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ARON PINKER,  
THE DOINGS OF THE WICKED IN QOHELET 8:10

## THE DOINGS OF THE WICKED IN QOHELET 8:10

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### INTRODUCTION

The interpretative efforts on Qoh 8:10, since antiquity to this time, have been aptly summarized by Crenshaw in his statement: “Interpretations of this verse have one thing in common: tentativeness.”<sup>1</sup> Whitley considered this verse “obscure and uncertain.”<sup>2</sup> With a deep sense of humility Longman says, “This verse vies for the most difficult in the book, and thus I begin its exposition by admitting that certainty eludes every honest interpreter, even though the problems are often hidden behind smooth English translations.”<sup>3</sup> The verse is an obvious instance of a case in which every word of the sentence is well defined but the sentence does not make sense. Thus Gordis concludes that “the first part of the verse is manifestly not in order.”<sup>4</sup>

The verse reads,

וּבִכְן רָאִיתִי רְשָׁעִים קִבְּרִים וְבָאוּ וּמִמָּקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יִהְיוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בַּעִיר אֲשֶׁר  
בְּנִי-עָשׂוּ גַם-זֶה הַבֵּל

Clearly, Qohelet saw something, which led him to the observation that what he saw was also **הַבֵּל**. What did Qohelet see? A burial of wicked persons, as the Septuagint suggests; wicked person already buried, as the Targum, Peshitta, and Vulgate suggest; the wicked approaching and coming, as Driver understood; or, neither of these?<sup>5</sup> Were some illicit activities conducted in the holy sites? Does the entire verse refer to the wicked, or only the first part? What are the wicked doing in Qoh 8:10? Or, should we rather ask what is done to the wicked in Qoh 8:10?

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<sup>1</sup> Crenshaw, J. L. *Ecclesiastes, A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press (1987) 154.

<sup>2</sup> Whitley, C. F. *Qoheleth*. BZAW 148. Berlin: DeGruyter (1979) 74.

<sup>3</sup> Longman, T. *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1998) 218.

<sup>4</sup> Gordis, R. *Qoheleth, The Man and his world, a study of Ecclesiastes*. New York: Schocken Books (1968) 294.

<sup>5</sup> Driver, G. R. “Problems and Solutions.” *VT* 4 (1954) 230. Driver renders, “And then I have seen wicked men, approaching and entering the holy place, walk about and boast in the city that they have done right.”

This starting point, however, is at odds with the most natural reading of the verse as it stands in the MT, a reading represented by the following paraphrase (I am paraphrasing here because even this reading involves emendation, which signals to me that the verse is Crenshaw, J. L. *Ecclesiastes*, 154).

Logic guides Longman to the observation that “It is clear that the verse does speak of the *wicked* and of *the holy place*, and since it concludes with the ‘meaningless’ formula, there must be some anomalous connection between the holy place and the wicked that contributes to Qohelet’s feeling that the wicked do not get what they deserve.

This starting point, however, is at odds with the most natural reading of the verse as it stands in the MT, a reading represented by the following paraphrase (I am paraphrasing here because even this reading involves emendation, which signals to me that the verse is problematic from a textual point of view): Qohelet observes that wicked people die and their deeds are forgotten (the verb in MT is the *hithpael* of שכח) in the city in which they were active in the holy place. On a surface level this sounds as good news to the righteous: What could be better than to have the wickedness of the evil slide into oblivion? But Qohelet surprises us and concludes, “This too is meaningless.”<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to suggest that Longman’s initial observation is not only logical but also natural. I would advance the position that at issue in Qoh 8:10 is, indeed, the fact that *previously* wicked “do not get what they deserve.” Our major problem is to find the proper X and Y so that the verse

וּבִבְנֵי רְשָׁעִים X וְY  
וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְּעִיר אֲשֶׁר כָּן-עָשׂוּ גִּם-זֶה הַבַּל

would make sense, assuming that it deals with wicked people who have repented and act as pious do. In this article I suggest that the *Urtext* was

וּבִבְנֵי רְשָׁעִים קְבָרִים וְאוֹב וּמָקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יִהְיוּ  
וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְּעִיר אֲשֶׁר כָּן-עָשׂוּ גִּם-זֶה הַבַּל

“and also I saw wicked frequenting graves, and necromancer, and place of a holy. And they were forgotten in the city in which they did so (correctly?). This too is absurd.” This *Urtext*, only slightly different than the MT, provides reasonable X and Y, and a profound thought. In Qohelet’s view experience shows that wicked could become pious, and consequently God’s being “slow to anger” has justification. That was apparently at odds with the normative position, which argued that this attribute of God promotes wickedness since it creates a time-disconnect between crime and its punishment.

### MEANING OF THE VERSE

The Septuagint has: Καὶ τότε εἶδον ἀσεβεῖς εἰς τάφους εἰσαχθέντας, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν καὶ ἐπηνέθησαν ἐν τῇ πόλει, ὅτι οὕτως ἐποίησαν καὶ γε τοῦτο ματαιότης (And then I saw the ungodly carried into the tombs, and *that* out of the holy place; and they departed, and were praised in the city, because they had done thus: this also is vanity).<sup>7</sup> The Septuagint’s translation could be retranslated into a Hebrew text that reads:

<sup>6</sup> Longman, 218.

<sup>7</sup> Brenton, L. C. L. (trans.). *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*.

ואז ראיתי רשעים קָבַר מוֹבָאִים וּמְקֻדָּשׁ (וּמְמָקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ)  
וְהָלְכוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ בְּעִיר אֲשֶׁר כָּן־עָשׂוּ גַם־זֶה הַבֵּל

This retranslation clearly demonstrates the many emendations that the Septuagint makes in the MT. Moreover, the reflexive *hithpael* of שָׁבַח cannot mean “were praised” (ἐπηνέθησαν).

According to Jewish tradition there is an obligation on the community to bury the dead before sunset even if a criminal. In addition to the reason given in Deut 21:23, this practice was also sensible in the hot climate and because Jews did not embalm the dead. Though the verse in Deut 21:23 refers to a person who was executed according to a court verdict, the burial obligation was understood as applying to any dead (Tosefta Gittin 5:5, *j.* Gittin 5:9, 47c). Josephus confirms Jewish adherence to this custom (*Apion* 2:211). Providing decent burial to a stranger was as giving bread to the hungry and cover to the naked (Tob 1:17–18). It seems that the Septuagint exploits a pious tradition that even a wicked person, or an alien, should be properly buried. The Talmudic statement וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ אֵלָא וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ in *b.* Gittin 56b reflects perhaps an effort to strengthen this pious tradition. In this context, according to the Septuagint Qoh 8:10 speaks about wicked persons who have been given proper burial, including a stop at a holy place, and those who participated in the burial were congratulated in the city for what they have done. In this case it is difficult to understand why Qohelet would find this very humane and practical behavior to be הַבֵּל.

The Targum reads,

ובקושטא חמית חייביא דאיתקברו ואישתיצו מן עלמא מאתר קדיש דצדיקאי  
שריין תמן ואזלו לאיתוקדא בגיהנם ואיתנשו מבין יתבי קרתא והיכמא דעבדו  
יתעבד להון אופ דין הבלו

(And truly, I saw the wicked buried, *and blotted out of the world and from a holy place where the righteous dwell, they went to be burned in Gehenna* and were forgotten *by the inhabitants* of the city. And as they had done so *was done to them*. Also this is הַבֵּל), states the standard doctrine.<sup>8</sup> It sees the verse expressing what one would normally wish to happen, a *tit-for-tat* punishment, a complete eradication. Thus, we would have expected such happening to be applauded, not denigrated as הַבֵּל.

The Peshitta literally follows the MT, reproducing all the problems that are inherent in the MT. Its transliteration in Hebrew letters renders:

והידין חזית רשיעא דקברירין ואתין ומן אתרא דקדושא אזלו ותטעוי במדינתא  
דהכנא עבדו הידין

(And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the holy place, and they were forgotten in the city where they had done such evil things).<sup>9</sup>

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson (1986) [1851] 826.

<sup>8</sup> Knobel, P. S. *Targum of Qohelet*. Aramaic Bible 13. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press (1991) 42.

<sup>9</sup> Lamsa, G. M. (trans.) *Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text*. New York: Harper Row (1968) [1933] 691.

