

TYNDALE



CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Job

August H. Konkel

Ecclesiastes &
Song of Songs

Tremper Longman III

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort

WITH THE ENTIRE TEXT OF THE
 New Living
Translation

CORNERSTONE
B I B L I C A L
COMMENTARY

General Editor

Philip W. Comfort

D. Litt. et Phil., University of South Africa;

Tyndale House Publishers;

Coastal Carolina University.

Consulting Editor, Old Testament

Tremper Longman III

PhD, Yale University;

Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, Westmont College.

Consulting Editor, New Testament

Grant Osborne

PhD, University of Aberdeen;

Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Associate Editors

Jason Driesbach

MA, Biblical Exegesis and Linguistics, Dallas Theological Seminary;

Tyndale House Publishers.

Mark R. Norton

MA, Theological Studies, Wheaton Graduate School;

Tyndale House Publishers.

James A. Swanson

MSM, Multnomah Biblical Seminary;

MTh, University of South Africa;

Tyndale House Publishers.



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CONTRIBUTORS TO VOLUME 6

Job: August H. Konkel

BRE, Providence College;

MDiv, Providence Theological Seminary;

PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary;

President, Providence College and Theological Seminary.

Ecclesiastes & Song of Songs: Tremper Longman III

BA, Ohio Wesleyan University;

MDiv, Westminster Theological Seminary;

PhD, Yale University;

Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, Westmont College.

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2004). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and lay people understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT
GENERAL EDITOR

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

b.	Babylonian Gemara	Gr.	Greek	no.	number
bar.	baraita	Heb.	Hebrew	NT	New Testament
c.	<i>circa</i> , around, approximately	ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	OL	Old Latin
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , the same	OS	Old Syriac
ch, chs	chapter, chapters	in loc.	<i>in loco</i> , in the place cited	OT	Old Testament
contra	in contrast to	lit.	literally	p., pp.	page, pages
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls	LXX	Septuagint	pl.	plural
ed.	edition, editor	Ⲛ	Majority Text	Q	Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	m.	Mishnah	rev.	revision
ET	English translation	masc.	masculine	sg.	singular
et al.	<i>et alli</i> , and others	mg	margin	t.	Tosefta
fem.	feminine	MS	manuscript	v., vv.	verse, verses
ff	following (verses, pages)	MSS	manuscripts	vid.	<i>videur</i> , it seems
fl.	flourished	MT	Masoretic Text	viz.	<i>videlicet</i> , namely
		n.d.	no date	vol.	volume
		neut.	neuter	γ.	Jerusalem Gemara

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version	NCV	New Century Version	NKJV	New King James Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NEB	New English Bible	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
ESV	English Standard Version	NIV	New International Version	NLT	New Living Translation
GW	God's Word	NIrV	New International Reader's Version	REB	Revised English Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	RSV	Revised Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible	NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation	TEV	Today's English Version
KJV	King James Version		(<i>Tanakh</i>)	TLB	The Living Bible
NAB	New American Bible				
NASB	New American Standard Bible				

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]	BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]	BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (Pritchard) [1965]			BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Pritchard) [1969]	BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]		
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>				

- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]
- CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]
- COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 volumes, Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]
- DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]
- DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd edition, Leon-Dufour) [1972]
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (5 volumes, D. Clines) [2000]
- DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]
- DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]
- DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]
- DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]
- EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]
- IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]
- IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]
- ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]
- KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th edition, Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]
- MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]
- NA²⁶ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th edition, Nestle-Aland) [1979]
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th edition, Nestle-Aland) [1993]
- NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd edition, Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]
- NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]
- NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]
- NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]
- PGM *Papyri Graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. (Preisendanz) [1928]
- PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]
- TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (8 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]
- TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]
- UBS³ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (third edition, Metzger et al) [1975]
- UBS⁴ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (fourth corrected edition, Metzger et al) [1993]
- WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	1 Sam	1 Samuel	Esth	Esther
Exod	Exodus	2 Sam	2 Samuel	Ps, Pss	Psalms, Psalms
Lev	Leviticus	1 Kgs	1 Kings	Prov	Proverbs
Num	Numbers	2 Kgs	2 Kings	Eccl	Ecclesiastes
Deut	Deuteronomy	1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Song	Song of Songs
Josh	Joshua	2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah
Judg	Judges	Ezra	Ezra	Jer	Jeremiah
Ruth	Ruth	Neh	Nehemiah	Lam	Lamentations

Ezek	Ezekiel	Obad	Obadiah	Zeph	Zephaniah
Dan	Daniel	Jonah	Jonah	Hag	Haggai
Hos	Hosea	Mic	Micah	Zech	Zechariah
Joel	Joel	Nah	Nahum	Mal	Malachi
Amos	Amos	Hab	Habakkuk		

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	Jas	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Phlm	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

Deuterocanonical

Bar	Baruch	1–2 Esdr	1–2 Esdras	Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel	Add Esth	Additions to Esther	Ps 151	Psalms 151
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah	Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah	Sir	Sirach
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Jdt	Judith	Tob	Tobit
Sg Three	Song of the Three Children	1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sus	Susanna	3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees		

MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD	Cairo Geniza copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>	1QIsa ^b	Isaiah copy ^b	4QLam ^a	Lamentations
		1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>	11QP ^s ^a	Psalms
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>	1QpHab	<i>Peshar Habakkuk</i>	11QT ^{em} ^{a,b}	<i>Temple Scroll</i>
1QIsa ^a	Isaiah copy ^a	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>	11QTg ^{lob}	<i>Targum of Job</i>

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

P1 Matt 1; early 3rd	P20 James 2-3; 3rd	P39 John 8; first half of 3rd
P4+P64+P67 Matt 3, 5, 26; Luke 1-6; late 2nd	P22 John 15-16; mid 3rd	P40 Rom 1-4, 6, 9; 3rd
P5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd	P23 James 1; c. 200	P45 Gospels and Acts; early 3rd
P13 Heb 2-5, 10-12; early 3rd	P27 Rom 8-9; 3rd	P46 Paul's Major Epistles (less Pastorals); late 2nd
P15+P16 (probably part of same codex) 1 Cor 7-8, Phil 3-4; late 3rd	P30 1 Thess 4-5; 2 Thess 1; early 3rd	P47 Rev 9-17; 3rd
	P32 Titus 1-2; late 2nd	
	P37 Matt 26; late 3rd	

P49+P65 Eph 4-5; 1 Thess
 1-2; 3rd
 P52 John 18; c. 125
 P53 Matt 26, Acts 9-10;
 middle 3rd
 P66 John; late 2nd
 P70 Matt 2-3, 11-12, 24; 3rd
 P72 1-2 Peter, Jude; c. 300

P74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th
 P75 Luke and John; c. 200
 P77+P103 (probably part of
 same codex) Matt 13-14, 23;
 late 2nd
 P87 Phlm; late 2nd
 P90 John 18-19; late 2nd
 P91 Acts 2-3; 3rd

P92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300
 P98 Rev 1:13-20; late 2nd
 P100 James 3-5; c. 300
 P101 Matt 3-4; 3rd
 P104 Matt 21; 2nd
 P106 John 1; 3rd
 P115 Rev 2-3, 5-6, 8-15; 3rd

Significant Uncials

Ⲁ (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th
 A (Alexandrinus) most of NT;
 5th
 B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th
 C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most
 of NT with many lacunae;
 5th
 D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th
 D (Claromontanus), Paul's
 Epistles; 6th (different MS
 than Bezae)
 E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th
 F (Augensis) Paul's Epistles; 9th
 G (Boernerianus) Paul's
 Epistles; 9th

H (Coislinianus) Paul's
 Epistles; 6th
 I (Freerianus or Washington)
 Paul's Epistles; 5th
 L (Regius) Gospels; 8th
 Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke,
 John; 5th
 P (Porphyrrianus) Acts—
 Revelation; 9th
 T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th
 W (Washingtonianus or the
 Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th
 Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th
 037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels;
 9th

038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels;
 9th
 040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th
 043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matt,
 Mark; 6th
 044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae)
 Gospels, Acts, Paul's
 Epistles; 9th
 048 Acts, Paul's Epistles,
 General Epistles; 5th
 0171 Matt 10, Luke 22;
 c. 300
 0189 Acts 5; c. 200

Significant Minuscules

1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles;
 12th
 33 All NT except Rev; 9th
 81 Acts, Paul's Epistles,
 General Epistles; 1044
 565 Gospels; 9th
 700 Gospels; 11th

