.

¹⁸ Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth*, 230.

¹⁹ Charles H.H. Wright, *The Book of Koheleth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888), 310-11.

²⁰ D.C Siegfried, *Prediger und Hoheslied* (HAT II, 3/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898), 29.

or the passing and coming of countless generations."²¹ This is no "little exaggeration" but a ninety degree turn. The frequency of the wind from the north is only about three percent. How does this turn achieve "maximum effect"? Why is north-south more impressive than east-west?

A number of commentators suggested that v. 6 expresses the image of a seemingly random movement of air with an overall fixed direction. For instance, Knobel says: "Sinn: In immer neuen Wendungen geht (the wind, unaufhörlich nimmt er neue Richtungen und gleichwohl kommt er am Ende doch wieder auf die alte Bahn.)" סובב סבב הולך

More recently, Fox expressed the same notion saying: "The wind, which might well be perceived as wandering aimlessly, in Qohelet's vision follows a fixed circuit."²² What about the particulars of this motion? Why does Qohelet specifically mention the north south axis? Fox does not explain. Zapletal deletes v. 6a because of metrical considerations.²³ However, one wonders how compelling could be Zapletal's rationale in a book such as Qohelet. Barton notes that "metrical theory seems too insecure to support such a deletion."²⁴

The textual analysis of v. 6 focused on the use of the delayed subject (wind) and the repetitive use of participles. Crenshaw says:

The withholding of the subject is the most striking stylistic feature of this verse. The subject was the opening word in 1:4 and the second word in 1:5, but 1:6 holds it in abeyance until five participles have made an appearance. ... Another stylistic characteristic of this verse is the repeated use of two participles, סובב and הולך. The threefold occurrence of סובב and two fold use of הולך serve to simulate the feeling of restlessness generated by the constant blowing of the wind. This sense of being caught in a rut reaches its peak in three successive participles סובב סבב הולך just before the subject הרוח is introduced. Even the next clause returns to this relentless

²¹ James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (Westminster, John Knox Press, 1987), 65.

²² So think also, for instance, August Knobel, *Commentar über das Buch Koheleth* (Leipzig: Verlag von Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1836), 115; Ernst Elster, *Prediger Salamo* (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1855), 42; D. Geret Wildeboer, "Der Prediger," in Karl Budde, Alfred Bertholet and D. Geret Wildeboer, *Die fünf Megillot* (KHC 17; Freiburg: Mohr, 1898), 124; Marcus A. Jastrow Jr., *A Gentle Cynic: Being a Translation of the Book of Koheleth* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1919), 202, note 5); Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and A Time to Build Up* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 166; Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.4-11," 108.

²³ Vincenz Zapletal, *Das Buch Kohelet* (Freiburg: O. Gschwend, 1911), 95-96. He says that v. 6a: "passen nicht zum übrigen Metrum, da sie drei zweihebige Stichen bilden. Sie sind ein Einschub, der das ungewöhnliche שָׁאַל mehr oder weniger gut erklärt."

²⁴ Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 74.

striving for sameness, for it repeats the subject **הרוח** and employs a form of the root **סבב**.

Repetition of the same word is not unusual in the Tanach as, for instance, the following cases show: Gen 14:10, 39:10; Exod 16:5, 23:30; Num 3:9, 8:16, 17:28; Deut 2:27, 14:22, 16:20, 28:43; Ps 61:9, 68:20; Prov 8:30. The phrase **סבב סביב** occurs in Ezekiel at least 24 times. However, the *qal* participle of **סבב** is repeated only in our verse. A word is usually repeated for emphasis, intensity, and strengthening the expressed idea. In the last clause the same effect is accomplished by combining **הולך** with **סבב**. Delitzsch understands **סבב סביבה** here as an action noun derived from **סבב**. In his view **סבב סביבה** is not adverbial (it does not mean that the wind retraces its motion backwards),²⁵ but rather the wind returns to its turning movement.²⁶

The word **דרך**, from **דרך** = “to flow,” “to give light” (based on the Arabic), is used only for “south,” mainly in Ezekiel (10 times), and once in Deut 33:23 and Job 37:17.²⁷ In the Tanach, the terms **תימן**, **נגב**, and **ימין** are usually used for “south.” Most translators take **על** to be used like **אל** or **ל**, rendering **על-סביבה** by “to its rounds.”²⁸ Indeed, Theodotion has **ἐπὶ** for **על**, and the confusion **אל / על** is well attested in the Tanach. However, in v. 6 Qohelet treats the wind as walking and wandering entity, thus “and upon its turns” would seem contextually more fitting.²⁹

The explanations provided by the commentators clearly demonstrate the difficulty of Qohelet’s statement in v. 6, and the willingness of commentators to go a long way toward harmonization of Qohelet’s statement with reality. Unfortunately their efforts are not satisfactory.

2 Flow of Rivers

Commentators are divided on whether v. 7 describes a one directional flow of rivers to the sea, or it presents an image of a cyclical process. The first interpre-

²⁵ For instance Knobel, *Commentar*, 115, says, “**סביבות** Umgebungen hier: Umkreise; er kehrt auf seinen Umkreisen zurück d. h. er macht dieselben Bahnen zurück, die er durchlaufen hat.” However, Elster, *Prediger*, 42, argues, “diese Auffassung ist deshalb nicht statthaft, weil die Kreise des Windes doch keinenfalls einen so bestimmten Punkt bezeichnen, zu welchem derselbe als rückkehrend gedacht werden könnte.”