The Vulgate renders *vidi impios sepultos qui etiam cum adviverent in loco sancto erant et laudabantur in civitate quasi iustorum operum sed et hoc vanitas est* (I saw the wicked buried: who also when they were yet living were in the holy place, and were praised in the city as men of just works: but this also is vanity [Douay-Rheims]). The disparity between the Vulgate<sup>10</sup> and MT can be seen if we retranslate it into Hebrew:

ראיתי רשעים קברים אשר בחייהם היו במקום קדוש  
וישתבחו בעיר ככן עשו גם זה הבל

Serrano rightly noted that the Vulgate “like most modern interpreters, succeeds in presenting and understandable reading, but only at the expense of the original.”<sup>11</sup>

While Qoh 8:10 is linked in the Talmud (*b. Gittin* 56b) with the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, Rashi (1040–1105) takes this verse as referring to the Babylonians who destroyed the First Temple, to better fit the biblical period. He says, “and then (ובכן) in this prophecy I saw the wicked buried (who were deserving to be Second Temple by the Romans, Rashi (1040–1105) takes this verse as referring to the Babylonians who destroyed the First Temple, to better fit the biblical period. He says, “and then (ובכן) in this prophecy I saw the wicked buried (who were deserving to be interred in the ground because they were despised by other nations, as it is said about them “this nation was not” [Isa 23:13]),<sup>12</sup> and they ruled in God’s house, which is a holy place (מקום קדוש), and when they went from there to their land they boasted in their city that they did so and so in the house of God. And the rabbis homiletically read וישתבחו instead of וישתכחו. And regarding the forgetting, the Aggadah says that ultimately their name would be forgotten from the city in which they did so, as it is said “I will gather all the nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat” (Joel 4:2). Where they besmirched before him, they will also be punished. And so he says “God is in the city their image he will shame” (Ps 73:20). This too is one of the הבלים presented to the world that God does not immediately punish the wicked and people figure that there is no judgment and judge.”

This explanation, trying to adopt various Midrashic sources, is more a homily than a straight forward text-based interpretation, or typical Rashi-*peshat*. The historical context is unlikely; Qohelet is not assumed to be prophetic; and Rashi cannot have it both ways with regard to וישתכחו. Sforno (1470–1550) says that the verse talks about Sennacherib and Titus, which would also make Qohelet into a prophet.

Ibn Ezra (1089–c.1164) links Qoh 8:10 with the preceding verse. He says, “As I applied myself, I saw that wicked people who ruled others and caused them evil died without pain, and were buried in their grave as in

<sup>10</sup> The Nova Vulgata has *Et ita vidi impios sepultos, discedentes de loco sancto; in oblivionem cadere in civitate, quod ita egerunt: sed et hoc vanitas est.*

<sup>11</sup> Serrano, J. J. “I saw the Wicked Buried (Eccl. 8,10).” *CBQ* 16 (1954) 168.

<sup>12</sup> In Midrash Tanhuma (on Yitro) it is asked: וכי יש קבורים באים ומהלכים. R. Simon suggests there to understand the verse as if it read כקבורים, i.e., the wicked are alive, but are as good as dead. Rashi seems to have adopted this position saying שהיו ראויים להטמן בעפר, שהיו נבזים.

אֵין חֲרֻצוּבוֹת לְמוֹתָם (Ps 73:4). Then they came to this world back, (in the sense) that their children will replace them and thus their memory will continue. The meaning of וּמִמָּקוֹם קָדוֹשׁ יִהְיוּ לְכֹחוֹ is that the holy ones who die without children would be forgotten in the city that they were in and practiced truth (כֶּן), as in כֶּן דּוֹבְרוֹת צִלְפַּחַד בָּנוֹת (Num 27:7). Wonder how the memory of a righteous has been erased and forgotten, as well as all the good that he has done, yet this wicked died in peace and left children in his place? This too is הִבֵּל.” Ibn Ezra’s contrivance of children for the wicked and childlessness for the righteous speaks volumes for the difficulties he must have faced with this verse. His unrealistic solution is no less problematic than the original text.

Rashbam (c.1085–1174), follows his grandfather Rashi in understanding קְבָרִים as deserving to be dead and buried. He links this verse with several verses in the preceding chapter and what follows. Among the things that Qohelet did in 7:23 and 7:25, “delving in wisdom issues I [Qohelet] saw in the world wicked who deserve death and burial, coming and going from holy places and ruins where they committed many bad deeds.”<sup>13</sup> Rashbam understood Qohelet as expecting the wicked to be quickly punished things. But ultimately their name and memory were forgotten in the city in which so was done. This, as the other things, is הִבֵּל, since they were not quickly punished for their evil by God because their crimes were committed in holy places, and being disappointed that this is not the case. However, Qohelet’s resentment that the wicked are forgotten seems strange. Among the modern commentators, Hertzberg renders Qoh 8:10 thus: “Further, I saw sinners coming near and entering, while they (the righteous) must leave the holy place and be forgotten in the city where they acted properly.”<sup>14</sup> He reads קְבָרִים וְבָאוּ instead of וְבָאוּ וְקָבְרוּ, which requires two metatheses, assuming a ו/י confusion in two cases, attachment of a מ to the preceding word, and several revocalizations. Already Gordis commented that Hertzberg’s reading: (1) Has no warrant in the MT; (2) Is not supported by any of the *Versions*; (3) Gives a highly awkward word order; and, (4) Has no clear sense.<sup>15</sup> I might add that “coming near” would be superfluous if the wicked eventually “enter.”

Gordis prefers to follow the Septuagint, translating “I have seen wrong-doers being carried with pomp to their graves, and, as men return from the sacred ground, the evil-doers are praised in the city where they had acted thus. Indeed, this is vanity!”<sup>16</sup> He reads וְרָאִיתִי רְשָׁעִים קָבְרִים מוֹבָאִים, and

<sup>13</sup> Japhet, S. and Salters, R. B. *The Commentary of R. Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on Qohelet*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press (1985) 107–108.

<sup>14</sup> Hertzberg, H. W. *Der Prediger (Qohelet) übersetzt und erklärt von H. W. Hertzberg*. Leipzig: Deichert (1932) 167. He renders “Und weiterhin sah ich, Frevler [sich nahen] und [eingehen]; doch von heiliger Stätte müssen weichen und vergessen werden in der Stadt, die ds recht taten—auch das ist eitel.”

<sup>15</sup> Gordis, 295–296.

<sup>16</sup> Gordis, 184. Barton (Barton, G. A. *Ecclesiastes*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark (1908) 155), Kroeber (Kroeber, R. *Der Prediger*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag (1963) 100), and Strobel (Strobel, A. *Das Buch Prediger (Qohelet)*. Dusseldorf: Patmos-Verlag

וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ instead of וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ. This is based on dropping one י, the attachment of a מ to the following word, the assumption of a ו/ו confusion in one case, one metathesis, the attachment of a מ to the preceding word, the assumption of ב/כ confusion in one case, and several revocalizations. Moreover, Gordis adds much extraneous material to make the verse intelligible. There is nothing in the verse to justify use of “being carried,” “pomp,” “men return.” Finally, Gordis’ reliance on the Septuagint is somewhat shaky, since the Septuagint itself is not clear in this case. Gordis is, perhaps, assuming that “evil-doers are praised,” because of the custom not to speak evil of the dead, since it was believed that their spirits have great influence in the world of the living.

Moreover, the cemetery, in which dead bodies are interned, cannot be “sacred ground,” since it is ritually unclean. Jastrow is sensitive to this problem. He has: “And so [among other things] I have seen wicked men buried, and [people] coming back from the sanctified ground, and going about singing their praises in the very city they acted thus—surely this is vanity.”<sup>17</sup> However, “sanctified ground” would require מקום מקודש in the text, which is obtainable from וּמִמְקוֹם קָדוֹשׁ if we assume that a מ dropped out by haplography, and a metathesis in קדוש. Furthermore, “coming back” for באים is unattested. Adding these emendations, to those that were made by Gordis, amounts to a major reconstruction of the verse.

Zimmermann makes it explicit that the מקום קדוש was not a cemetery, but rather the place from which the funeral procession started. He renders: “And so too I have seen scoundrels brought to burial (קָבֵר מוֹבָאִים), and they were given honor, and people made a procession from a holy place, and then they were eulogized (וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ) in the city how rightfully they acted! This is revolting.”<sup>18</sup> It seems though that in Zimmermann’s interpretation the order of event is reversed.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ cannot mean “and then they were eulogized” since the *hithpael* usually indicates a reflexive or reciprocal action, nor is there anything in the biblical text that could correspond to “and they were given honor.”