1424 (or Family 1424—a
 group of 29 manuscripts
 sharing nearly the same
 text) most of NT; 9th-10th
 1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th
 2053 Rev; 13th
 2344 Rev; 11th

f¹ (a family of manuscripts
 including 1, 118, 131, 209)
 Gospels; 12th-14th
 f¹³ (a family of manuscripts
 including 13, 69, 124, 174,
 230, 346, 543, 788, 826,
 828, 983, 1689, 1709—
 known as the Ferrar group)
 Gospels; 11th-15th

Significant Ancient Versions

SYRIAC (SYR)
 syr^c (Syriac Curetonian)
 Gospels; 5th
 syr^s (Syriac Sinaiticus)
 Gospels; 4th
 syr^h (Syriac Harklensis) Entire
 NT; 616

OLD LATIN (IT)
 it^a (Vercellenis) Gospels; 4th
 it^b (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th
 it^d (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin
 text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts,
 3 John; 5th
 it^e (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th
 it^k (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark;
 c. 400

COPTIC (COP)
 cop^{bo} (Boharic—north Egypt)
 cop^{fav} (Fayyumic—central Egypt)
 cop^{sa} (Sahidic—southern Egypt)

OTHER VERSIONS
 arm (Armenian)
 eth (Ethiopic)
 geo (Georgian)

TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

Note: For words and roots from non-biblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

HEBREW/ARAMAIC

Consonants

א	<i>aleph</i>	= '		מ, ם	<i>mem</i>	= m
ב, ן	<i>beth</i>	= b		נ, ן	<i>nun</i>	= n
ג, ן	<i>gimel</i>	= g		ס	<i>samekh</i>	= s
ד, ך	<i>daleth</i>	= d		ע	<i>ayin</i>	= '
ה	<i>he</i>	= h		פ, ן, ף	<i>pe</i>	= p
ו	<i>waw</i>	= w		צ, ץ	<i>tsadhe</i>	= ts
ז	<i>zayin</i>	= z		ק	<i>qoph</i>	= q
ח	<i>heth</i>	= kh		ר	<i>resh</i>	= r
ט	<i>teth</i>	= t		ש	<i>shin</i>	= sh
י	<i>yodh</i>	= y		שׁ	<i>sin</i>	= s
כ, ן, ך	<i>kaph</i>	= k		ת, ך	<i>taw</i>	= t, th (spirant)
ל	<i>lamedh</i>	= l				

Vowels

ַ	<i>patakh</i>	= a		ֿ	<i>qamets khatuf</i>	= o
ֿ	<i>furtive patakh</i>	= a		ֿ	<i>holem</i>	= o
ֿ	<i>qamets</i>	= a		ֿ	<i>full holem</i>	= o
ֿ	<i>final qamets he</i>	= ah		ֿ	<i>short qibbutz</i>	= u
ֿ	<i>segol</i>	= e		ֿ	<i>long qibbutz</i>	= u
ֿ	<i>tsere</i>	= e		ֿ	<i>shureq</i>	= u
ֿ	<i>tsere yod</i>	= e		ֿ	<i>khatuf patakh</i>	= a
ֿ	<i>short hireq</i>	= i		ֿ	<i>khatuf qamets</i>	= o
ֿ	<i>long hireq</i>	= i		ֿ	<i>vocalic shewa</i>	= e
ֿ	<i>hireq yod</i>	= i		ֿ	<i>patakh yodh</i>	= a

GREEK

α	<i>alpha</i>	= a		ε	<i>epsilon</i>	= e
β	<i>beta</i>	= b		ζ	<i>zeta</i>	= z
γ	<i>gamma</i>	= g, n (before γ, κ, ξ, χ)		η	<i>eta</i>	= ē
δ	<i>delta</i>	= d		θ	<i>theta</i>	= th
				ι	<i>iota</i>	= i

κ	<i>kappa</i>	= k	τ	<i>tau</i>	= t
λ	<i>lamda</i>	= l	υ	<i>upsilon</i>	= u
μ	<i>mu</i>	= m	φ	<i>phi</i>	= ph
ν	<i>nu</i>	= n	χ	<i>chi</i>	= ch
ξ	<i>ksi</i>	= x	ψ	<i>psi</i>	= ps
ο	<i>omicron</i>	= o	ω	<i>omega</i>	= ō
π	<i>pi</i>	= p	·	<i>rough</i>	= h (with
ρ	<i>rho</i>	= r (ῥ = rh)		<i>breathing</i>	vowel or
σ, ς	<i>sigma</i>	= s		<i>mark</i>	<i>diphthong</i>)

THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.¹

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

TG	Tyndale-Strong's Greek number	ZH	Zondervan Hebrew number
ZG	Zondervan Greek number	TA	Tyndale-Strong's Aramaic number
TH	Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number	ZA	Zondervan Aramaic number

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [T626, Z627], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by capital letter (e.g., T61692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., T62013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.



Job

AUGUST H. KONKEL

INTRODUCTION TO *Job*

THE BOOK OF JOB belongs to that category of writings typically termed “wisdom literature.” This is not a specific genre designation but is a term of convenience, derived apparently from ecclesiastical usage and used to designate the biblical books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (Murphy 1981:3). Biblical wisdom may be defined as the exposition of a fundamental order within the universe (Crenshaw 1981:66). Wisdom is to know and follow this order, and folly is to contravene and ignore it. Traditional wisdom sought to provide direction for understanding order, but the wisdom writers recognized that the divine order contains mystifying paradoxes. Reflective wisdom addressed realities that appeared to be a contradiction of the traditional understanding of the creative order. The book of Job is a profound reflection on the mysteries of the divine order.

Fundamental to Old Testament revelation is the affirmation that the sovereignty of the Creator is absolute and that his providence for his creation is uncompromisingly beneficent. Traditional Hebrew wisdom asserts that wisdom and knowledge begin with a reverence for the Creator and a loyalty to the covenant that he has given: the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10). Such knowledge is the means to a good life: “Joyful is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gains understanding. . . . She offers you long life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. . . . Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly” (Prov 3:13, 16, 18). The basic premise is that righteousness contains its own reward in the operative providence of God.

The reality of life is that the affirmations of traditional wisdom often contradict the experience of the faithful. Bad things happen to good people; and, conversely, good things often happen to bad people. The book of Job confronts the tension between the idea that virtue has its own reward and the reality that the virtuous often suffer. However, the book of Job does not sever the connection between conduct and consequences. It is not adequate to say that the world is “amoral.” Tsevat has argued that there is no realization of moral values except those affected by people, so there is no relation between fate and religio-moral actions (1980:26-33). This amounts to a denial of the sovereign providence of God, so fate operates as a cruel, arbitrary force that may as readily punish good as reward it. Job indeed suffered as an innocent person, but this does not imply that we are to expect nothing from our

behavior. The prologue is not meant to teach us that piety, as far as it is possible, is disinterested in personal good. Certainly, it does not insure safety, nor is personal benefit the primary motivation for good conduct; but there are temporal rewards for moral behavior. In the end, the fortunes of Job are restored as a reminder that the author is not oblivious to the consequences of our actions and the truth about a moral universe (Clines 1989:xlvii). Thus, we should conclude that the author was not seeking to undermine all traditional values.

The book of Job does not resolve the rational question of the problem of the innocent suffering.¹ The story of Job suggests that, in human experience, the cause of individual suffering may remain forever a mystery. Readers are privy to the reason for Job's anguish, but Job himself will never learn of the challenge in the courts of heaven that so drastically changed his life. The quest for wisdom does not lead us to explain the order of the universe but to live within it under the sovereign control of God. A large portion of the dialog is an attempt to explain the order of the world in terms of justice and retribution; but in the end this effort is condemned by God. "Job's friends cherished religious conviction more than a vital relationship with the living God, for they believed in a rational deity who was enslaved by a greater principle: justice" (Crenshaw 1981:118).

Job is a solemn reminder that our attempts to defend the order of God may not be honoring to him at all. Although Job is overwhelmed by God to the point that he is brought to silence and submission, God, in the end, takes his side—the side of the man who had challenged the divine rule—and Job must offer sacrifices for his three friends (42:7-8; cf. Barr 1971:46). The profound lesson of the book of Job would seem to be that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Humans face the problem of suffering on both a rational and an existential level. On a rational level, the problem is one of justice; on an existential level, the question is one of how to respond to inexplicable suffering. The question of why innocent people suffer is intellectual; the practical question is what the innocent should do when suffering comes upon them.² In the book of Job we see more than one response. In the prologue Job is reverent and accepting, but in the dialog we find him rejecting his very life (9:21). The fundamental issue is Job's relationship to God. When Job could not bow in submission to the divine "theft" of his property, family, and health, there was still no question but that he must plead his innocence before God and find his hope and life there.