²⁶ Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth*, 230. Similarly Siegfried, *Prediger*, 29, says, “**סבב** sonst = Umgebungen, hier Abstraktbildung zu **סובב** = Kreisbewegungen.”

²⁷ Cf. “**דרך**,” BDB: 204b.

²⁸ So do, for instance, Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 262; Siegfried, *Prediger*, 29; Zapletal, *Kohelet*, 96. For instance, Ginsburg says, “The verb **שוב**, *to return*, is here construed with the preposition **על**, *to*, as in Prov. xxvi.”

²⁹ Friedrich Ellermeier, *Qohelet* (vol. 1, part 1 of *Untersuchungen zum Buche Kohelet*; Herzberg am Harz: Jungfer, 1967), 200-201. Ellermeier argues that **על** indicates purpose, thus meaning “on account of” or “for the sake of.”

tation considers v. 7 asserting that all the natural water channels eventually empty into the sea, without causing any change in the sea level, and that they do so continually. This understanding views v. 7 as describing a phenomenon without giving a rationale for it. The second interpretation also considers v. 7 asserting that all the natural water channels eventually empty into the sea, without causing any change in the sea level. However, it adds that the rivers return to the sources of the rivers. This addition, v. 7b, can be understood as the reason for the observed unchangeable sea level. A further division among commentators who adopt the second interpretation relates to the process by means of which the waters of the rivers return to their sources. Some assume subterranean channels in the sea connected to the river sources; others stipulate evaporation from the sea, and rain as feeding the river sources.

It might seem from the preceding section that all agree on the meaning of v. 7a, and that this meaning is obvious. That is certainly not the case. Does Qohelet refer to perennial rivers, vanishing rivers, or all kinds of rivers? Does Qohelet state that the rivers eventually flow into the ocean surrounding the earth (as then believed), to land locked seas, or lakes? Do these water bodies always maintain their sea level? Does he refer to a particular sea? Qohelet, must have been familiar with the flow of the Jordan River into the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret) and then to the Dead Sea. He could have seen the changes in these seas in the rainy winters and dry summers. How could he say **מלְאָה וְהַיּוֹ אִינָנוּ?** It is surprising that commentators have not addressed these questions, to the best of my knowledge.

Delitzsch sensed that the generality of the text is *prima facie* questionable, explaining:

Der Satz: 'alle Flüsse gehen ins Meer' besteht zu Recht. Selbstverständlich meint der Verfasser nicht, daß sie alle unmittelbar dort hin abfließen, und bei dem Meere denkt er nicht an dieses oder jenes, auch nicht, wie das Targum erklärt, an den die Erde wie ein Ring umgürtenden Ocean, sondern das Meer ist gattungsbegrifflich gemeint, viell. Mit Einschluß der nicht zu Tage tretenden **תְהוֹם**. Schließt man dieses innerirdische Meer ein, so machen auch Flüsse, die sich in Höhlen, in Moore oder auch in Landseen verlaufen die keinen sichtbaren Abfluß haben, keine Ausnahme. Die Aussage geht aber zunächst auf das sichtbare Meeresbecken, welches durch diese darein mündenden Wassermassen keinen zichtlichen Zuwachsgewinnt: „das Meer, es wird nicht voll.“³⁰

Unfortunately, this explanation leaves unanswered most of the questions which were posed.

³⁰ Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth*, 231.

It seems that the older versions were influenced by a worldview of the ancient Near East that assumed the earth being surrounded by an ocean (cf. *b. 'Erub.* 22b: "the whole world is in fact surrounded by the ocean"), which has channels to the subterranean waters feeding the sources of the rivers.³¹ They interpret v. 7b to mean that the streams return to their source. For instance, Symmachus has "into the place from which the rivers flow, there they return"; Targum has "to the place where the streams flow continually, there they flow again through the channels of the sea"; Septuagint and Peshitta have "to the place from whence the rivers flow, thither they return to flow again; and Vulgate has "unto the place from whence the rivers come, they return, to flow again." Some classical Jewish exegetes (Rashi, Qara) also adopt the ancient worldview. They were followed by a number of modern commentators.³²

There were also commentators who could not accept this ancient worldview about subterranean channels. Rashbam simply highlights the continual one-direction flow of the rivers. Ibn Ezra explains that water always evaporates from the sea. The sweet water of the rivers that flow into the sea is lighter and therefore evaporates faster forming clouds, which bring rains. In his view, the rains feed the sources of the rivers. Surprisingly, the later Sforno (c. 1475-1550), does not explain v. 7. Many modern commentators adopt Ibn Ezra's explanation since it seems to agree with the modern meteorological concept of "water cycle."³³ For instance, Delitzsch explains that the rivers,

sie wo sie einmal hinfließen auch immer und immer wieder hinfließen, ohne ihren Lauf zu ändern, nämlich in das allesverschlingende und sich in Regenwolken sammelnde Wasser (Iob 36,27f.) füllt die Rinnen von neuem und der Zug der Wasser geht immer von neuem, indem sich das Alte wiederholt, in gleicher Richtung nach gleichem Ziele.³⁴

Gordis observes that: "Ibn Ezra more scientifically explains 'through evaporation.' This latter view has the advantage of suggesting a cycle for the sea, as for the sun and the wind. Linguistically, however, this is rather

³¹ The Epicurean poet Lucretius (*On the Nature of Things*, Book VI, 631-637) expresses this notion in the following words: "Lastly since earth has open pores and rare,/ And borders on the sea, and girds its shores,/ Need must its waters, as from earth to sea/ They flow, flow back again from sea to earth,/ And so the brackish taint is filtered off/ And to the source the water back distils,/ And from fresh fountains streams o'er all the fields."