Some commentators combined elements of the preceding interpretations in various ways. For instance Serrano renders “And then I saw the wicked approach, they entered and went out of the holy place, and they were praised in the city because they acted thus. Indeed this is

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(1967) 131) considered the Septuagint version as being indispensable for the understanding of this verse.

<sup>17</sup> Jastrow, M. *A Gentle Cynic, Being a Translation of the Book of Qoheleth, Commonly Known as Ecclesiastes, Stripped of Later Additions, also its Origin, Growth, and Interpretation*. Philadelphia: Lippincott (1919) 228–229.

<sup>18</sup> Zimmermann, F. *The Inner World of Qohelet*. New York: KTAV (1973) 172.

<sup>19</sup> Usually the dead is cleaned and prepared for burial, then brought to the synagogue, where he is eulogized (*b. Megillah* 28b, *b. Rosh ha-Shanah* 25a, *b. Mo’ed Katan* 21b). The procession starts at the synagogue and ends at the cemetery where the dead is buried. While Qoheleth might have seen such a funeral, this practice was not yet established in the time of the second Temple. Qohelet alludes in 12:5 to professional mourners (הַסּוֹפְדִים) who eulogized the dead in the marketplace.

vanity.”<sup>20</sup> Crenshaw translates: “Then I saw the wicked, approaching and entering (וּבָּאִים קִרְבָּיִם) the holy place, walk about and boast (וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ) in the city that they had done right. This is also absurd.”<sup>21</sup> Longman adopts from the Septuagint only וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ and mainly adheres to the MT. He reads: “Thus, I observed the wicked buried and departed. They used to go out of the holy place, and they were praised in a city where they acted in such a way. This too is meaningless.” He explains that “the wicked may indeed die, but even then they are buried and praised in the city where they did their evil deeds and religious posturing. It is the fact that the wicked continue to receive the praise owed to the righteous that frustrates Qohelet and leads him to utter his conclusion that ‘this is meaningless.’”<sup>22</sup> Obviously, dead people need to be buried. This would not surprise Qohelet. Nor would he have been shocked by the wicked going to the holy place. What we are baffled by is their receiving praise altogether. This would have been illogical to Qohelet as it is to us. Thus, the verse cannot say “the wicked continue to receive the praise owed to the righteous.”

The JPS (and NJPS) rearranges the verse and attaches גִּם־זֶה הַבֵּל to the beginning of the next verse. Retranslated into Hebrew, Qoh 8:10 would then read

ובכן ראיתי רשעים ממקום קדוש יהלכו וקבר מובאים  
ואשר כן עשו ישתכחו בעיר

i.e., “And then I saw scoundrels coming from the Holy Site and being brought to burial, while such as had acted righteously were forgotten in the city.”<sup>23</sup> Fox explains in his commentary to the JPS translation, “While scoundrels receive elegant obsequies, the bodies of the righteous—presumably the righteous poor, who must rely on public beneficence for proper burial—lie unattended.” This depiction is unlikely in light of traditional Jewish customs with respect to the dead, the concept of *מת מצוה* and the institution of *חברא קדישא* (burial society), which probably drew on ancient customs.<sup>24</sup> Whybray is right in noting that “there is no suggestion in the text that that these funerals of the wicked were in anyway extraordinary.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Serrano, 170.

<sup>21</sup> Crenshaw, 153.

<sup>22</sup> Longman, 216, 219.

<sup>23</sup> Fox, M. V. *The JPS Bible Commentary, Ecclesiastes* קהלת. Philadelphia: JPS (2004) 58. Cf. also Fox, M.

V. *Qohelet and His Contradictions*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (1989) 250–251. Seow (Seow, C. L. *Ecclesiastes*. AB 18c. New York: Doubleday (1997) 276) adopts Fox’s interpretation.

<sup>24</sup> Respect for the dead motivates prompt burial of the dead. The Talmud notes that one of the ten edicts of Joshua was to bury any corpse found (*b. Babba Kama* 81a). This obligation is even incumbent on a High Priest who otherwise could not come in contact with the dead (*j. Nazir* 7:1). Though burying the dead is an obligation of the heirs, it is the community that is ultimately responsible for the burial. Consequently, in the time of the Talmud the institution of the *חברא קדישא* was established (*b. Moed Katan* 27b).

<sup>25</sup> Whybray, R. N. *Ecclesiastes*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1989) 135.



It seems as though the commentaries (and translations) of Qoh 8:10 can be divided into two major groups according to the treatment of the word **יִשְׁתַּבְּחוּ**. One group consists of those who retain the MT (e.g., Hertzberg, Ginsburg,<sup>26</sup> Delitsch,<sup>27</sup> Murphy,<sup>28</sup> KJV, NKJV, NASB, ASV, Young, Darby, Webster, HNV, MLB, NJPS), and usually understand **בְּנֵי-עֲשׂוּ** as “acted justly” and referring to the righteous. The other group (e.g., McNeile,<sup>29</sup> Burkitt,<sup>30</sup> Barton, Driver, Gordis, Jastrow, Zimmermann, Crenshaw, Longman, NIV, NRSV, ESV, RSV, NEB, JB) adopts the approach of the Septuagint (also found in Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, and the Vulgate), which emends **יִשְׁתַּבְּחוּ** to **יִשְׁתַּבְּחוּ**. Each group has to make a number of additional emendations to obtain a sensible text.

### ANALYSIS OF THE VERSE

Almost each word in Qoh 8:10 has been subject to some emendation and it contains rare words or forms of words. In the following I will discuss each word in the verse.

**וּבְכֵן**: The word **וּבְכֵן** is composed of the conjunction **ו**, the preposition **ב**, and the particle **כֵּן**. Waltke and O'Connor cite this word as an example of a “complex preposition that functions as an adverbial.”<sup>31</sup> The particle occurs only here, in Est 4:16, and Sir 13:7, but is common in Aramaic.<sup>32</sup> No two of the *Versions* agree on the meaning of **וּבְכֵן**. The Septuagint has “and then” (Καὶ τότε), Targum “and truly” (ובקושטא), Peshitta “and so” (והידין), and, it is omitted by the Vulgate. Already Ibn Janāḥ (c.990–c.1050) discussed **וּבְכֵן** and considered for it the meanings **וְאִז**, “and then,” and **כֵּן**, “and afterwards,” eventually settling on **וְכֵן**, “and so.”<sup>33</sup> Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's taking **וְאִז** = **וּבְכֵן** has no support in the Hebrew Bible. It apparently relies on the Targum (**ובתר כן**) for **וּבְכֵן** in Est 4:16, though here the Targum has **ובקושטא** “and truly.” Rashbam: **וּבְכֵן** = **ובכך** “and in that.”

Modern scholarship assigned to **וּבְכֵן** a variety of meanings. For instance, we find: “Further” (Hertzberg), “and then” (Crenshaw, Fox), “and

<sup>26</sup> Ginsburg, C. D. *Song of Songs and Coheleth* (ed. Orlinsky, H. M.). New York: KTAV (1970) [1861] 398–399.

<sup>27</sup> Delitsch, F. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (trans. Easton, M. G.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1975) [1872] 346.

<sup>28</sup> Murphy, R. E. *Ecclesiastes*. WBC. Dallas: Word (1992) 79–80.

<sup>29</sup> McNeile, A. H. *An Introduction to Ecclesiastes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1904) 77, 106.

<sup>30</sup> Burkitt, F. C. “Is Ecclesiastes a Translation?” *JTS* 23 (1921–1922) 26.

<sup>31</sup> Waltke, B. K. and O'Connor, M. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns (1990) 221.

<sup>32</sup> Gesenius, W., Kautzsch, E. (ed.), Cowley, A. E. (trans.) (GKC). *Gesenius' Hebrew grammar*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover (2006) §119.ii, 384; Brown, F., Driver, S. R. and Briggs, C. A. (BDB). *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson (2001) 486. S.v. **כֵּן** 3.b.