The lament of Job "unfolds a curious situation which bristles with irony" (Crenshaw 1981:109). On the one hand, Job endeavored to escape God's constant vigilance; on the other, he longed to find the God who concealed himself from his former friend. God could not be responsible for such antagonism, but Job knew that such misfortune must be a part of the ruling hand of God. The speeches of God removed Job from the center of the picture and destroyed the illusion that he was at the heart of the universe. Job was not able to determine the order of the universe, nor did he understand his suffering. He was, however, able to meet God as someone other than a hostile enemy and to submit to him as a child of the earth (42:6).

Job, who earlier had rejected his life, saw God and rejected his former attitude (42:5-6). "Seeing God" was not a sensory perception but a personal encounter. The crucible of life experience led to a more profound reverence for God.

The book of Job excels as an example of wisdom literature. The search for wisdom must begin on the path of understanding the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7; 9:10). Job began as an individual uncompromising in his integrity and his desire to revere God. No effort may be spared in the search for wisdom (Prov 2:1-4). Job was relentless in his pursuit of God, even in his pain and anguish. The end result of wisdom is not some new rational insight but a more profound comprehension of the fear of the Lord (Prov 2:5-6). Skladny defines the fear of the Lord as the instinctive and intuitive recognition of the total claim of God in religious and moral issues (1961:15). In the end, Job came to terms with this claim in a way that was not possible at the beginning; he was able to speak rightly about God (42:7-8). The theodicy of Job's friends proved to be their liability. Job had no such answers for the moral problem of evil in the world, but he was rewarded for his uncompromising submission to the claim of God upon his life. This is true wisdom.

AUTHOR

As is the case with a large portion of the literature of the Old Testament, the book of Job is anonymous. We know nothing of the identity or the life circumstances of the author, but from his work we do know something about him as a person. The book of Job has its origin among the wise. In ancient Israel, there were three primary means of revelation: law, prophecy, and wisdom. This is observed when those who rejected the prophetic warnings of Jeremiah laid plot against him, assuring themselves that the "law will not fail from the priest, nor counsel from the wise man, nor the word from the prophet" (Jer 18:18, my translation). Similarly, Ezekiel's warning to the rebels of Jerusalem mentions these same three means: "They will look in vain for a vision from the prophet, the law will fail from the priest, and counsel from the wise" (Ezek 7:26, my translation). The author of Job speaks from within the circles of the wise rather than from the ranks of the priests or prophets.

It is often assumed that there was a professional class of wise men in Israel as was the case in Egypt and Mesopotamia. A royal court of wise men responsible for the education of the royal family and other bureaucrats was indispensable to aspiring rulers. They needed to learn proper speech, correct etiquette, interpersonal relationships, and all the skills that enabled them to function as elites. This was less necessary in Israel for at least two reasons: they did not have the complex writing systems of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and the whole specialized technique of reading omens was excluded in Israel (Crenshaw 1981:28). There probably was a class of wise men in Israel, such as the men of Hezekiah who collected proverbs (Prov 25:1). However, in Israel the wise, as a class, were those who stood in opposition to fools. Their instruction had less to do with the finer details of court life and more to do with the ordinary struggles of living a good life. The setting for the vast majority of proverbs

and wisdom sayings was the family. The continuity of the wisdom tradition is expressly said to rest within the family (Prov 4:1-5). The purveyors of wisdom did not necessarily have a particular affiliation with a recognized group of scholars. Their inspiration and authority was recognized in the exercise of their craft; the author of a magisterial work like that of Job would be known as one of the wise regardless of any particular social position or function.

There have been various proposals suggesting that the book of Job originated outside of Israel. Humbert argued that the book was of Egyptian origin, based on the extensive development of wisdom literature in Egypt.³ He notes the detailed and knowledgeable descriptions of the hippopotamus and the crocodile in the God speeches (40:15–41:34) and the reference to ships of papyrus plying the waters (9:26). Though wisdom was highly advanced in Egypt, nothing in that literature begins to approach the profundity and the scope of Job. Another suggestion is that the book of Job was originally Arabic, which would account for its universal spirit and the difficulty of its language.⁴ However, the polytheism of the pre-Islamic, Arabic-speaking world could hardly have furnished the background for the spiritual and intellectual concerns which inspired the author of Job. Pfeiffer, who believed that Edomite tradition served as one source for the documents of the Pentateuch, insisted that Job was thoroughly Edomite wisdom.⁵ Altogether, these observations of influences outside of Israel merely indicate the inclusive nature of the material in the composition (Fohrer 1989:42-43); the author used all manner of information from Egypt and Mesopotamia, and drew on the full resources of the Hebrew language, which was far more extensive than that preserved in the pages of the Bible.

It can readily be seen that the writers of the wisdom literature of the Bible, as a whole, drew on material from the common cultural environment. For example, the thirty sayings referred to in Proverbs 22:20 are not only modeled on the thirty sayings of the Egyptian work of Amenemope, but there is also an overlap of form and content. It is also true that wisdom made much use of observations from the natural world. This, however, does not make it less theological. Wisdom embodied timeless, universal principles via concrete illustrations from and applications to a particular historical life situation. Religion and faith were present in every experience, for the wise did not divide their world into the sacred and profane. Even the most profane experience was religious, for it was always a part of life within the divine order (Nel 1978:34). Wisdom derived its authority from its theological context within the religious community of Israel. In bringing a wide variety of experiences and information to the text, the author of Job was completely within this Hebrew wisdom tradition.

Another observation that appears to favor authorship from outside of Israel is that Job, the hero, is depicted as living in north Arabia or possibly Edom. Furthermore, in most of the book God is not addressed by his Israelite name, Yahweh. The author made no direct reference to any of the historical traditions of the Hebrew people. But these facts only mean that he succeeded in disguising his own age and background in the portrayal of his hero (Clines 1989:lviii). There is no question that the poet had deep roots in the traditions of Israel and that the universalism of Job is

authentically Hebrew. The evidence for the Hebrew background of the author is all the more impressive because it is incidental and unconscious (Gordis 1965:214). The national name for God appears at Job 12:9, betraying a reminiscence of a familiar passage in Isaiah 41:20: "it is the LORD [Yahweh] who has done this." In describing a hippopotamus lying placidly in the stream, the proper name Jordan is parallel to the generic reference to a river: "It is not disturbed by the raging river, not concerned when the swelling Jordan rushes around it" (40:23).

Though the search for allusions to other biblical literature can become too speculative, it seems that the poet was familiar with other passages of the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, the touching lament of Job in 7:17-18 is even more moving when it is recognized as a conscious parody of the triumphant declaration of the glory of humankind expressed in Psalm 8:4-5. The psalmist could say, "What are people that you should think about them, mere mortals that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor." Job can only lament, "What are people, that you should make so much of us, that you should think of us so often? For you examine us every morning and test us every moment." Eliphaz mocked Job's claim to wisdom (15:7-8): "Were you the first person ever born? Were you born before the hills were made?" In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom boasts of being the first and most beloved of God's works: "The LORD formed me from the beginning . . . Before the mountains were formed, before the hills, I was born" (Prov 8:22, 25).

The ethical code of Job's confession of integrity (ch 31) is a statement of the ideals of justice, equality, reverence, and consideration for the weak enjoined in the law and the prophets. The three basic violations of murder, theft, and adultery are mentioned in 24:14-16 just as in the covenant stipulations (Exod 20:13-15). Though the author of Job drew on a vast array of experience and education, his fundamental view of life was shaped by the Hebrew precept that "the fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom."

Though we do not know of an official guild of the wise, their education and experience certainly set them apart from more ordinary folk. As Andersen aptly expresses it, a book like Job "was not written in a vacuum. Only God creates out of nothing. His creatures use the materials he gives them, and the work of the mind is done with what flows into a man's life from his own experience and from the culture of his people" (1976:23). The author of Job appears to have had firsthand experience of such foreign countries as Egypt and of such varied areas as the desert, the mountains, and the sea. Such opportunities for travel were most likely limited to the members of the upper classes. The writing also reveals the author's high degree of familiarity with the arts and sciences of his time. He created vivid images of wild beasts, birds, and sea monsters (38:39-41:34). He was familiar with sea and clouds, snow and hail, rain and ice (38:16-30); and he could talk about the constellations (38:31-33). He knew about the science of mining (28:6-11) and was familiar with the craft of the hunter, referring to six different types of traps (18:8-10). Not only must the author have been an individual of some means, he must have had a keen

mind of diverse interests—gaining knowledge from reading and discussion as well as from travel.