³² So do, for instance, Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 263; Stuart, *Commentary*, 114; Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes*, 106; Ginsberg, *Koheleth*, 61.

³³ So do, for instance, Hengstenberg, *Commentary*, 53; Hitzig, *Prediger*, 211; Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth*, 231; Wright, *Koheleth*, 311; Fox, *Time to Tear*, 166; Young-Jin Min, "How Do the Rivers Flow? (Ecclesiastes 1,7)," *BT* 42 (1991): 230; Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 42.

³⁴ Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth*, 231.

forced."³⁵ More important is the question of Qohelet possessing a similar concept of "water cycle."³⁶ Ginsburg thought that Ibn Ezra's idea was too modern for Qohelet and the ancient Hebrews to have. He finds support for his position in Gen 7:11, Job 38:16, Prov 8:28, Eccl 40:11, and the Targum on v. 7.³⁷ Unfortunately, the quoted sources refer to the nebulous concept of "abyss" (תְהוּם), and Ecclesiasticus only states "that which is of the waters does return into the sea." Similarly Plumptre notes that:

We are apt to read into the words the theories of modern science as to the evaporation from the sea, the clouds formed by evaporation, the rain falling from the clouds and replenishing the streams. It may be questioned, however, whether that theory, which Lucretius states almost as if it were a discovery, were present to the mind of the Debator and whether he did not rather think of the water of the ocean filtering through the crevices of the earth and so feeding its wells and fountains.³⁸

As will be shown later, Ibn Ezra's explanation can be found in Aristotle's *Meteorology*, which well precedes Qohelet's time. Wright rightly notes that "Koheleth's instances are selected from common experience, and would have lost much of their force if any facts not generally known had been alluded to."³⁹

Barton insists that Qohelet wants only to express the same idea as in Aristophanes, *Clouds*, I, 1292-4, (*The sea though all the rivers flow to it, / does not increase in volume*).⁴⁰ Why does he then add v. 7b? Doesn't Aristophanes' statement convey the notion that "the flowing rivers accomplish nothing?" In Barton's view v. 7 does not allude to the notion that the streams return from the abyss by subterranean channels, or that the water returns in vapor to fall as rain, but to the continual one-direction flow that accomplishes nothing. It echoes Elster's position, that

der hier ausgesprochene Gedanke ist viel einfacher. 'Die Flüsse immer an denselben Ort' heisst hier gar nicht, dass sie immer wieder zu ihrem Quellort zurückkehren, sondern nur, dass sie immer in ein

³⁵ Gordis, *Koheleth*, 206-207. Ginsberg, *Koheleth*, 61, notes that one cannot say that clouds "flow" (תַּבְלִיל).

³⁶ It is interesting to note that the "water cycle" concept was known to R. Eliezer (end of the 1st century B.C.E.). Cf. *Gen. Rab.* 13:6 and 9, and *Qoh. Rab.* 1:13.

³⁷ Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 263.

³⁸ Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes*, 106.

³⁹ Wright, *Koheleth*, 311.

⁴⁰ Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 74. Barton notes that Aristophanes says, αὕτη μὲν (ἡ θάλαττα) οὐδὲν γίγνεται ἐπιβρέοντων τῶν ποταμῶν, πλείων. Barton takes the phrase שׁוב with ה and an infinitive to mean "to do a thing again" (Gen 30:20, Hos 11:9, Job 7:7, Ezra 9:14).

und derselben Richtung gehen, nämlich ins Meer. Dem Verfasser liegt das Auffallende grade in der Unerschöpflichkeit, mit der die Flüsse immer neue Wassermassen in das Meer führen.⁴¹

In this case, the statement "and the sea does not fill up" would be superfluous. A number of modern commentators took a similar approach.⁴²

The textual analysis of v. 7 focused on the inclusiveness of 'נהל', suitability of the **הַלֵּךְ** for streams, the definitiveness of **הַיָּם**, emendations of **שָׁם**, and the form **שׁוּב** with **לְ** and an infinitive. The term **נהל** was considered being more general than **גָּדָר**. For instance, Ginsburg says: "**נהלִים** (from **נהל**, *to run, to flow*) is better rendered *streams*, being of a much wider meaning than the expression *rivers*."⁴³ Unfortunately, the greater scope of the term makes v. 7a patently wrong. In the short unit consisting of vv. 4-7 the verb **הַלֵּךְ** is used in three different meaning: "die" (v. 4), "blow" (v. 6), and "flow" (v. 7). The meaning "flow" is well attested in the Tanach (Isa 8:6-7, Ezek 21:12, Joel 4:18), the Shiloah inscription, and Ugaritic. Sea with the article (**הַיָּם**) is usually understood being the ocean, which in antiquity was believed to surround the world. Water bodies, into which rivers flow, were believed in some way connected to this ocean. Some read **מִשְׁמָה** instead of **שָׁם**, assuming an error caused by haplography.⁴⁴ The form **שׁוּב** with **לְ** and an infinitive could mean "return to again," or indicate repetition of an action, "to return again." Thus some⁴⁵ render v. 7b "to

⁴¹ Elster, *Prediger*, 43.