<sup>33</sup> Bacher, W. (ed.) *The book of Hebrew roots, by Abu'al-Walīd Marwān ibn Janāḥ, called Rabbi Jōnāḥ*. Edited with an appendix, containing extracts from other Hebrew-Arabic dictionaries [by] Adolf Neubauer. Amsterdam: Philo Press (1968) 223.

so” (Jastrow), “thus” (Longman), “And so too” (Zimmermann), “indeed” (Zer-Kavod), and Gordis omits it. This is also the case with the Standard English translation, which use the meanings: “And so” (KJV, Webster), “Then” (NKJV, ESV, RSV), “Then too” (NIV), “So then” (NASB), “So” (ASV, HNV), “And so” (Young), “And” (Darby), “Not only that” (NEB), “and then” (JB), etc.

Zer-Kavod felt that here and in Est 4:16 the particle opens the statement with emphasis, and consequently it is equivalent to **אכן**, or **אמנם**. However, in Sir 13:7 it is not at the beginning of the verse. It seems to me that “and also” would well serve in each of the three occurrences of **וּבְכֵן**.<sup>34</sup> This implies that Qoh 8:10 was linked to the text that preceded it.

**רְאִיתִי רָשָׁעִים**: The verb **ראה**, in its various meanings, plays a significant role in the book of Qohelet. It is used 47 times in the book, and 18 times in the first person singular of the perfect tense (**רָאִיתִי**). Loader considered the **רָאִיתִי** sentences, as well as those sentences introduced by **יָדַע**, and a few other verbs, as belonging to a basic literary form (or *Gattung*), which he called “observation.” “The observation is marked by a first person singular style,” and it consists in a “report of what has been seen in life.”<sup>35</sup> It seems that Loader’s definition fully applies to Qoh 8:10 and depicts here an actual observation.

**קְבָרִים**: The word is the *qal* passive participle masculine plural of **קבר**, “to bury.” MT reading is attested by the Targum (**דִּאֲתִקְבְּרוּ**), Peshitta (**דִּקְבִּירִין**), and Vulgate (*sepultos*), while the Septuagint has the noun “grave” (**τῶν σῆψ**), and so do the Syro-Hexaplar and Coptic Versions. Both MT and Septuagint share the consonantal text **קְבָרִים** though they vocalize it differently. **אֵל תִּיקְרִי קְבֻרִים אֵלָּא קְבֻצִּים** (*b. Gittin* 56b) is, however, a homiletic reading. The versions seem to favor the MT reading, and so do most of the Standard English translations (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, MLB, NASB, NIV, NJPS, NLT, ESV, ASV, Young, Darby, Webster, HNV, JB, etc.).

The Midrash suggested understanding **קְבָרִים** as **כְּקְבֻרִים**, which would make their moving possible. Rashbam probably echoes this Midrash by saying: “Wicked, while still alive are called “buried,” because they deserve death, as in Ez 21:30.”<sup>36</sup> Ibn Ezra mentions, but rejects the borrowed sense **שְׁמוּרִים** = **קְבֻרִים**, which probably derives from the story in *b. Gittin* 56.

A number of commentators (Burkitt, Driver, Galling) have opted for **קְרָבִים** (*Qal* active participle masculine plural of **קרב**, “to near, to approach”) instead of **קְבָרִים**, a term that is often used in reference to a person approaching the Lord at the tabernacle or temple. This emendation can be justified as a case of metathesis, but not by the similarity between **ר**

<sup>34</sup> Zer-Kavod, M. **קְהֵלֶת**. In **חֲמֵשׁ מִגִּילּוֹת**. Jerusalem: Mosad Ha-Rav Kook (1973) 50.

<sup>35</sup> Loader, J. A. *Polar Structures in the Book of Qohelet*. BZAW 152. Berlin: DeGruyter (1979) 25.

<sup>36</sup> Japhet and Salters, 170.

and ב in the paleoscript, as Serrano does, since it would date the book much earlier than generally accepted. The reading קָרְבִּים was adopted by some Standard English translations (NEB, NAB). However, the phrase קָרְבִּים וּבָאִים, which is usually used for translation and interpretation, is not attested in the Hebrew Bible, which has only קָרְבוּ לְבֹא (Ez 36:8), הִקְרִיב קָרְבוֹ וַיֵּאָתִיּוֹן (Isa 13:22, cf. Jer 48:16), and קָרְבוּ לְבֹא (Isa 41:5). Tur-Sinai suggested the clever emendation בִּיקְרָם יִבְאוּ “with their honor would come” for the expression קָרְבִּים וּבָאִים.<sup>37</sup> Yet, this would leave the destination unidentified.

וּבָאִים: MT is attested by the Targum, Peshitta, and Aquila. The Septuagint apparently reads מוֹבָאִים, which can be understood as formed by attaching to וּבָאִים the מ that was lost by haplography because of the מ in קָרְבִּים, and the מ of מִמָּקוֹם.<sup>38</sup>

The verb בָּאוּ has been considered problematic in this verse. The verb בוא usually means “to go to, to enter, to arrive,” not “to depart,” which would be proper for those who have been buried. This has found its expression in the Midrashic question וְכִי יֵשׁ רְשָׁעִים קְבוּרִים בָּאִים וּמֵהֲלָכִים (Midrash Tanhuma on Yitro).

Already Ibn Ezra rejected attempts to translate וּבָאִים as “disappeared, left” (cf. Targum’s וַאֲשֶׁתְּצִיאוּ, and see also Darby’s “and going away”) as in וּבָאִים הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ. Some connect וּבָאִים with יֵהָלְכוּ, translating “coming and going” (Rashbam), or “they do as they wish.” These attempts were also rejected by Ibn Ezra. Still, a number of Standard English translations link וּבָאִים with יֵהָלְכוּ (KJV, NKJV, NIV, ESV, NASB, RSV, Webster). This linkage, however, creates redundancy, since יֵהָלְכוּ includes already the act of coming (Prov 6:11, וּבָאִים בְּמַהֲלָךְ רָאשָׁן). Zimmermann considers וּבָאִים another example of confusion in translating from the original Aramaic. He assumes that original was itta’alu (יִתְעַלּוּ) or perhaps ’i’allelu (אֵיִעֲלִלוּ). The translator erroneously thought the word being the Ittaph’al of the root ‘al, “they came.” He should have taken it as the Ithpa’al of ‘aly, be glorified, exalted.”<sup>39</sup> Krüger renders וּבָאִים “and went in to rest.”<sup>40</sup> This interpretation has no support nor makes any sense.

וּמִמָּקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ: MT is attested by the Targum (מֵאַתֵּר קְדִישׁ), Peshitta (מִמָּקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ), and Vulgate (*in loco sancto*). It is possible that מִמָּקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ is a euphemism for מִמָּקוֹם טָמֵא, the cemetery, which being the place where dead are interred is considered as defiling (Feigin). Cf. Deut 22:9. The form מִמָּקוֹם occurs in the late 2Chr 6:21, and מִמָּקוֹם in the late Est 4:14. Rossi

<sup>37</sup> Tur-Sinai, N. H. הלשון והספר. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik (1959) 148.

<sup>38</sup> Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 284. Seow suggests that the *Urtext* was קָרְבוּ מוֹבָאִים → קָרְבוּ מוֹבָאִים (dittography) → קָרְבוּ מוֹבָאִים (incorrect interpretation) → קָרְבוּ מוֹבָאִים (incorrectly vocalized). This scheme does not provide a rationale for the incorrect vocalization.

<sup>39</sup> Zimmerman, 154.

<sup>40</sup> Krüger, T. *Qoheleth* (trans. Dean Jr. O. C.). Minneapolis: Fortress Press (2004) 158.

manuscript 413 reads מִמָּקוֹם, perhaps following the reading in Esther. The construct מִקוֹם הַקֹּדֶשׁ occurs in Lev 10:17, 14:13, Ps 24:13, and Ezr 9:8. Lev 10:13-17 shows that מִקוֹם הַקֹּדֶשׁ is synonymous with מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ (cf. vv. 13, and 17), another priestly designation, which occurs in Ex 29:31, Lev 6:9, 19, 20, 7:6, 10:13, 16:24, 24:9, and Ez 42:13. The construct “מִיָּהֱלֹכֹו” never occurs in the Hebrew Bible. Whitley’s translation of מִמָּקוֹם קָדֹשׁ “without (מִן) decent burial” has no support in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>41</sup>

Various referents have been assumed for מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ. Most commentators usually choose one of the following: a cemetery,<sup>42</sup> the Temple (or the synagogue),<sup>43</sup> or Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup> Ibn Ezra, however, maintains that מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ refers to a person, “And the meaning of מִמָּקוֹם קָדֹשׁ יְהִלְכוּ is the holy ones who die without children.”