It is not surprising that the author of Job should have chosen an upper-class figure as his hero, since this was probably the life that he himself understood best. Perhaps it was those who had experienced some of the best of life who could reflect more philosophically on the suffering of the less fortunate. Job demonstrates that there were those among the wise who were not satisfied with the conventional wisdom of collective retribution and the general operation of justice. In order to depict the tragedy of human suffering, the author of Job posed the problem in a way that he might experience it—or perhaps even did experience it. He selected an individual of great prosperity who was hurled to the lowest depths of misfortune rather than one who suffered a lifetime of poverty, misery, and rejection. From this vantage point he was able to contemplate the meaning of righteousness and justice in relation to people and God.

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

There are no historical allusions in the book that indicate the times or circumstances of the author, so even from ancient times there has been a great disparity in suggestions for the time and occasion of writing. Rabbinic opinion ranged from the era of the patriarchs down to the Persian period. The Babylonian Talmud records an opinion to the effect that Job lived in the time of Abraham and that he was married to the daughter of Jacob (*b. Bava Batra* 15b). Another tradition of the Talmud connects Job with Jethro and Balaam, who were consulted by Pharaoh on the question of the genocide of the Israelites. This tradition says that Job was punished because he failed to protest this crime (*b. Sanhedrin* 106a; *b. Sotah* 11a). The Tannaitic rabbis Johanan and Eleazar supposed that Job was one of those who returned from the Babylonian captivity (*b. Bava Batra* 15a). In another tradition, the Greek appendix to the book of Job identifies the man Job with Jobab the king of Edom, grandson of Esau (Gen 36:33). The early datings no doubt reflect the patriarchal setting of the book's hero, which is presented in authentic detail and coloring. However, this is not necessarily the life circumstance of the author, who made use of this story just as he did the other ancient material with which he was familiar.

The earliest reference to the person Job outside the book is found in Ezekiel 14:14, 20. Ezekiel singles out three paragons of virtue whose righteousness could save none but themselves in such a corrupt land: Noah, Daniel, and Job. It is not certain, however, that the references to these three individuals are based on the biblical narratives as we know them, for Ezekiel may have had traditions that were different from what we know of these three in the present biblical accounts. This would seem to be necessarily true in the case of Daniel, since the prophetic writing of Ezekiel precedes that of the biblical book of Daniel.⁶ Noth attempted to show that all three individuals used as examples of righteousness by Ezekiel were ancient figures known outside of Israel who were deliberately chosen by the prophet as non-Israelites to prove the universal execution of divine recompense (1951:253-

judge for him (9:32-33); he expressed the firm conviction that there is in heaven a witness to testify on his behalf (16:19). In a moment of triumph, Job was assured of justice: "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. And after my body has decayed, yet in my body I will see God!" (19:25-26). The "redeemer" means a kinsman, the one who was bound by law to see that justice was done to an injured brother. This redeemer can be none other than God; the idea that some other being should or could come to vindicate Job would, in the theology of the book, be more than blasphemy—it would be the ultimate absurdity. Job's affirmation of faith during his affliction was realized when God both confronted and comforted Job. The children of dust and ashes are secure in the arms of a loving and just God.

OUTLINE

- I. Prologue: The Misfortunes of Job (1:1–2:13)
 - A. The Integrity of Job (1:1–5)
 - B. The First Test (1:6–22)
 1. The challenge in heaven (1:6–12)
 2. The loss of family and possessions (1:13–19)
 3. Job's confession and confidence (1:20–22)
 - C. The Second Test (2:1–10)
 1. The challenge in heaven (2:1–6)
 2. Job's affliction and confession (2:7–10)
 - D. Job's Comforters (2:11–13)
- II. Dialog (Job and His Friends): The Question of Retribution (3:1–25:6)
 - A. Job: Despair for the Day of Birth (3:1–26)
 1. The universe should not have Job's day (3:1–10)
 2. Job should have died at birth (3:11–19)
 3. Job should be allowed to die now (3:20–26)
 - B. Eliphaz: The Harvest of Sorrows (4:1–5:27)
 1. You reap what you sow (4:1–11)
 2. Can a person be righteous before God? (4:12–21)
 3. Evil is the root of trouble (5:1–7)
 4. God judges evil (5:8–16)
 5. God delivers the righteous (5:17–27)
 - C. Job: Life Is Futile (6:1–7:21)
 1. Faithfulness brings no relief (6:1–13)
 2. Friends betray the sufferer (6:14–30)
 3. Life is miserable and brief (7:1–10)
 4. God vigilantly watches humans (7:11–21)
 - D. Bildad: The Wisdom of the Sages (8:1–22)
 1. Judgment is justice (8:1–7)
 2. Lessons from the plants (8:8–22)

- E. Job: Can a Mortal Be Just before God? (9:1–10:22)
 - 1. Mortals cannot challenge God (9:1–24)
 - 2. Mortals are mercilessly subject to God (9:25–31)
 - 3. Mortals need a mediator (9:32–35)
 - 4. Mortals are humiliated by their Maker (10:1–22)
- F. Zophar: Repent (11:1–20)
 - 1. God knows guilt better than the guilty (11:1–12)
 - 2. God restores the repentant (11:13–20)
- G. Job: A Challenge to Wisdom (12:1–14:22)
 - 1. Wisdom belongs to God alone (12:1–25)
 - 2. Wisdom cannot defend God (13:1–19)
 - 3. God must defend his ways (13:20–27)
 - 4. Mortals are no match for God (13:28–14:22)
- H. Eliphaz: A Defense of Wisdom (15:1–35)
 - 1. God grants no secret revelation (15:1–16)
 - 2. The wicked receive retribution (15:17–35)
- I. Job: Hope for a Sufferer (16:1–17:16)
 - 1. God as an Adversary (16:1–17)
 - 2. God as an Advocate (16:18–17:16)
- J. Bildad: Punishment for the Wicked (18:1–21)
- K. Job: My Redeemer Lives (19:1–29)
 - 1. Friends and family fail (19:1–22)
 - 2. God will vindicate (19:23–29)
- L. Zophar: The Wicked Will Die (20:1–29)
 - 1. Arrogance endures for a moment (20:1–11)
 - 2. Wealth is poison to the wicked (20:12–29)
- M. Job: The Wicked Prosper (21:1–34)
 - 1. The wicked grow wealthy and old (21:1–16)
 - 2. The platitudes of wisdom are wrong (21:17–34)
- N. Eliphaz: Job Is a Guilty Sinner (22:1–30)
 - 1. Wealthy Job is wicked (22:1–11)
 - 2. The distance of God is deceptive (22:12–20)
 - 3. A repentant Job would prosper (22:21–30)
- O. Job: God Is Hidden (23:1–24:25)
 - 1. God answers no questions (23:1–17)
 - 2. The wicked are unpunished (24:1–17)
 - 3. Traditional assertions are wrong (24:18–25)
- P. Bildad: An Unanswered Question (25:1–6)
- III. Monologue (Job): The Failure of Retribution (26:1–31:40)
 - A. The Unsearchable God (26:1–14)
 - 1. Wisdom has no answers (26:1–4)
 - 2. God's ways are unknowable (26:5–14)

- B. Bankrupt Wisdom (27:1-23)
 - 1. Maintaining integrity (27:1-6)
 - 2. Meaningless thoughts (27:7-23)
- C. Hymn to Wisdom (28:1-28)
- D. Reflections (29:1-31:40)
 - 1. Days of dignity (29:1-25)
 - 2. Days of derision (30:1-31)
 - 3. Code of honor (31:1-40)
- IV. Response (Elihu): Suffering as a Discipline (32:1- 37:24)
 - A. Divine Revelation (32:1-33:13)
 - 1. The voice of youth (32:1-22)
 - 2. An arbiter for Job (33:1-13)
 - B. The Words of Correction (33:14-33)
 - C. The Work of Justice (34:1-37)
 - 1. Job's charge of injustice (34:1-9)
 - 2. Job's views condemned (34:10-37)
 - D. The Watcher of Mankind (35:1-16)
 - 1. Our good does not benefit God (35:1-8)
 - 2. Our pride keeps us from God (35:9-16)
 - E. The Lessons of Justice (36:1-37:24)
 - 1. Discipline is redemptive (36:1-21)
 - 2. Discipline is like the seasons (36:22-37:24)
- V. Challenge: God Asks the Questions (38:1-42:6)
 - A. The First Challenge: Understanding the Universe (38:1-40:6)
 - 1. Question: what do you know? (38:1-3)
 - 2. Joy and beauty at the birth of the universe (38:4-21)
 - 3. Beauty and mystery in the heavens (38:22-38)
 - 4. Power and danger among the animals (38:39-39:30)
 - 5. Response: the silence of Job (40:1-5)
 - B. The Second Challenge: Understanding Justice and Power (40:6-41:33)
 - 1. Question: can you bring justice? (40:6-14)
 - 2. Power and beauty: Behemoth (40:15-24)
 - 3. Danger and beauty: Leviathan (41:1-34)
 - 4. Response: the submission of Job (42:1-6)
- VI. Epilogue: The Fortunes of Job (42:7-17)
 - A. God's Vindication of Job (42:7-10)
 - B. God's Restoration of Job (42:11-17)

COMMENTARY ON
Job

◆ I. Prologue: The Misfortunes of Job (1:1–2:13)
A. The Integrity of Job (1:1–5)

There once was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless—a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil. ²He had seven sons and three daughters. ³He owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, and 500 female donkeys. He also had many servants. He was, in fact, the richest person in that entire area.