⁴² For instance, Wildeboer, *Prediger*, 124, notes that, "**שָׁבִים לְלִכְתָּה** *sie gehen immer wieder*, redet durchaus nicht vom Zurückkehren der Flüsse zu ihrem (eigentlichen) Ursprung"; Graetz, *Kohelet*, 57, explicates: "dahin, wo die Flüsse gehen, kehren sie wieder zurück, um (von neuem ins Meer) zu gehen"; Knobel, *Commentar*, 116, says, "unaufhörlich machen sie die denselben Lauf ins meer"; Siegfried, *Prediger*, 29, states, "die Flüsse dagegen streben immer wieder zum Endpunkte ihres Laufe hin"; Zapletal, *Kohelet*, 96; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 74, observes that, "The source of the water is quite beside the point"; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 71, advises, "We should avoid, however, any unnecessary speculation about the mechanics of the return of the water to its origin—for instance, vaporization or underground rivers"; Zer-Kavod, "קְהַלָּת," 3, considers 7a and 7b to be parallel.

⁴³ So think, for instance, Ginsburg, *Coheleth*, 263; Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 74; Delitzsch, *Hoheslied und Koheleth*, 230-231. Zapletal, *Kohelet*, 96, thinks that Qohelet wrote **נהרִים** instead of **גָּדָרִים**. The reverse error occurs in Gen 15:18 (cf. Josh 3:15).

⁴⁴ So do, for instance, Symmachus (who has ἀφοῦ); Vulgate (who has *unde*); Zapletal, *Kohelet*, 96; Siegfried, *Prediger*, 29; Ginsberg, *Koheleth*, 61.

⁴⁵ So do, for instance, Jastrow, *Cynic*, 202; Ginsberg, *Koheleth*, 61; T. Anthony Perry, *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 58; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 61; Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.4-11," 109-110; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 60; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*.

the place from which the rivers flow they return," and others⁴⁶ render "to the place to which the rivers flow they continue to flow."

An overview of the exegesis on v. 7 impresses one with the laxity and impatience expressed by the commentators regarding the factual basis upon which Qohelet might have made his observation. There is a perceptible rush to the main idea that the continual flow of the rivers has no effect. However, disregard of the framework within which Qohelet made or adopted his statement may also undermine the correct understanding of the main idea.

C SOLUTION

The four natural phenomena considered in unit 1:4-7 deal with the earth, sun, wind, and rivers. It is difficult not to associate these subjects with the four elements of antiquity *earth, fire, air, and water*, respectively.⁴⁷ Indeed, this association has been noted by Ibn Ezra in his commentary on v. 4: "Because everything under the sun is composed of four elements, from which they were created and to which they will return, these being fire, air, water, and air, he mentioned the four."⁴⁸ Most commentators glossed over this association.⁴⁹ It seems, however, that the allusion to the four elements is significant, because it is another linkage point between the unit 1:4-7 and Aristotle's *Meteorology* (c. 350 B.C.E.). Aristotle also begins his treatise of natural phenomena by stating:

We have already laid down that there is one physical element which makes up the system of the bodies that move in a circle, and besides these four bodies owing their existence to the four principles, the

⁴⁶ So do, for instance, Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 69; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 146; Zer-Kavod, "קְהֻלָּת," 3; Fox, *Time to Tear*, 163.

⁴⁷ Michael V. Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," *JSOT* 40 (1988): 109. Fox argues that "הָרָץ here does not mean the physical earth, but humanity as a whole—'le monde' rather than 'la terre' (cf. Gen 6.11; 11.1; 1 Kgs 2.2; Ps 33.8). There is no other way in biblical Hebrew to express the concept of humanity as a unit." The permanent existence of humanity is not, however, guaranteed. The verses in Gen 8:21-22 and 9:12-17 refer only to God and a specific calamity. It is not inconceivable that a man-made disaster could destroy all of humanity. Moreover, taking *הָרָץ* = "humanity" it is difficult to see what does it share with such inanimate elements as sun, wind, and rivers. Finally, Fox suggests that "Qohelet says that the movement of generations does not change the face of humanity (just as the rivers' incessant flow into the sea does not change it). No sooner does one generation depart than another arrives to fill the gap; thus the 'world' never changes in spite of the appearance of movement." This understanding raises more questions than the verse posed originally.