I have already observed that the cemetery, being ritually unclean, would not qualify as a מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ. Several decades ago, Reines suggested that מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ is “the grave.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, מָבֵאִים מִקוֹם קָדֹשׁ is “and come to rest in the grave” (cf. Isa 57:2, Gen 15:15). However, this meaning for the expression מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ is not attested in the Biblical or Post Biblical literature. Seow notes that it is unlikely that מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ refers to the Temple, since one would expect then הַמָּקוֹם הַקֹּדֶשׁ.<sup>46</sup> The biblical references to מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ “probably designate[s] the religious purpose of a general area rather than a specific place.”<sup>47</sup> It is also doubtful that מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ refers to a structure that served as a synagogue. Such structures did not exist prior to the Maccabean struggle in the Land of Israel.<sup>48</sup> Sukenik notes, “whereas there is archaeological evidence of the existence of synagogues in Egypt as early as the third century B.C., and in Greece as early as the second century B.C., the date of the oldest synagogue found in Palestine is not earlier than the first century A.D.”<sup>49</sup> No one considered the possibility that מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ could mean “the resting place of a holy man” or “the residence of a holy man.”

<sup>41</sup> Whitley, 76.

<sup>42</sup> Jastrow, 229; Gordis, 295; and so Ewald, Zöckler, Volz, Humbert, etc.

<sup>43</sup> Lauha, A. *Qohelet*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag (1978) 155. Lauha says, “Die heilige Stätte (מָקוֹם קָדֹשׁ) war für Israeliten der Erscheinungsort Jahwes, d.h. in der klassischen und nachklassischen Zeit der Tempel (Lev 6,9,19; 14,13; Jos 5,15; Hab 2,20; Jon 2,5,8; Ps 24,3).” A similar view held Rashi; Barton, 153; Fox, 58; Whybray, 135; Crenshaw, 154; Zimmermann, 172; Ogden, G. *Qoheleth*. Sheffield: JSOT Press (1987) 135; NEB, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Eaton, M. A. *Ecclesiastes*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity (1983) 122.

<sup>45</sup> Reines, C. W. “Qohelet viii 10.” *JJS* 5 (1954) 86.

<sup>46</sup> Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 285.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, D. P. *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature*. SBLDS 101. Atlanta: Scholars (1987) 232-235.

<sup>48</sup> Oesterly, W. O. E. *The Jews and Judaism During the Greek Period. The Background of Christianity*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press (1970) 213.

<sup>49</sup> Sukenik, E. L. *Ancient synagogues in Palestine and Greece*. London: Oxford University Press (1934) 1.

יִהְלְכוּ: This is the *piel* imperfect 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural of הָלַךְ, “to go, come, walk” (Hab 3:11, Ps 81:14, 115:7). The more poetic form יִהְלִכֹן occurs only in the Psalms (89:16, 104:10, 26). The Septuagint seems to have read יִהְלְכוּ (ἐπορεύθησαν) and so did the Peshitta (אזלו), Aquila, and Symmachus. However, nowhere else is the *piel* used for the *qal*. The Targum’s תמן שרין and Vulgate’s *errant* reflect the sense of “they walked around” for יִהְלְכוּ.

The reading יִהְלְכוּ can be found explicitly or implicitly in many translations or interpretations (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, KJV, NKJV, Darby, Webster, HNV, NEB, JB). However, the sense “return, coming back” (Jastrow, Gordis) is unwarranted. Whitley’s emendation of יִהְלְכוּ to יִהְלִכוּ attempts to align the stem of this word with the *qal* of הָלַךְ in the other cases where Qohelet uses this root to denote “departure” from the world (3:20, 6:4, 9:10, 12:5).<sup>50</sup> However, nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does יִהְלִכוּ mean “depart life,” nor is the verb used in this sense in the book of Qohelet. The best translation for יִהְלְכוּ is probably “they go, they walk about, they frequent” (Rashbam, Hertzberg, Fox, Crenshaw, Zer-Kavod, Longman, NLT, ESV, NASB, RSV, NIV, ASV, Young, NJPS).

יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ: The MT יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ “they were forgotten” is the *hithpael* imperfect 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural from שכח, “to forget.” This grammatical form of שכח is a *hapax legomenon*.<sup>51</sup> Rendsburg considers יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ to be a Northern Hebrew usage of Hitpa’el with passive sense, as in Aramaic (two different T-stem formations) and MH (in the *nitpa’al* form).<sup>52</sup>

In Driver opinion the MT, which has יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ, is the consequence of confusion regarding the referents of the two parts of the verse. Assuming that the first part deals with the wicked and the second part with the righteous, אֲשֶׁר כָּן עָשׂוּ was taken to mean “they that have done right” and the subject of the two preceding verbs. This error led to the change of the original יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ into יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ.<sup>53</sup>

The reading יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ is supported by four ancient versions Septuagint (ἐπιγέθησαν), Syr-Hexaplar, Aquila and Theodotion (ἐκαυχήσαντο), Symmachus (ἐπαίνουμένοι), Vulgate (*laudabantur*) and many Hebrew manuscripts. Only the Targum has איתנשין “they were forgotten.”<sup>54</sup> The root שָׁכַח occurs altogether 11 times in the HB, mostly in the Psalms. The *hithpael* of שָׁכַח can be found only in the formulaic לִהְשֹׁכַח בְּתִהְלֹךְ (Ps 106:47, 1Chr 16:35).<sup>55</sup> It is unlikely that the original reading of יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ was confused for יִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ because the root שָׁכַח is much rarer than the common root שכח. Qohelet uses שָׁכַח is twice and שכח three times.

<sup>50</sup> Whitley, 76.

<sup>51</sup> See HALOT, 1490, s.v. I שכח and BDB, 1013.

<sup>52</sup> Rendsburg, G.A. “Comprehensive Guide to Israelian Hebrew: Grammar and Lexicon.” *Orient* 38 (2003) 18.

<sup>53</sup> Driver, 230.

<sup>54</sup> One manuscript of the Targum has איתנשאו “they were lifted up.”

<sup>55</sup> See HALOT, 1387, s.v. I שָׁכַח and BDB, 986.

Taking **וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ** in a passive sense, rather than the natural reflexive sense, has no support.

The Ketib-Qere system attests to numerous cases of **ב/כ** confusion in the Hebrew Bible. Certainly, in the square script such confusion would seem possible. Consequently, the **וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ** / **וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ** confusion cannot be ruled out. The logic of this reasoning is, however, weakened by the possibility that the Septuagint, and some other versions, tapped into an available homiletic saying that was created for a different purpose (*b. Gittin* 56b), rather than presented the meaning *per se*. Moreover, the reading **וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ** is not compelling.

Standard English translations are divided regarding the reading **וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ**. Several follow the MT and translate “they were forgotten” (KJV, NKJV, Young, Darby, Webster, ASV, NASB, MLB, NJPS, HNV), and almost an equal number have the alternate reading “they were praised, or “they boasted” (NLT, NEB, ESV, RSV, NAB, NIV, NRSV, JB). Similarly modern scholarship has for **וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ** / **וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ** that they “are forgotten” (Hertzberg, Zer-Kavod, Reines); “are neglected” (Fox); “are praised” (Jastrow, Gordis, Longman); “boast” (Driver, Crenshaw); “were eulogized” (Zimmermann), etc.

**בְּעִיר**: The term **עִיר**, “city, town,” occurs also in Qoh 7:19, 9:14, 15, and 10:15. Barton felt that the collocation of **מָקוֹם קָדֵשׁ** and **עִיר** “makes it clear” that Jerusalem, where Qohelet lived (5:1), is referred to.<sup>56</sup> Qohelet’s use of **בְּעִיר** is intended to strengthen his thesis by the multiplicity of people in a city or town.

**אֲשֶׁר בֵּן-עֵשׂוֹ**: The particle **בֵּן** has been variously interpreted. The Septuagint translates **בֵּן** “thus” (οὕτως), Targum has “and so” (והיכמא), Peshitta has “such” (הכנא), and Vulgate has “just” (*iustorum*). Symmachus renders **אֲשֶׁר בֵּן-עֵשׂוֹ** “the righteous” (ὡς δίκαιοι προῆξάντες).