⁴Job's sons would take turns preparing

feasts in their homes, and they would also invite their three sisters to celebrate with them. ⁵When these celebrations ended—sometimes after several days—Job would purify his children. He would get up early in the morning and offer a burnt offering for each of them. For Job said to himself, "Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular practice.

NOTES

1:1 *There once was a man.* Noth is correct in observing that the Heb. perfect is deliberately ambiguous in its temporal reference (1951:258). The phrase translated "There once was a man" does not imply that Job is a literary creation, as the English expression "Once upon a time" does.

named Job. Apart from Ezek 14:14, 20, the name is found only in the book of Job in the Heb. Bible. The Heb. form *'iyyob* [TH347, ZH373] follows an inflection pattern in nouns that indicates a characteristic activity or profession. If it is linked to the root *'ayab* [TH340, ZH366] "enemy," it could be interpreted as "inveterate foe." The name derives from Semitic tradition and is well known outside the Bible. One of the Amarna letters (no. 256), dating from about 1350 BC, names the prince of Ashtaroth in Bashan as *'ayyab*, an older form of the biblical name. Still earlier, an Egyptian execration text (c. 2000 BC) mentions a Palestinian chief named *'ybm*. The name *'ayyabum* is found in Akkadian documents from Mari and Alalakh dating from the early second millennium BC (Albright [1954] has explained this as a contracted form of *'ayya 'abu(m)*, meaning "Where is my father?"). An Ugaritic version of the name in the form *ayab* is also found in a list of palace personnel.

the land of Uz. Job is ambiguous in location as well as time. He is situated outside the land of Israel to the east (1:3), which, from the point of view of an Israelite, could be anywhere from Midian in the south (Judg 6:3) to the northern part of Syria ("Paddan-aram"; cf. Gen 28:2; 29:1). To the east lay the desert and the edge of civilization. It was the domain of nomadic shepherds such as the Midianites, but it was also the home of wealthy farmers such as Job who resided in the few fertile areas. Uz may be connected to Aram in the more northern area of the east (Gen 10:22-23), the location of the relatives of Abraham (Gen 22:21), but the name is also found among the descendants of Esau in the southern

area of Edom (Gen 36:28), a territory that came under judgment for its role in the fall of Jerusalem (Jer 25:20; Lam 4:21). Later traditions maintain both southern and northern locations. Josephus (*Antiquities* 1.6.4) says Uz, one of the four sons of Aram, founded Trachonitis and Damascus (the area of Syria in the north). The appendix to the Greek translation of Job places Uz on the borders of Edom and Arabia and makes Job one of the kings of Edom at a city named Dennaba. However, tradition has also identified Job's city Dennaba with Karnaim (cf. Amos 6:13) in the territory of Hauran, the modern *Sheikh Sa'ad* just to the east of the Sea of Galilee (Pope 1965:4).

1:2 *seven sons and three daughters.* Seven is a number symbolic of completeness applied to the full number of children in the song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:5). The ratio of seven sons to three daughters is apparently ideal (cf. Job 42:13). Three added to seven provides ten, which according to Elkanah is also a complete family (1 Sam 1:8). The same ratio applies to sheep and camels (Job 1:3) and in another context to Solomon's wives and concubines (1 Kgs 11:3).

1:5 *sometimes after several days.* The Heb. refers to the completion of the festival cycle and does not indicate the number of days involved. Although the course of such a festival could be seven days (Judg 14:12, 15), there is no reason to imagine a week of celebration with each brother hosting a day, as suggested by the medieval Jewish commentators Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

COMMENTARY

There is little point in speculating on the form of the story of Job known to the author. It has numerous archaic elements of language and style, which indicate it was an old story (Sarna 1957), but these have been integrated into the work both linguistically and literarily. The prologue contains poetic elements (e.g., 1:21) as well as dialog, which unites it with the main sections of the book. Theological unity between the prologue and main sections is demonstrated in the shared perspective that the idea of retributive justice does not adequately explain God's providence. The difficulty of reading Job does not arise out of the diverse form of the original story of Job, whatever we may conceive that to have been. The real tension between the prologue and the rest of the book is in the diverse portrayal of its characters; but, as Cheney observes, it is this very feature that is quintessential to the structure and the meaning of the book as a whole (1994:1). The prologue presents Job as a paragon of virtue who survives the test of integrity; Job worshiped God in spite of the testing that deprived him entirely of God's blessing. However, this is not all there is to Job. The virtuous Job provides the perspective from which we can observe the contradictions of human character and faith and evaluate what it means to have integrity of both reason and faith in times of trial.

There is no reason to doubt that Job was a historical individual whose story was well known. The prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 14:14) refers to Noah, Daniel, and Job as three historical individuals. Though they may have been known through the biblical stories, Ezekiel does not refer to them as existing only in stories. The prologue of Job, however, does not tell us his story in the manner of a biography. Instead Job is presented without reference to historical circumstances. He is given no genealogy and no reference point in biblical chronology. His life circumstances are left deliberately vague so that they can represent any person at any point in time; people of

any era in any location can identify with Job and learn the lessons that wisdom has for them.

It is often proposed that Job was an individual created by the author. As early as the Babylonian Talmud, the opinion was expressed that Job was created as a parable, that he never really existed (*b. Bava Batra* 15a). The same opinion was followed by Maimonides, who affirmed in his commentary that the book of Job was based on fiction. This is a misunderstanding of the intent of the author, who does not wish to present Job as fictitious but to make him representative of a universal human problem. The land of Uz apparently formed a link with the Aramean, Edomite, and Arabic regions, as the name is found with all these associations. Job is located at the confluence of the great civilizations of Arabia and Syria. His name is one that transverses a great time span and numerous languages. Job was known as a venerable nobleman of ancient times.

The most important aspect of Job's life is his character; "he was blameless—a man of complete integrity" (1:1). The terms used suggest uncompromising ethical conduct. This is not perfection (as is frequently ascribed to Job), for that is beyond human capability; but it signifies a person of impeccable morality. The conduct of Job was based on his reverence for God, which inspired a desire to perform God's will at all times. Such a man was blessed, not only in terms of his relationship with God and others but also in the material provision of life. In Hebrew thought these aspects of blessedness were never separated from each other: Job's family was the first item of blessedness, for children are a heritage from the Lord, a reward and a source of strength (Ps 127:3-5). All those who fear the Lord will be blessed; all those who walk in God's ways will eat of the fruit of their labor. They will be prosperous—their children around the table will be like olive shoots (Ps 128:1-3). Job's wealth is given in terms of cattle and servants in keeping with the patriarchal setting. The numbers are perfectly realistic for a wealthy person; Nabal had 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats (1 Sam 25:2). Nevertheless, it is not the author's concern to provide a precise inventory of Job's wealth; the number seven, a symbol of fullness, is added to three to provide the number ten, another symbol of fullness. Job's greatness does not consist of his wealth; his greatness is his character, which is seen in all the accretions that pertain to such a person.

Job was scrupulous in his conduct to the point of offering sacrifices for his sons and daughters after their celebrations. This is not to be thought of as neurotic behavior done out of fear of punishment but rather as a desire to exemplify the fullest reverence for God. Neither is this to suggest that Job may be vicariously pious for his children. As the head of a patriarchal household, it would be his responsibility to take the initiative in spiritual leadership. Job invited his children to the central location of the family home in order to offer sacrifices on behalf of the collective family, symbolizing the purification of sins.