⁴⁸ The Hebrew text reads:

בעבור היהת כל נמצא תחת השם מרכיב מאربע מוסדים מהם יצאו ואליהם ישובו והם האש והרוח הנח שהוא האויר והמים והארץ זכר ארבעתם

⁴⁹ Hans W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger* (KAT n.s., xvii, 4; Gutersloh: Mohn, 1963), 71; and, Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 70.

motion of these latter bodies being of two kinds: either from the centre or to the centre. These four bodies are fire, air, water, earth. Fire occupies the highest place among them all, earth the lowest, and two elements correspond to these in their relation to one another, air being nearest to fire, water to earth. The whole world surrounding the earth, then, the affections of which are our subject, is made up of these bodies.⁵⁰

What might have been Qohelet's purpose in alluding to the four fundamental elements? It is possible that by beginning his treatise in a manner similar to that of Aristotle, with the elements that are the constituents of everything, Qohelet suggests that his study is scientific. The four elements also imply permanence because the universe is permanent, as Aristotle clearly says: "Since there is necessarily some change in the whole world, but not in the way of coming into existence or perishing (for the universe is permanent)."⁵¹ This view, which Qohelet might have been familiar with, is expressed in v. 4 (הארץ וְלֹעֲלָם עַמְדָת אֵין כִּל חַדֵּשׁ תְּחַת הַשָּׁמֶן) and in v. 9b (אֵין כִּל חַדֵּשׁ תְּחַת הַשָּׁמֶן).⁵² The universe, and within it the earth, as well as its four fundamental constituents are permanent. There are things that are permanent within the scope of human experience. This notion is also illustrated by means of the examples in vv. 6-7.

In v. 6 Qohelet describes the motion of the wind. According to Ugaritic mythology Mount Zaphon was the regular place of residence for Ba'al, and a palace was built for him on the top of the mountain.⁵³ Ba'al, the head of the Canaanite pantheon, was the storm-god and as such the source of wind and rain, bringing the blessing of fruitfulness to soil. The religious significance of Mount Zaphon made it well known and consequently a useful orientation feature. Eventually Zaphon (צְפּוֹן) came into being the geographical direction "north," replacing the older Semitic concept נַמָּלֵשׁ.⁵⁴

Remnants of the Ugaritic mythology regarding Ba'al can be found in the Tanach. Ezekiel in his vision sees a storm wind coming from the north (Ezek 1:4). In Zechariah's vision the horses sent to the north abated God's wind

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Meteorology*, Book 1, Part 2, lines 1-4.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Meteorology*, Book 1, Part 14, line 33.

⁵² D.S. Margoliouth, "The Prologue of Ecclesiastes," *Expositor* 8 (1911): 467. Margoliouth says, "... the doctrine of the eternity of the world whereon Ecclesiastes bases his philosophy is such a pillar of the Aristotelian system that it is not surprising if Ecclesiastes makes some acknowledgement."

⁵³ Mount Zaphon (in Ugaritic צְפּוֹן), presently called Jabal Al-'Akr' (Bald Mountain), is located at the delta of the River Orontes, about 30 km north of the city Ugarit. In Hittite and Akadian documents this mountain (alt. 1770 meters) Khaz(z)i and consequently in the classical sources it is called Mons Casius, Κόστιον ὄπος.

⁵⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, "צְפּוֹן," *Encyclopaedia Biblic* 6:747. Cf. Otto Eissfeldt, *Baal Zaphon, Zeus Kasios und der Durchzug der Israeliten durchs Meer* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1932), 14.

(Zech 6:8).⁵⁵ In Song of Songs the north (wind) is urged to wake up and breath into the garden (Song 4:16).⁵⁶ The stormy cold winds from the north served as an implicit metaphor for the powers of destruction and evil (Isa 14:13, Jer 1:14, 4:16). They also brought rains (Prov 25:23, רוח צפון תחולל גשם).

The normative biblical perspective was that God creates the wind (Amos 4:13, ברא רוח), it is metaphorically the powerful blast of the breath of His nostrils (2 Sam 22:16, נשמת רוח אפו), or the wind originates in God's treasures (Jer 10:13, 51:16 מארתו ו יצא רוח and similarly in Ps 135:7). Winds are God's emissaries (Ps 104:4, ששה מלאכיו רוחות, cf. Exod 14:21, 15:8, 10; Num 11:31, 2 Kgs 2:16; Jon 1:4, 4:8; Ps 148:8, Job 4:9).⁵⁷ The wind was viewed as being unidirectional "passing without return" (Ps 78:39, רוח הולך ולא ישוב, cf. Hab 1:11).

Qohelet's view of the wind does not draw on the ancient Canaanite tradition nor does it reflect the normative biblical perception. With respect to the motion of winds Qohelet is "scientifically" dogmatic. Indeed, an eminent scientific philosopher as Aristotle says:

The cause of the predominance of winds from the north and from the south is the same. (Most winds, as a matter of fact, are north winds or south winds.) These are the only regions which the sun does not visit: it approaches them and recedes from them, but its course is always over the-west and the east. Hence clouds collect on either side, and when the sun approaches it provokes the moist evaporation, and when it recedes to the opposite side there are storms and rain. So summer and winter are due to the sun's motion to and from the solstices, and water ascends and falls again for the same reason. Now since most rain falls in those regions towards which and from which the sun turns and these are the north and the south, and since most evaporation must take place where there is the greatest rainfall, just as green wood gives most smoke, and since this evaporation is wind, it is natural that the most and most important winds should come from these quarters.⁵⁸

Qohelet, as Aristotle, also seems to think that most winds are north winds or south winds. The fact that in Judea such an observation would be patently wrong does not invalidate his dogmatic position, since he apparently bases it on a scientific theory as the one propounded by Aristotle. The winds are

⁵⁵ This phrase is usually rendered "done my pleasure," relying on the post-biblical concept נחת רוח "gratification."