The two basic meanings for **בֵּן**, the neutral “so” and the positive “true” found in the *Versions*, occur with minor nuances in all the interpretations of Qoh 8:10.<sup>57</sup> For instance, Rashi and Rashbam have “so,” but Ibn Ezra has “truth,” as **בֵּן בְּנוֹת צִלְפַּחַד דְּבָרָת** (Num 27:7). Similarly, **בֵּן** was rendered “justly” (Delitzsch, Ginsburg, Murphy, Seow), “properly” (Hertzberg), “right” (Crenshaw, Krüger), “rightfully” (Zimmermann), “righteously” (NJPS), “thus” (Jastrow, Barton, Gordis, Zer-Kavod), “such” (Longman), etc. Gordis observes, “While this interpretation [**בֵּן** = “justly”] is theoretically possible, the contrast between **רָשָׁעִים** and **בֵּן-עֵשׂוֹ** is not sufficiently strong to sustain it, and Koheleth never uses **בֵּן** in this sense of “justly.” For this contrast, **צָדִיק** is the usual term (cf. 3:17, 7:20, 9:2).”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Barton, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Hertzberg, 170. Hertzberg considers the meaning “so” for **בֵּן** as “sehr künstlich und wenig sinnvoll.”

<sup>58</sup> Gordis, 296.

Ibn Ezra's reliance on Num 27:7 appears somewhat biased. He should have more properly used Num 36:10 (כִּן עָשׂוּ בְּנוֹת צִלְפָּחָד), which is closer to the text that we have and where כִּן means "they did (precisely) so."<sup>59</sup> The כִּן emphasizes the exactitude of execution. Indeed, a survey of the cases having the form "כִּן + some form of the verb עָשָׂה" reveals that in all these cases כִּן means "they did (precisely) so." This survey also points to the source of the Targum's expansion וְחִיכְמָא דְעַבְדֵּי לֵהוֹן. The principle of מִידָה כִּנְגַד מִידָה is expressed in the HB by כִּן יַעֲשֶׂה לּוֹ (Lev 24:19, Jud 15:11, Prov 24:29, cf. Jud 15:10, Jer 50:15, 29), which the Targumist skillfully exploited.

Why did Qohelet use כִּן rather than זֶה, which occurs many times in the book?<sup>60</sup> Perhaps, he did not want the זֶה of זֶה-עָשׂוּ being confused with the זֶה of גַּם-זֶה. It is also possible that כִּן provided a clever *'double entendre'*, it conveys both "so" and "correctly." Since no specific acts of the wicked are referred to in the verse, according to available interpretations and translations, translating כִּן-עָשׂוּ by "they did so" introduces considerable vagueness.

גַּם-זֶה: The emphatic גַּם-זֶה, "this too," occurs 14 times in Qohelet (1:17, 2:15, 19, 21, 23, 26, 4:4, 8, 16, 5:9, 6:9, 7:6, 8:10, 14) and variants of it can be found in 2:1, 14, 15, 24; 5:15; 7:18 and 9:13. It is worth noting that the only other place in the Hebrew Bible where the emphatic גַּם-זֶה occurs is 2Sam 18:26, though גַּם-אֲתִיזָה (Gen 29:33, 44:29), כִּי-גַם-זֶה (Gen 35:17), and גַּם-יִבְזֶה (ISam 16:8, and 9) occur.

We have seen that the presence of וּבִכְן implies that Qoh 8:10 was linked to the text that preceded it. The term גַּם-זֶה also suggests an addition to a previous set that has been, apparently, identified by being הֶבֶל. However, the closest הֶבֶל – statement preceding 8:10 is 7:6. Thus, either some material has been excised or rearranged by an editor. The existence of an editor, or "pious commentator," was already suggested by Jastrow.<sup>61</sup> The other possibility is that the זֶה in גַּם-זֶה links to אֶת-כָּל-זֶה in Qoh 8:9.

Thus, among the various things that he considered, and that were described in the verses preceding 8:9, Qohelet now turns to despotism, and

<sup>59</sup> Gen 6:22, 18:5, 34:7, Ex 7:6, 12:28, 50, 22:29, 23:11, 26:4, 17, 36:11, 22, 29, 39:32, 42, 43, 40:16, Lev 24:19, 4:20, 16:16, Num 1:54, 5:4, 6:21, 8:4, 20, 22, 9:5, 14, 15:14, 17:26, 32:21, 36:10, Deut 3:21, 7:19, 20:15, 22:3, Jos 10:1, 37, 11:15, 14:5, Jud 11:10, 14:10, 15:11, 1Sam 1:7, 8:8, 2Sam 9:11, 12:31, 1Kgs 2:38, 6:33, 7:18, 11:8, 2Kgs 16:11, 7:9, Jer 28:6, 42:5, 48:30, Ez 45:20, 12:11, Prov 24:29, Neh 5:12, 1Chr 20:3. This list illustrates the rarity of the form "כִּן + some form of the verb עָשָׂה" outside the Pentateuch and the historical books. The high frequency in Exodus stems from exactitude required in the construction of the sanctuary.

<sup>60</sup> Jastrow, 71-76. Jastrow speaks of additions to the *Urtext*, which were intended to "tone down" some of Qohelet's contentions. The גַּם זֶה in Qoh 8:10 might be indication that some material was deleted.

<sup>61</sup> Qohelet uses כִּן only 6 times (3:19, 5:1, 7:6, 8:10 (2t), 11), two of which are in our verse, and 38 זֶה times (1:10, 17, 2:2, 3, 10, 15, 19, 21, 23, 25, 26, 3:19 (2t), 4:8, 16, 5:9, 6:2, 5 (2t), 9, 7:6, 10, 14 (2t), 18 (2t), 27, 29, 8:9, 10, 14, 9:1 (2t), 3, 11:6 (2t), 12:13).

the subject matter of our verse. Obviously, attaching הֶבֶל גַּם־זֶה to the following verse, as the JPS does, resolves the difficulty. Yet, הֶבֶל גַּם־זֶה never occurs at the beginning of a verse in the Hebrew Bible.

הֶבֶל: This is the main term for the characterization, or judgment, of the various issues and cases discussed in the book of Qohelet. It means “vapor, breath,” something of no consequence, perhaps similar to the current “hot air.”<sup>62</sup> Its notion of transience has been figuratively expressed by terms such as, “fleeting,” “temporary,” “insubstantial,” “utterly fruitless,” “incongruous,” “ephemeral,” “enigmatic,” and “absurd.” Miller renders הֶבֶל “vapor,” and shows that it has three distinct metaphorical nuances: insubstantiality, transience, and foulness.<sup>63</sup> Farmer notes the virtual equality of הֶבֶל and רוּחַ in Qoh 1:14, 2:11, 17, 26, 4:4, 16, and 6:9.<sup>64</sup> This suggests to her that the material referent (vapor, or breath) should be contemplated for הֶבֶל in each case, to appreciate the metaphorical nature of the term.

In Qohelet’s view human existence abounds in paradoxes; everything in it is of no consequence, as “thin air,” or emptiness. Thus the term is used frequently in the book, exactly 37 times, equal to the numerical value (Gematria) of הֶבֶל.

### SOLUTION

The first difficulty in Qoh 8:10 is the impression that Qohelet is surprised by the fact of the wicked being buried. Zer-Kavod tried to justify this surprise, explaining that Qohelet saw “wicked buried [in the tomb that they prepared for themselves, and were not thrown out of it as befits them].”<sup>65</sup> Except of the logical contradiction of this statement, it cannot be true in light of the ancient Jewish tradition to bury every dead before sunset.

The Hebrew Bible mentions some unusual cases where the bones of the dead were thrown out of the grave. For instance, Josiah’s reform included the extraordinary actions of defiling the shrines to various idols with human bones taken out of their graves on the king’s orders (2 Kgs 23:14, 16, 18). Jeremiah prophecy makes the unusual point that “At that

<sup>62</sup> Fox, M. “The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet.” *JBL* 105 (1986) 409-427; Ogden, G. S. “The Meaning of the Term Hebel.” In *Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (ed. Zuck, R. B.). Grand Rapids: Baker (1994) 227-231; Seow, C. L. “Beyond Mortal Grasp: the Usage of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes.” *AusBR* 48 (2000) 1-2; Anderson, W. “The Semantic Implications of הֶבֶל and רוּחַ רֵעוּת in the Hebrew Bible and for Qoheleth.” *JNSL* 25 (1999) 59-73; Miller, D. B. “Qohelet’s Symbolic Use of הֶבֶל.” *JBL* 117 (1998) 437-454; Seybold, K. “הֶבֶל.” In *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*, III (eds. Botterweck, G. J. and Ringgren, H.). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1978) 313-320.