Job was afraid that one of his children may have "cursed God in their hearts" (1:5). The question here is just what sort of sin it was that Job feared. This is the first of four occurrences in the prologue in which the Hebrew word that normally

means "bless" (*barak* [TH1288A, ZH1385]) has the sense of "curse" (cf. 1:11; 2:5, 9). This has often been treated as a euphemism to avoid the word "curse" (*qalal* [TH7043, ZH7837]) in speaking about God, but Cheney is certainly correct in his observation that this is an antiphrastic idiom that has a major role in the narrative (1994:52-77). *Antiphrasis* is a common technique in many languages in which a word is used opposite to its normal sense. Usually it is done for the sake of humor or irony, as when speaking of "a giant of 3 feet 4 inches." (Other examples of antiphrases in English include the use of *wicked* and *deadly* in the statements "That was a wicked game" and "That was a deadly dessert.") The word *barak* is used antiphrastically in contemporary Hebrew. In Yiddish the *misheberak* (a noun form of the word *barak*) normally is a blessing that someone asks to be said, usually on behalf of someone else, on being called to read the Scriptures (Torah). Antiphrastically, it means a tirade against someone (this example was posted by Francis Landy on the Enkidu list [a now defunct online forum], June 18, 1995). Further evidence that the use of the word *barak* for "curse" is not a case of euphemism but of antiphrasis is that the direct expression for cursing God (using the Heb. word *qalal* for "curse") is found elsewhere in Scripture (Exod 22:28; Lev 24:15-16) and could have been used here. In each of its four occurrences in the prologue of Job, *barak* is used to mean "curse" for literary effect. The use of "bless" raises theological questions about our relationship to an all-powerful and all-knowing God when, as humans, we are so limited in knowledge and ability. Using the term "bless" instead of "curse" suggests that we do not always know the effects of our actions.

Our relationship toward God is not always knowable or certain. It may be that our intentions to honor God lead to what is in reality an offense; our blessing may be a curse. In turn, there is the possibility that God's blessing to us will be experienced as a curse. There is no reason to contemplate deliberate blasphemy on the part of the children of Job. It instead seems that Job was seeking to make amends for any inadvertent sins that would undermine the piety of his children. Cheney suggests that in this verse the Hebrew may be read as a relative sequence: Job thinks that his children may have sinned and then blessed God in their hearts (1994:72). Their words of blessing would then be a blasphemy without their even knowing it. Job's offering is not out of fear that the children were willfully sinning or secretly cursing God.

Job's offering on behalf of his children introduces a central theological issue in the book of Job: well-intending mortals, in their finite knowledge, may offend God and not realize it; their words of blessing may be a mockery. If this is the case, God's blessing is much less predictable than the traditional wisdom asserted. This already begins to raise the recurring question of the dialog: "Can a mortal be pure before God?" (4:17; 9:2; 15:14; 25:4).



Ecclesiastes

TREMPER LONGMAN III

INTRODUCTION TO *Ecclesiastes*

ECCLESIASTES IS AN ENIGMATIC BOOK. What other book in the Bible puts such an emphasis on the meaninglessness of this present life (see 1:2 and throughout) or advises readers not to be either “too good or too wise” (7:15-18)? This is a book that seems, on the surface, to have internal tensions—if not contradictions. Should we enjoy life (2:24-26), or should we take a sober or even somber attitude toward it, perhaps preferring death (7:1-4)?

Even though there are many questions concerning the interpretation of this book and, consequently, numerous disagreements among the commentators on certain details, the main message is rarely lost: Apart from God, there is no true meaning in life. Likewise, the final advice of the book is clear and beyond debate:

Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone’s duty. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad. (12:13-14)

This small, admittedly difficult book is an important one for us to hear today. The issues of life haven’t changed all that much since the time the book was first written in antiquity. Today we still face the question, where can we find the meaning of life?

AUTHOR

“Ecclesiastes” is the Latin translation of the Hebrew name *Qoheleth* (sometimes written Kohelet), which the NLT translates as “the Teacher.” Accordingly, both “Qoheleth” and “the Teacher” will be used to refer to this person in this commentary. The Hebrew *Qoheleth* literally means “one who assembles (a group)” and may refer to assembling a group of students to hear one’s teaching (as recorded in 1:12–12:7). Interestingly, this name likely intends to associate the Teacher with Solomon, since the verb *qahal* [TH6950, ZH7735], on which the name Qoheleth is formed, occurs a number of times in 1 Kings 8, which is Solomon’s speech at the dedication of the Temple. As a matter of fact, there are a number of characteristics of the Teacher’s description that cause one to think of Solomon. He is called “David’s son, who ruled in Jerusalem” in the superscription (1:1). As he later searches for meaning “under the sun,” he describes his great wealth, wisdom, and the numerous women who were his. This fits in well with what we know of the historical Solomon from 1 Kings 3–11. Even so, it is unlikely that the Teacher actually was Solomon.

A number of texts, for instance, dissociate the Teacher from the royal throne (4:1-3; 5:8-9; 10:20). Indeed, if the Teacher was Solomon, what purpose would be served by using a nickname (Qoheleth, meaning "Teacher") rather than simply stating that fact? Solomon's name was associated with such wisdom and authority as to merit a wide audience—certainly preferable to any nickname. The view that Solomon is not the author of the book has been held by other conservative commentators in the past (Luther, Moses Stuart, Delitzsch, Young, and Kidner—to name a few). However, in the interests of fairness, it should be pointed out that some conservative scholars consider this opinion to be incorrect (most notably in recent days, W. Kaiser). (See the Bibliography for each of these authors' commentaries.)

Furthermore, the Teacher, even if he was Solomon, is clearly not the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, in spite of some popularly held interpretations that insist on this view. There is a second voice in the book—that of an unnamed wise man who uses the Teacher's words and life story to teach the dangers of embracing "under the sun" perspectives (12:12). This unnamed wise man talks about the Teacher in 1:1-11 and 12:8-14. By contrast, the Teacher's distinct voice can be recognized by the fact that he speaks in the first person in 1:12-12:7. The second wise man, whose words frame the Teacher's speech, could be called the "frame narrator" (Fox 1977). The authorial voice is more closely connected with this second wise man, who chose not to give his name.

Thus, in the final analysis, the book of Ecclesiastes, like many other Old Testament books, is anonymous. Due to its presence in the canon, though, we can affirm that its ultimate author is God himself, because he speaks through the human author.

Notwithstanding, the implicit references to Solomon in the book are not to be ignored. The association of the "Teacher" with Solomon serves an important function in the book. Temporarily, the Teacher assumes the character of Solomon (with no intention to deceive since it is so clearly marked by the Teacher's dissociation from royalty; cf. 4:1-3; 5:8-9; 10:20) in order to explore areas of potential meaning. From the historical record in 1 Kings, we know that Solomon had more of everything than anyone else did, yet he still turned against the Lord and ended up splitting the kingdom. He had it all, but his life ended in meaninglessness.

It should also be noted that the Teacher, whose words form the central section of the book, can be characterized as a confused wise man. He is someone who knows the wisdom teachings of Israel well but has set out to understand life on his own and is frustrated and confused by life's incongruities and mysteries. This being the case, it is not surprising that in some cases we see the Teacher contradicting himself, as he turns sometimes to his knowledge of traditional wisdom for answers and at other times to his own anecdotal observations of life (e.g., 3:16-22; 7:3-9; 11:9).

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

As we have seen above, the book of Ecclesiastes is anonymous. Since we do not know who the author is, its date is unknown. Due to the extensive associations with Solomon in the book, it clearly could not have originated before Solomon

(c. 960 BC). The language of the book is unusual, and some scholars argue that its Hebrew is like post-biblical Hebrew and therefore points to a late date for the book, perhaps sometime after the fourth century BC. This viewpoint is often supported by the presence of what look like Greek and Persian loanwords and a similarity in terms of language and grammar to Aramaic. An interesting twist on this argument is the viewpoint that the difficult Hebrew of Ecclesiastes should be explained as the product of someone who was thinking in Greek and writing in Hebrew (Buhlman 2000). DeJong believes that Qoheleth's argument describing human limitation fits best in the Jewish Hellenistic period when there was too much ambition (1994). These data could well point to a late date, but we are actually in the dark about many aspects of the development of the Hebrew language. The unique nature of the Hebrew of the book could be due to its use of a dialect or vernacular, rather than literary, form of Hebrew. It is best to remain "agnostic" about the date of the book, especially since it is unimportant to its interpretation.

AUDIENCE

Since we cannot date the book, we cannot be specific about the audience to whom it is addressed. The way the book is written, the second wise man is speaking to his son (12:12) concerning the dangers of speculative thinking—that is, thinking apart from God ("under the sun"). In a sense, then, other readers find themselves in the same place as the son, learning a lesson about living without God and his revelation: Apart from God, life is meaningless. This warning serves to undermine the tendency of all God's human creatures to create their own meaning for their lives. Wisdom, relationships, power, money, influence, and other areas are all put under a microscope, and the conclusion is that "all is meaningless" without God.

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

With few and minor exceptions, the Hebrew Masoretic text of Ecclesiastes is without problems; it is supported by the Greek, Latin, and Syriac versions. The Aramaic Targum characteristically is an interpretive paraphrase and in the case of Ecclesiastes in particular is a witness to early exegesis. Fragments of Ecclesiastes were discovered at Qumran, and they also essentially agree with the Masoretic Hebrew tradition.