⁵⁶ Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB 7C; New York: Doubleday, 1980), 498-500.

⁵⁷ Oswald Loretz, *Qohelet und der Alte Orient: Untersuchungen zu Stil und theologischer Thematik des Buches Qohelet* (Freiburg: Basel, 1964), 195.

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Meteorology*, Book II, Part 4, lines 31-36.

generated by unequal heating associated with the sun's position. Since the sun moves at fixed periods from solstice to solstice (i.e., in the north-south direction) and back, so would also move the winds.⁵⁹ From this perspective v. 6a has to be understood as serving double duty.⁶⁰ It refers both to the sun and to the wind, since the wind and the seasonal position of the sun are intimately connected.

This image of the fundamental meteorological process explains v. 6. Obviously, it is possible for this fundamental process to be drastically affected by local modalities. Qohelet's allusion to the four elements puts his readers on notice that his book deals with fundamental issues and processes. He is not concerned with local perturbations or temporal aberrations.

Qohelet's view of the flow of the rivers also does not draw on the ancient tradition reflected in the biblical texts. With respect to the flow of the rivers Qohelet is again "scientifically" dogmatic. The normative biblical perspective was that God rules the sea (Amos 5:8, 9:6; Ps 89:10, 95:5; Job 26:12; Nah 1:4; Hab 3:15), he sets constraints upon the waters of the sea (Jer 5:22; Ps 104:6-9; Job 38:8-11; Prov 8:29), and watches over them that they do not exceed their boundaries (Job 7:12). The reasonable conclusion from this perspective should have been that the rivers do not fill the sea because God set a boundary to them, and consequently the flow of the rivers is unidirectional. However, Qohelet seems to be stating in v. 7b that the flow of the rivers is cyclical.

As was mentioned in the analysis of the exegesis on v. 7, many understood v. 7 describing the unidirectional flow of rivers to the sea. In that case v. 7b would be a restatement of v. 7b. Since the preceding three examples describe cyclical phenomena, it is reasonable to assume that v. 7 is also of the same kind. Thus, Qohelet opted to suggest that the flow of the rivers is cyclical despite the normative biblical view; the rivers empty into the sea, yet somehow return to flow again.

What returning process might Qohelet have had in mind? Since it seems that Qohelet was familiar with Aristotle's views in *Meteorology*, it would be instructive to see what Aristotle does say. Aristotle states that:

... all rivers and all the water that is generated flow into it: for water flows into the deepest place, and the deepest part of the earth is

⁵⁹ Margoliouth, "Prologue," 468-469. Margoliouth says, "The assertion that these are the two main directions of the winds is Aristotle's, and is deduced from his meteorological system. The sun's path being from East to West, it does not *visit* the North and South but only diverges towards them."

⁶⁰ Loretz, *Anfänge*, 230. Loretz says, "Da die zweite Strophe vom Wind handelt, ist anzunehmen, daß ein Schreiber **הרוּחַ** versehentlich ausgelassen hat." I suggest that the absence of **הרוּחַ** is intentional.

filled by the sea. Only all the light and sweet part of it is quickly carried off by the sun, while the rest remains for the reason we have explained. It is quite natural that some people should have been puzzled by the old question why such a mass of water leaves no trace anywhere (for the sea does not increase though innumerable and vast rivers are flowing into it every day.) But if one considers the matter the solution is easy. The same amount of water does not take as long to dry up when it is spread out as when it is gathered in a body, and indeed the difference is so great that in the one case it might persist the whole day long while in the other it might all disappear in a moment-as for instance if one were to spread out a cup of water over a large table. This is the case with the rivers: all the time they are flowing their water forms a compact mass, but when it arrives at a vast wide place it quickly and imperceptibly evaporates.⁶¹

Aristotle's statement, as that of Qohelet, speaks about *all rivers*; it views, as Qohelet does, the flow of rivers as a cyclical phenomenon; and, it describes an evaporation process as that of Ibn Ezra, which some thought to be too modern to be true. These similarities between Aristotle and Qohelet, coupled with those that were indicated in the discussion of v. 6, as well as the fact that the normative biblical position on God's restraint of the sea is not mentioned, makes it likely that Qohelet envisioned a restitution process for the rivers which was similar to that suggested by Aristotle and Ibn Ezra.⁶² Aristotle's description of the cyclical flow of rivers seems modern, but is not. For instance it does not envision mixing of sea water with river water. Still, it provided an observant person such as Qohelet with an acceptable rationale for a phenomenon that rested entirely on observable elements.

Aristotle is aware of the phenomenon of vanishing rivers. He says:

That there exist such chasms and cavities in the earth we are taught by the rivers that are swallowed up. They are found in many parts of the earth: in the Peloponnesus, for instance, there are many such rivers in Arcadia. The reason is that Arcadia is mountainous and there are no channels from its valleys to the sea. So these places get full of water, and this, having no outlet, under the pressure of the water that is added above, finds a way out for itself underground. In Greece this kind of thing happens on quite a small scale, but the lake at the

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Meteorology*, Book II, Part 2, lines 37-43.