<sup>63</sup> Miller, D. B. *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: The Place of Hebel in Qohelet’s Work*. Academia Biblica 2. Atlanta, GA, and Leiden: SBL and E. J. Brill (2002) 154.

<sup>64</sup> Farmer, K. A. *Who Knows What is Good? A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*. ITC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1991) 143-146.

<sup>65</sup> Zer-Kavod, 50.



time—declares the Lord—the bones of the king of Judah, of its officers, of the priests, of the prophets, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be taken out of their graves and exposed to the sun, the moon, and all the host of heaven which they loved and served and followed, to which they turned and bowed down. They shall not be gathered for reburial; they shall become dung upon the face of earth” (Jer 8:1–2). Those were, however, highly demonstrative acts intended to make an indelible impression on the populace; hardly befitting regular scoundrels. Severe curses deterred people from tempering with the graves. The buried wicked *per se* could not have been the subject of Qohelet’s contemplation or observation.

The second difficulty is the verb **וַבָּא**. We have seen in the ANALYSIS section how exegetes unsuccessfully struggled with this word. The verb seems redundant in the presence of **יְהִלְכוּ**, and creates confusion in the flow of events. Simple metathesis yields **וַאֲבָ**, “and necromancer,” from **וַבָּא**, implying that the “wicked” visited the necromancer.<sup>66</sup> Necromancy was widely practiced among the ancient people, particularly in Egypt. The Hebrew Bible certainly forbids several times the engaging in necromancy (Lev 19:31, 20:6, 27, Deut 18:10–11), but the practice apparently persisted. This can be deduced from the references to it, and actions taken against it.

For instance, Isaiah says, “Now, should people say to you, ‘Inquire of the ghosts and familiar spirits for chirp and moan; for a people may inquire of its divine beings—of the dead on behalf of the living—for instruction and message,’ surely, for one who speaks thus there shall be no dawn” (Isa 8:19–20, cf. 9:3). We are told that the sins of king Manasseh included the following: “He consigned his son to the fire; he practiced soothsaying and divination, and consulted ghosts and familiar spirits” (2Kgs 21:6, cf. 2Chr 33:6). It is notable that the first king of Israel Saul (1Sam 28) and the reformist Josiah (2Kgs 23:24) tried to eradicate necromancy. Saul’s actions clearly demonstrate that it was easier to eradicate the necromancers from the land than the need for necromancy from the heart.

The Talmud also attests to the wide and open practice of necromancy, though there were some who expressed dissatisfaction (*b. Berachot* 59a), and the veracity of the spirits was not doubted (*b. Shabbath* 152b). We read of a pious man who was rewarded for eavesdropping on the prophecies of the dead (*b. Berachot* 18b). An Amora who inquired of a necromancer and the prediction indeed occurred (*b. Berachot* 59a). The scholar Banaah was well versed in necromancy (*b. Babba Batra* 58a). R. Akiva use necromancy to prove that the River Sambation stopped flowing on the Sabbath (Genesis Rabba 11:6). In *b. Gittin* 56b, we are told that the ghosts of Titus, Ballam, and Jesus are called upon to provide advice for Onqelos, the nephew of Titus, whether he should embrace Judaism. Ben Sira says: “Samuel prophesied after his death, and showed the king his end, and lift up his

<sup>66</sup> The Bible refers to necromancy by the general term **דֹּרֵשׁ אֶל הַמֵּתִים**, and **אֲבָ וִידְעוֹנִי**. The etymology and exact connotation of these words is, however, not clear (cf. *TDOT* I, 131–134).

voice from the earth in prophecy” (46:20). The causal references to necromancy (Deut 26:14, 1Sam 28, cf. 1Chr 10:13), its wide use by pious persons in the time of the Talmud, and Josephus’ positive attitude toward the woman of En-dor (*Ant.* 6:14:4), all indicate that while necromancy was censured by the Torah, it was in practice tolerated, and probably considered by the common folks an act of piety.<sup>67</sup> There was apparently a related practice of **דורש אל המתים**, which involved fasting and sleeping in cemeteries to find communion with the dead (cf. *b. Sanhedrin* 65b, *b. Haggigah* 3b).

If **קברים** → **קברים** and **וּבְאוּ** → **וְאוּב** as the Septuagint reads, then it makes sense to understand **קְדוּשׁ וּמִמְקוֹם** as alluding to something of a funerary nature. I suggest that here **קְדוּשׁ מְקוֹם** is the burial place of a holy man (Ez 39:11), though it could also be the residence of a holy man. The concept of a person who was a **קְדוּשׁ** in the sense of being distinguished by his piety and spiritual closeness to God is attested in the Bible. Such person was Elisha (2Kgs 4:9), or those who fear God (Ps 34:10), and perhaps the holy mentioned in Isa 4:3, Hos 1:12, Zec 14:5, Job 5:1, Prov 9:10, and 30:3. The tradition of the saintly or holy man and his power found expression in later times in such statements as “said the Holy One, Blessed be He, ‘I rule over man, but who rules over me? The Saint, for when I issue a decree, he sets it aside’” (*b. Moed Katan* 16b).

It stands to reason that these holy men were visited, consulted, and venerated during their life (Gen 25:22, 2Kgs 4:23) and after their death, in particular in a society that believed that the dead continued to affect life on earth.<sup>68</sup> The Psalmist confession, “as to the holy and mighty ones that are in the land (grave?), those who espouse another, may have many sorrows! I will have no part in their bloody libations; their name will not pass my lips” (Ps 16:3-4), speaks volumes of the veneration of the holy men after their death.<sup>69</sup> It is probably not far fetched to assume that the place of Moses’ burial was concealed (Deut 34:6) to avoid such veneration.

If this understanding is correct, then Qohelet observes the wicked engaged in acts of piety focused on the dead. They visit the graves, go to necromancers, and frequent the graves of holy men (or visit living holy men). While the Hebrew Bible rejects all customs related to the worship of the dead, it is notable that feeding the dead was apparently practiced in the

<sup>67</sup> The Mishnah in *b. Sanhedrin* 65a has:

בעל אוב זה פיתום המדבר משהיו וידעוני זה המדבר בפיו הרי אלו בסקילה והנשאל בהם באזהרה

The difference in punishment is notable. Use of a necromancer warranted only a warning, perhaps because the custom was quite accepted.

<sup>68</sup> R. Yehoshua, upon receiving a satisfying rationale according to the teachings of the Shammai Academy, for a judicial question that bothered him, went to the graves of Beth Shammai in an act of appreciation (*b. Hagigah* 22b). R. Mani threw himself prostrate over his father’s grave in prayer for rain (*b. Taanit* 23b).

<sup>69</sup> Qohelet makes it clear in 9:6 that the dead cannot benefit from what goes on earth. This view, however, does not undermine the possibility that the dead could affect what happens on earth.

time of the Second Temple and was considered an act of piety at least among some of the “God fearers.” We find in Tobit 4:17 “Pour out your bread on the burial of the just, but give nothing to the wicked.” Similarly Ben Sira bears witness to this custom, though he opposes it. We read in Ecclesiasticus 30:18 “Delicacies poured upon a mouth shut up are as messes of meat set upon a grave” (cf. the Hebrew version in Sir 30:21). The causal description of a dead man’s revival upon touching Elisha’s bones (2Kgs 13:21) would be inconceivable if some holiness and magic is not believed to have been retained by the dead. Taken together with the belief in the existence of Sheol and existence in Sheol, causal references to necromancy (Deut 26:14, 1Sam 28), Job’s ruminations about hiding in and emerging from Sheol,<sup>70</sup> and archeological evidence,<sup>71</sup> one gets a strong feeling about the existence of popular beliefs regarding some *post-mortem* existence, which were not sanctioned but also not actively combated.<sup>72</sup> Bickerman says, “Although the conventional view was that the spirit returns to God who gave it (Tob 3:6, Koh 12:7), the Jews continued to cling to the primeval belief in the continuous existence of the departed in their graves as long as their bones remained there. The tomb was man’s eternal home, as Kohelet (12:5) said. Offerings of food, generally bread and wine, were commonly brought to the grave in ancient Israel, the Lawgiver having forbidden only the offering of consecrated food to the dead (Deut 26:14).”<sup>73</sup> The pious were apparently engaged in these activities of serving, reaching out to the dead and getting guidance from them. Qohelet saw the wicked doing the same things as the pious. Perhaps the wicked were repenting?