Ecclesiastes was one of five books that had their canonicity questioned by some early rabbinic authorities. Doubts arose because it was felt that Ecclesiastes contradicted itself, as well as other Scripture. For instance, the Talmud gave voice to the thought that Ecclesiastes 2:2, which teaches that pleasure is useless, contradicted 8:15 where the Teacher commends pleasure (*b. Shabbath* 30b). More seriously, some felt that 11:9, which literally encourages the reader to "follow the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes," contradicted Numbers 15:39, which literally admonishes people to "not prostitute [themselves] by going after the lusts of [their] own hearts and eyes" (*Midrash Rabbah, Kohelet*).

Some rabbis also accused Ecclesiastes of being secular inasmuch as one hears the incessant refrain "everything is meaningless." However, the predominant opinion

was that Ecclesiastes indeed was canonical, and it is found in all the major early lists of authoritative books. The fact that it was found at Qumran implies that it had achieved that status before the time of Christ. In other words, though the canonicity of Ecclesiastes was questioned by some, it was never rejected by the mainstream Jewish communities.

GENRE AND LITERARY STYLE

One of the most important keys to interpreting a biblical book is the identification of its literary genre, which often includes structure. We can tell this from modern examples. We expect different things from a novel than we do from a biography and, therefore, we read them differently. In the Bible there are many different genres represented, including history, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, epistle, and poetry. (For information on how to read the different genres of the Bible, see Longman 1997.)

It is therefore appropriate to ask what kind of book we have when we begin to read the book of Ecclesiastes. As was noted in the section above under "Author," one important observation is that there are two voices in the book. The largest part of the book (1:12–12:7) contains the voice of a person who goes by the nickname "the Teacher" (Heb., *Qoheleth*). However, in the beginning of the book (1:1–11) and at the end (12:8–14), someone is speaking to his son (12:12) *about* the Teacher. These words provide a kind of literary frame around the Teacher's words.

In comparison with other ancient writings, I have elsewhere identified the Teacher's words as a kind of reflective autobiography (see Longman 1991). Thus, the book as a whole may be called a framed autobiography. As we will see below, the most important insight we can derive from this literary observation is that the authoritative teaching of the book comes from the words of the voice in the frame. That voice directs us as to how to understand the thoughts and opinions of the Teacher, much like the authoritative voice of the book of Job is that of God who, at the very end of the book of Job, guides our understanding of the thoughts of the human characters of the book.

The book of Ecclesiastes is composed of both prose and poetry. The formatting used in some versions (such as the NIV and NJB) gives the wrong impression that there is more poetry in the book than is really there. The NLT redresses this imbalance.

The Hebrew of the prose is difficult, but we do not know whether that is the result of the style or a particular dialect of the language. The poetry is most often associated with the proverbs that are found throughout the book (1:15, 18; 7:1–14). The famous poem that begins "For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven" is rightly put in poetic format (3:1–8). The striking images that are found throughout the book will be unpacked in the commentary.

MAJOR THEMES

The structure of Ecclesiastes has three parts. In the prologue (1:1–11), an unnamed wise man (see above under "Author") introduces the Teacher and sets the mood

for his conclusion. As we will see, the tone is quite depressing. It anticipates the Teacher's conclusions by introducing some of his favorite phrases such as "everything is meaningless" (1:2) and "under the sun," where nothing is "truly new" (1:9). The second section is the longest. It is the autobiography of the Teacher in which he talks about his futile search for meaning and gives some advice to those who listen to him (1:12–12:7). The structure of the autobiography itself is not very clear-cut. We can delineate distinct units of his teaching, but he keeps coming back to the same subject. The confusion of the structure of his speech may well reflect the confusion in his thinking as he grapples with the apparent conflict between Israel's tradition and the suffering of the righteous. The last part is, in a number of ways, the most important part of the book. In the epilogue (12:8–14), we again hear the words of the unnamed wise man who is commenting on the Teacher's words to his son. We need to read the Teacher's comments in the light of the evaluation of the second wise man in much the same way that we read the speeches of Job's three friends in the light of the Yahweh speeches at the end of the book of Job. The epilogue affirms the fact that life under the sun is difficult; but then in the last two verses of the book, the wise man turns his son back to the foundational teachings of the faith: fear God, obey the commands, and expect a future judgment. Because of this structure, we need to differentiate the major themes in the speech of the Teacher from the major themes in the words of the second wise man who comments on the Teacher's thinking.

Major Themes of the Teacher. One cannot read the Teacher's comments in 1:12–12:7 without coming away with the impression that everything is "meaningless" (*hebel* [TH1892, ZH2039]). He looks for meaning in a number of different areas of life (work, pleasure, wisdom, wealth, relationships) and comes up empty. Half of the occurrences of the word *hebel* in the Old Testament are found in Ecclesiastes. It means literally "breath, breeze, vapor," but the word is always used in a metaphorical way, signifying either the meaninglessness of a thing or its transitory nature. A minority of scholars think that the word has the latter sense and translate "everything is transitory," giving the book of Ecclesiastes a radically different sense (see Fredericks 1993). But this is not the way the ancient versions (the LXX and Vulgate) understood it. Also the New Testament almost certainly contains an allusion to the *hebel* of Ecclesiastes in Romans 8:20, and there the sense is clearly "meaninglessness" or "frustration" (Gr. *mataiotēs* [TG3153, ZG3470]), rather than "temporary."

Some scholars, while taking *hebel* in the sense of meaninglessness instead of transitory, argue for a more specific meaning. Fox (1989) takes it as "absurd," Staples (1955) as "mysterious" and Ogden (1987:22) as "enigmatic," but none of these arguments are persuasive. It is best to stick with the general translation of "meaninglessness" (for a fuller discussion see Longman 1998:61–64).

A second important theme for the Teacher is represented by the phrase "under the sun." This phrase indicates the scope of the Teacher's inquiry into meaning. It is analogous to saying "under heaven" (2:3; 3:1) or "on earth" (5:2). In other words, the Teacher is restricting his inquiry to what he can see and experience. He makes no appeal to revelation or to God for his knowledge.

hesitate to humble himself by taking on human form (Phil 2:5-11). When he was born, he was born not in grandeur but in a manger. He was the one through whom the creation came into being, but the world did not recognize him (John 1:10).

Toward the end of his life, we see how he was deserted by his broader group of followers and his closer circle of disciples, betrayed by Judas, and denied by Peter. Finally, as he was hanging on the cross, he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mark 15:34). At this point, Jesus experienced the meaninglessness of this world in a way that Qoheleth could not imagine. Jesus did this in order to break the curse of that meaninglessness in our life. His resurrection infuses life with new meaning. In short, Jesus, the Messiah, is the answer to the problem expressed by the Teacher's cry, "meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless."

OUTLINE

Superscription (1:1)

- I. Frame Narrative: Prologue (1:2-11)
- II. The Teacher's Autobiography (1:12-12:7)
 - A. Introduction (1:12)
 - B. The Teacher's Search for the Meaning of Life (1:13-2:26)
 1. Beginning thoughts (1:13-18)
 2. Searching for meaning in pleasure (2:1-11)
 3. Searching for meaning in wisdom (2:12-17)
 4. Searching for meaning in work (2:18-23)
 5. Grab all the gusto you can! (2:24-26)
 - C. The Search Continues (3:1-6:9)
 1. A time for everything (3:1-15)
 2. Where can we find justice? (3:16-22)
 3. I'd rather be dead (4:1-3)
 4. Searching for meaning in work, again (4:4-6)
 5. The lonely miser (4:7-8)
 6. It's great to have friends (4:9-12)
 7. Even political power lets you down (4:13-16)
 8. God is distant (5:1-7)
 9. Oppression (5:8-9)
 10. Searching for meaning in money (5:10-6:9)
 - D. The Teacher's Advice (6:10-12:7)
 1. Who can know the future? (6:10-12)
 2. Advice (7:1-14)
 3. Wisdom and righteousness don't help (7:15-22)
 4. Wisdom is hard to come by (7:23-24)
 5. Seeking and not finding (7:25-29)
 6. No one is like the wise! (8:1)

7. The king is supreme (8:2-8)
 8. Do bad people really get what is coming to them? (8:9-15)
 9. Not even the wise know (8:16-17)
 10. Everyone dies! (9:1-10)
 11. Chance rules (9:11-12)
 12. The limits of wisdom (9:13-16)
 13. Assessing wisdom (9:17-18)
 14. Proverbs on wisdom and foolishness (10:1-4)
 15. The world upside down (10:5-7)
 16. The "accidents" of life (10:8-11)
 17. Fools (10:12-15)
 18. The king: blessing or curse? (10:16-17)
 19. More wisdom (10:18-19)
 20. Advice concerning the king (10:20)
 21. Risk and the uncertainty of life (11:1-6)
 22. Youth, old age, and death (11:7-10)
 23. Youth, old age, and death, continued (12:1-7)
- III. Frame Narrative: Epilogue (12:8-14)

COMMENTARY ON
Ecclesiastes

◆ Superscription (1:1)

These are the words of the Teacher,* King
David's son, who ruled in Jerusalem.