⁶² I do not suggest here that Qohelet borrowed from Aristotle. Other Greek philosophers expressed similar views. For instance, Anaximenes of Miletus (585-528 B.C.E.) calls the sea "the source of the water and the source of the wind. For neither could the force of the wind blowing outwards from within come into being without the great main sea, nor the streams or rivers, nor the showery water of the sky, but the mighty main is the begetter of clouds and winds and rivers." *Apud* Robert J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology* (vol. 7; Leiden: Brill, 1966), 12.

foot of the Caucasus, which the inhabitants of these parts call a sea, is considerable. Many great rivers fall into it and it has no visible outlet but issues below the earth off the land of the Coraxi [east coast of the Black Sea] about the so-called 'depths of Pontus'. This is a place of unfathomable depth in the sea: at any rate no one has yet been able to find bottom there by sounding. At this spot, about three hundred stadia from land, here comes up sweet water over a large area, not all of it together but in three places. And in Liguria a river equal in size to the Rhodanus [Rhone] is swallowed up and appears again elsewhere: the Rhodanus being a navigable river.⁶³

Qohelet does not speak of vanishing rivers. He and his Judean readers might have heard about vanishing rivers, and were aware of non perennial streams, but it is doubtful that they had any direct experience of vanishing rivers. Still it is possible that Qohelet entertained a concept similar to that of Aristotle's about vanishing rivers. Qohelet refers twice in v. 7a to "the sea" (הַיָּם), using the article. He seemingly considers the Mediterranean to be part of the Ocean surrounding earth. If v. 7a refers to the Mediterranean then the flow of the Jordan River obviously contradicts it. Thus, it is possible that Qohelet believed that the Jordan River continued to flow through "chasms and cavities in the earth" from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea, which was part of the Ocean surrounding earth.

Aristotle's meteorological theory aptly explains vv. 6-7. Moreover, Aristotle's stature makes it very likely that this comprehensive meteorological theory was well known to the Judean elite. Consequently, Qohelet devotes only four verses to a topic that Aristotle discusses in four books. His major point is that there are permanent phenomena on earth. This observation sharpens the fundamental question of his book. He is not interested in answering the question: "What advantage is there for man in all his toil that he toils under the sun?" Rather, Qohelet is looking for the "permanent advantage" that man can achieve under the sun. This search makes sense only when the existence of permanent phenomena has been demonstrated.

D CONTEXT

Most commentators consider v. 4 being the continuation of v. 3. This position rests mainly on the perception that יָמָר alludes to a human generation. The verse comments on the fleeting nature of human life when compared to the continuing existence of the earth. Man's activities ultimately bring him no gain (יתרונות) because life is cut off by death, when all temporary gains must be surrendered.

⁶³ Aristotle, *Meteorology*, Book I, Part 13, lines 48-55. Aristotle believed that there was a connection between the Caspian and Black Sea. He also argued that the waters of Lake Maeotis (the Sea of Azov) flow into the deeper Black Sea and thence into the still deeper Aegean and thus through the Mediterranean into the Ocean. Cf. Forbes, *Studies*, 26.

This view finds support in the use of the words **הַלְּקָה** and **בָּא**, which Qohelet sometimes uses euphemistically for death and birth (5:16; 6:4) of individuals.

This rationalization is not compelling, as can be seen from the proposed solution. Qohelet 1:4 is the first of four examples intended to demonstrate that permanent phenomena exist on earth. The suggested solution implies that in 1:4 Qohelet does not highlight the transience of humanity by contrasting it with the permanent inert state of the earth.⁶⁴ It is the later that is being stressed. Indeed, Whybray convincingly shows that "there is reason to doubt whether in v. 4 refers, at least primarily, to the human life span."⁶⁵ Thus, the phrase **דֹּר הַלְּקָה** and **דֹּר בָּא** metaphorically represents the beat of time; it means "time passes."⁶⁶ Time passes and the earth continues to be.

I have already elsewhere discussed the anthropomorphic conception of the sun in 1:5.⁶⁷ It is possible that the anthropomorphic tenor of 1:5 has been influenced by the anthropomorphic interpretation of **דֹּר** in 1:4. In that study it was suggested that the difficult **שׁוֹאָף** in Qoh 1:5 was derived from an original **אָף**, in a densely written Hebrew paleo-script manuscript. The original **שַׁת** **אָף**, **וַיַּרְחַ הַשְׁמַשׁ וַיַּאֲלִקְזֹמֶשׁ שַׁת** **אָף** **וַיַּרְחַ הַזָּהָם**, "and the sun rose, and the sun set, and at its place it stationed, it also rises, it is there," describes in non-anthropomorphic terms the sun's repetitive appearance.

⁶⁴ Loretz, *Anfänge*, 230.