As far as I could ascertain not a single commentator considered the possibility that Qohelet refers to a case of genuine repentance, though it has been suggested that the wicked frequent the holy place for “show” and

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<sup>70</sup> Althann, R. “Job and the idea of the beatific afterlife.” *OTE* 4,3 (1991) 322. Althann believes that looking forward to a beatific afterlife is suggested in Job 19:25-27. The metaphor of the mythical phoenix in Job 29:18 indicates to him that “Job expects a life after death. The point of the comparison in colon 1 is precisely that death is not the end. Just as the destruction of the mythical bird’s nest is the source of new life, of a new phoenix, so Job’s death would be the gateway to a new life for him.”

<sup>71</sup> Friedman, R.E. and Dolansky, S. “Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence.” In *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, Part 4 (eds. Avery-Peck, A.J. and Neusner, J.). Leiden: Brill (2000) 36-37. The authors say, “We know that there was belief in an afterlife in Israel. The combination of archeological records and the references that we do have in the text leave little room for doubt.” They note the funerary archeological findings in Megiddo, Gezer, Tel Abu Hawam, Beth Shemesh, Sahab (Trans-Jordan), and Dothan.

<sup>72</sup> Brichto, H.C. “Kin, Cult, Land, and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex.” *HUCA* 44 (1973) 29. For instance, with respect to Deut 26:14 Brichto notes “not only does this verse attest to the practice, as late as the time of Deuteronomy, of offerings made to the dead; it attests that normative biblical religion accorded them the sanction of toleration.”

<sup>73</sup> Bickerman, E. J. *The Jews in the Greek Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1988) 272.

deception. Yet, assuming that Qohelet saw the wicked repent makes sense, and it provides a context for a natural explanation of the verse. The event, from a theological standpoint, should have been *prima facie* evidence that God's attribute of "slow to anger" is justified. It should have been preserved as an example of an actual case in which "slow to anger" was operative in a familiar and verifiable setting. To Qohelet surprise, in the city where the repentance occurred and was observed it was also completely forgotten. This was truly absurd.

In my view the *Urtext* was as follows,

וּבְכֵן רָאִיתִי רָשָׁעִים קְבָרִים וְאוֹב וּמִקּוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יִהְיֶה  
וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְעִיר אֲשֶׁר כִּזְעָשׁוּ גִם־זֶה הַקֵּל

"and also I saw wicked frequenting graves, and necromancer, and place of a holy. And they were forgotten in the city in which they did so (correctly?). This too is absurd."

The verse can be paraphrased: "And I observed persons, who were considered wicked, frequenting cemeteries, necromancers, and the places of holy men. Yet they were not noted in the place where they did so. This too is absurd." The suggested *Urtext* is only slightly different than the MT and does not require the emendation of וַיִּשְׁתַּכְּחוּ to וַיִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ. The specific changes are:

- (1) קְבָרִים has been revocalized as קְבָרִים;
- (2) וְאוֹב has been reordered and revocalized as וְאוֹב; and,
- (3) in וּמִקּוֹם the מ was dropped.

As we have seen in the ANALYSIS section, most of the scholarship on Qoh 8:10 rejects the MT reading קְבָרִים. The words קְבָרִים and קְבָרִים differ in a single vowel. Metathesis occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible, as attested by the Ketib-Qere system.<sup>74</sup> While metatheses involving two transpositions are less frequent than single transpositions, they are also attested in the Ketib-Qere system. It is certainly possible to justify the extra מ as an error of dittography.<sup>75</sup> Thus, it would be relatively easy to understand how the MT could have arisen by a scribe making simple errors in transcription. I think, however, that the changes that have been made were intentional, and the justification for them was that they could have been scribal error. The construct X + (Y1) + (Z1) occurs several times in Qohelet (2:7, 8, 12, 21, etc.). The suggested reading also eliminates the need to use the *piel* יִהְיֶה for the *qal* יִהְיֶה.

<sup>74</sup> Tur-Sinai, 106-149. Most of the metathesis cases in the Ketib-Qere system involve only one transposition (ab → ba). There are, however, cases of more than one transposition: 2Sam 14:30 והוצתיה (K) but והציתיה (Q); Isa 10:10 ולשימו (K) but ולשימו (Q); Neh 12:14 למליו (K) but למליו (Q); Ex 40:3 הפרכת but in other places תשיר = תשאר but ירשת in the Septuagint; Jud 21:17 תשיר but תשאר in the Septuagint; 1Sam 13:20 מחרשתו but חרמשו in the Septuagint, etc.

<sup>75</sup> The Ketib-Qere system attests to the following cases of a missing or extra מ: 2Sam 22:16 ויהם (K) but ויהם (Q); 2Kgs 12:12 הפקדים (K) but המפקדים (Q); 2Kgs 17:16 שנים (K) but שני (Q); 2Kgs 17:24 וספרים (K) but וספרים (Q); Ez 44:23 לשפט (K) but למשפט (Q).

I have already mentioned that Jastrow detected in many instances in Qohelet the hand of a pious commentator. In particular, he ascribes the verses that follow Qoh 8:10 (v. 11-13) to this commentator. Jastrow says, “At this point, our pious commentator enters upon an elaborate argument (verses 11-13) somewhat in the style of Job’s friends to prove that the wicked are punished, even though the punishment be delayed. ‘Because the sentence for an evil deed is not promptly carried out, therefore the inclination of man is to do evil [cf. Genesis 8:21]. But although a sinner does a great deal of evil and is accorded a respite, yet I know that good fortune will attend those who fear God [comment or variant: ‘Those who fear His presence] and that it shall not be well for the wicked, and that he will not lengthen out his days as a shadow [?], because he does not fear the presence of God.’”<sup>76</sup>

The cause for this outburst by the pious commentator can be found within the framework of the *Urtext* that I have suggested. It stands to reason that the pious commentator did not like in the *Urtext* before him two things: (1) consideration of necromancy as an act of piety; and, (2) the view that “slow to anger” has justification in the potential for repentance. He took care of the first problem by changing **וְאֹב** into **וּבְאוּ**, and adding a **מ** to **וּמְקוֹם**, all changes that can be justified by being simple scribal errors. This completely obliterated Qohelet’s original thought. But that was not enough. It was necessary not only to eliminate Qohelet’s original thought, but to replace it with the normative thinking. That is why verses 11-13 were inserted.

## CONCLUSION

I suggest that at some time prior to the formation of the Septuagint, a pious scribe considered the *Urtext* reading,

וּבְכֵן רְאִיתִי רְשָׁעִים קְבָרִים וְאֹב וּמְקוֹם קְדוֹשׁ יִהְיֶה  
וְיִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ בְעִיר אֲשֶׁר כִּן־עָשׂוּ גַם־זֶה הַקֵּל

as offensive, because it condoned necromancy and presented it as a mark of piety. Moreover, Qohelet’s view that wicked could become pious, and consequently God’s being “slow to anger” has justification, was at odds with the normative position, which argued that this attribute of God promotes wickedness since it creates a time-disconnect between the crime and its punishment.

This pious scribe masterfully changed the *Urtext* within the constraints of acceptable human error, obtaining a text that suggested the burial of the wicked. Apparently the sages of that time (or later) felt that the custom of giving burial to anyone needs strengthening and came up with the homiletic **אל תיקרי וישתכחו אלא** (*b. Gittin 56b*). The Septuagint reflects this traditional view. Yet, **אל תיקרי וישתכחו אלא** in fact only strengthens the reading of **וְיִשְׁתַּכְּחוּ** in the MT.

Yet, when we return to the suggested *Urtext*, we are in the presence of a deep thinker and keen observer, as Qohelet was. His theodicy, based on

<sup>76</sup> Jastrow, 229.

actual observation, dared to go against the accepted norms. God's attribute of "slow to anger" has justification in real life, wickedness is not pathological. Why then are cases of wicked turning into pious men so quickly forgotten? And, that even in the place where they have occurred? The pious commentator provides the answer. These cases were forgotten because they clashed with the convenient normative theology. This is in Qohelet view an absurdity, because wicked turning into pious men should have been considered as instances that strengthen the theological foundations.