⁶⁵ Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.5-7," 106. Whybray notes that: "The word **דֹּר**, which has cognates in most of the Semitic languages, appears to have a cyclical connotation (cf. Heb. **דֹּר**, "circle"). In the OT it frequently denotes a period of time measured by the length of the human life-cycle. But this association with human life is not essential to its meaning. A more general sense of duration, age, period is attested elsewhere, especially in Akkadian, see "דֹּר" col. 181-184 in Botterweck, G. Johannes and Helmer Ringgren, eds. *ThWAT* 2: 1970-2000. So also in the OT: in many passages where **לְדֹר וּדֹר**, **לְדֹר דֹרִים** and similar expressions are used there is reason to doubt whether the thought is of human generations. Indeed, in some passages a human reference is improbable. Thus in Isa. 41.4, where Yahweh is represented as "calling the **דָּרוֹת** from the beginning," and in Isa. 51.9, where it was in the **דָּרוֹת עֲוָלִים** that Yahweh "cut Rahab in pieces and pierced the **חַנִּז**," it is most natural to suppose that the reference is to a primordial time before the appearance of the human race."

⁶⁶ Graham S. Ogden, "The Interpretation of **דֹּר** in Ecclesiastes 1:4," *JSOT* 34 (1986): 91-92. Ogden suggested that **דֹּר** means cycle, in accordance with the presumed "original meaning" of the root, and that the word refers to the cyclical movements of nature as described in 1:5-8. Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," 190, rightly notes that this interpretation suffers from two weaknesses: "דֹּר, whatever its etymology, never means 'cycle' in Hebrew (or in any other Northwest Semitic language); and it is not 'cycles' that 'go and come,' but rather things within cycles."

⁶⁷ Aron Pinker, "Anthropomorphic Conceptions of the Sun in Qohelet 1:5," *HIPHIL* 1 (2010): 1-14.

Understanding v. 6a as serving double duty, referring to both sun and wind, gives a more complete description of the sun. Qohelet refers in vv. 5-6a to both diurnal and seasonal movement of the sun, as seen by an observer on earth. Both solar motions depict permanent cyclicity.

Finally, in v. 8 Qohelet seems to be saying that much can be said about the four cases that he mentioned.⁶⁸ This is not a snobbish dismissal. As can be seen from Aristotle's four books *there is* much that can be said about the details of the natural processes mentioned, illustration of their validity, and refutation of competing theories. Qohelet's purpose is not to present a well developed meteorological theory, but to demonstrate existence of permanent phenomena.

E CONCLUSION

Qohelet's meteorological views do not reflect biblical notions, and at least in this respect are new. Many commentators viewed Qohelet's new ideas within the framework of confrontation with Greek philosophy during the Hellenistic period.⁶⁹ For instance, Loretz says: "Das Neue in seinem Werk wird zu Recht sowohl in seinem Pessimismus, als auch vor allem in seiner Konfrontation mit der griechischen Philosophie hellenistischen Zeit gesehen."⁷⁰ Qohelet seems to be receptive to such Hellenistic views as were elucidated in Aristotle's *Meteorology*.

The context of Aristotle's *Meteorology* provides a convenient framework for explaining the meteorological references in vv. 6-7. In particular, this context is useful for explaining v. 6. It would be too speculative to assume that Qohelet had access to Aristotle's *Meteorology* and referred to it in his treatise. However, Qohelet does not present the four cases in 1:4-7 as revelations or discoveries, but as well known facts. Therefore, it is likely that he was aware of similar views, and this was also the case for his intended audience.

The unit 1:4-7 is generally understood as dealing with the futility of human life, which Qohelet compares to the equally futile endless repetitions observable in nature. This study suggests that such a perspective of 1:4-7 can be questioned. Though the short unit 1:4-7 is replete with verbs of action its intended message is not about *change* (or *futile change*) but about *permanence*.

⁶⁸ The root יָגַע, which Qohelet uses also in 10:15 and 12:12, means "toil, or be weary." Thus, in v. 8 the phrase **כָל-הַדְבָּרִים יָגַעַם** could mean "all the things are wearying." Qohelet is telling the reader that a detailed explanation would be wearying.

⁶⁹ Reinhold Bichler, "Hellenismus": *Geschichte und Problematik eines Epochbegriffs* (Impulse der Forschung 41; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), *ad loc.* See this source for the characterization of the time from Alexander the Great to Augustus as the "Hellenistic Period."

⁷⁰ Loretz, *Anfänge*, 223.

Whybray rightly says: "It may be agreed that the purpose of vv. 5-7 is-at least in part-to set the human situation in a wider context by the use of these three analogies drawn from natural phenomena: the behaviour of the sun, the wind and the rivers."⁷¹ What is this context? It is suggested in this study that the context is that of setting the tone for the entire book and of precisely defining its fundamental concern. Choosing four examples that correspond to the four fundamental elements of antiquity (fire, air, water, and earth) Qohelet intimates that his treatise deals with the most basic problems of human existence. His question stated in 1:3 is deeper than it may seem. He is obviously aware that toil results in rewards, which are temporarily satisfactory. Since the four examples of natural phenomena show that permanence exists, the more tantalizing question is: "What is the *permanent* footprint that a person can leave of his existence in this world?"

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⁷¹ Whybray, "Ecclesiastes 1.5-7," 105. Whybray (110) seems to be suggesting that "Qohelet's purpose here, in a passage placed at the beginning of his book, is to remind his readers of the cosmic setting within which human life, which is always his main concern, has to be lived." It is, however, difficult to see what are the obvious constraints imposed by the cosmic setting on human life that the reader should be aware of.

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