1:1 Hebrew *Qoheleth*; this term is rendered "the Teacher" throughout this book.

NOTES

1:1 *the Teacher*. The Hebrew is *Qoheleth* (cf. NLT mg). This word is the participle of a verb that means "to assemble (a group)." The traditional translations of "the Teacher" or "the Preacher" derive from the idea that the group is either a classroom or a congregation. Indeed, the name of the book, *Ecclesiastes*, comes from a Gr. word that means "the Preacher." In actuality, though, the use of *Qoheleth* as a name or title is intended to further the Solomonic fiction described in the Introduction (see "Author"), because the verb "to assemble" occurs frequently in connection with Solomon's actions in 1 Kings 8.

COMMENTARY

The superscription acts like the title page of the book. Here it identifies in general terms the form of the message that follows ("these are the words"), as well as the source of the teaching that is found in 1:12–12:7 ("the Teacher"). For more about this superscription, please consult the "Author" section in the Introduction.

◆ I. Frame Narrative: Prologue (1:2–11)

²"Everything is meaningless," says the Teacher, "completely meaningless!"

³What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? ⁴Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes. ⁵The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again. ⁶The wind blows south, and then turns north. Around and around it goes, blowing in circles. ⁷Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to

the sea. ⁸Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content.

⁹History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. ¹⁰Sometimes people say, "Here is something new!" But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new. ¹¹We don't remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.

NOTES

1:2 *meaningless*. This word occurs over 35 times in this short book, marking it as a major theme, particularly of the body of the book (1:12-12:7). As a matter of fact, the refrain “Everything is meaningless . . . completely meaningless” may be seen as the Teacher’s bottom line since the second wise man (see “Author” in the Introduction) introduces the Teacher’s thoughts with this refrain here and then summarizes them similarly in 12:8. The basic meaning of the Heb. word is “vapor” or “bubble,” but in Ecclesiastes it is used metaphorically to mean “devoid of meaning.” Attempts to make the word suggest the brevity of life (see Fredericks 1993) are unpersuasive.

1:3 *What do people get?* Lit., “What profit is there for a person?” What is the ultimate end once all our activities cease? Is there any significance to our work, including our work at searching for meaning? This rhetorical question assumes the answer is “nothing”—people get nothing for all their hard work.

***hard work*.** This renders a phrase (see also 2:18) that might be lit. translated “my toil that I toil.” The Heb. root (*‘amal* [TH5999, ZH6662]) occurs here in noun and verb form, which serves to emphasize its importance for the thought of the verse. The word usually has negative connotations and is well translated by “hard work,” “toil,” or “drudgery.”

***under the sun*.** The Teacher’s thought may be characterized as “under the sun” thinking—that is, thinking apart from the revelation of God. It is not that he completely leaves God out; after all, he reflects on who God is and gives advice about a relationship with him in ch 5. However, his thinking about life is restricted to what he sees happen on earth and is not based on what he learns from Israel’s prophets.

1:5 *hurries*. Lit., the verb *sha’ap* [TH7602, ZH8634] means “to pant.” The sun can hardly keep up with its daily cycle. The picture supports the Teacher’s point that in spite of all the strenuous effort, nothing meaningful is accomplished in the world.

1:6 *The wind blows south, and then turns north*. The Heb. utilizes a literary device that is called delayed identification. The subject “wind” is actually toward the end of the verse. Thus, as the verse describes something going south, north, and round and round, the reader is not certain until the end that the author is describing the wind. Such a device grabs the attention of readers and gets them involved, but, as with many Heb. literary devices, it is hard to reflect it in a modern translation without sounding wooden.

1:9 *History*. Heb. does not have a word for history as such, but this translation is a good one for the literal but vague “that which was.”

COMMENTARY

As was explained in the introduction, the first part of the book contains the words of someone who is speaking about Qoheleth (“the Teacher”). Although the same is true of the epilogue (12:8-14), most of the book represents the words of Qoheleth speaking in the first person about himself.

The prologue (1:2-11) is the second wise man’s introduction before the reader encounters the Teacher’s speech. It essentially sets the mood for what follows, giving a foretaste of the conclusion that the Teacher reached in his exploration for meaning in this world. The tone is somber and expresses the conclusion that while there is a lot of activity in the world, it is tedious. To use a modern image, we are like rats on a wheel, running constantly but getting nowhere.

It begins by expressing the Teacher’s final conclusion: “Everything is meaningless.” As we will see in the chapters that follow, the Teacher looked for lasting signifi-

cance in many different areas of life and came up empty. In 1:3 he asks a rhetorical question that he will repeat elsewhere in his reflections (see 3:9; 5:16). He asks what people get for all their hard work, and the assumed answer is “absolutely nothing.” There is no profit to life. Indeed, according to 1:4-8, this is true not only for individuals but also for corporate humanity, nature, and even history. In 1:4, he takes the long view—a consideration of the ebb and flow of humanity from one generation to another—and concludes that nothing changes.

He then turns to nature, where change seems obvious at first glance, but closer inspection shows its insignificance. The sun moves through the sky, certainly, but it is the same every day, rising and setting, rising and setting. The wind blows, suggesting progress or change, but actually it simply blows in a circle getting nowhere (1:6). The same natural circular movement is seen with water (1:7). The water flows down the river to the sea, but the sea never gets full. Why? Because it simply recycles into the river, which flows back down into the sea, back to the river again, *ad infinitum*. After observing and commenting on all this motion that actually goes nowhere, the Teacher confesses his boredom with it all (1:8). Life is truly unsatisfying.

In 1:8-11 the Teacher reflects on the realm of human action. It again is characterized by constant motion, but on closer reflection he realizes that here, too, there is no real progress. Nothing is really new; history just repeats itself. If something strikes people as an innovation, it is only because they have forgotten something that actually happened in the past. A little research will show that it was an illusion; nothing is new. This paragraph also introduces another theme that wears heavily on the Teacher—forgetfulness. What we do today seems new and exciting to us, but it is not really new and will not be remembered in the future. Such an insight takes all the steam out of living and so-called creativity. The present loses out to the past and the future.

◆ II. The Teacher's Autobiography (1:12–12:7)

Introduction (1:12)

¹²I, the Teacher, was king of Israel, and I lived in Jerusalem.

NOTES

1:12 *I, the Teacher, was king of Israel, and I lived in Jerusalem.* The body of the book, beginning with this verse, contains the reflections of the Teacher. It is cast in autobiographical form and is framed by the words of a second wise man who introduces the Teacher and his thought (1:2-11), evaluates what he said (12:8-12), and concludes by emphasizing what is truly important in life (12:13-14).

COMMENTARY

The Teacher's reflections on life begin with a self-introduction. This verse is a typical introduction to an ancient Near Eastern autobiography, as we know them from Mesopotamia and Egypt (e.g., the Cuthaean Legend of Naram-Sin; the Sin of Sargon;

the Adad-guppi inscription; see Longman 1991:97-130). His description of himself as king over Israel in Jerusalem is part of his identification with Solomon. However, he also signals to his readers that this is a literary and not an actual identification by using the nickname “Teacher” (Heb., *Qoheleth*) and by using the past tense “I . . . was king.” According to the book of Kings, Solomon was king until his death; there never was a time he could look back on his life and say “I was king.” However, the Targum, which is admittedly a late work (second half of the first millennium AD), may witness to early legends that Solomon left the throne at the end of his life and searched for meaning (see Levine 1978:28). The book of Ecclesiastes may have been exploiting these legends for its own purpose of pointing out the meaninglessness of life.

◆ B. The Teacher's Search for the Meaning of Life (1:13–2:26)

1. Beginning thoughts (1:13–18)

¹³I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. ¹⁴I observed everything going on under the sun, and really, it is all meaningless—like chasing the wind.

¹⁶I said to myself, “Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them.” ¹⁷So I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind.

¹⁵What is wrong cannot be made right.
What is missing cannot be recovered.

¹⁸The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief.
To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.

NOTES

1:13 I devoted myself. Lit., “I gave my heart.” This phrase is used by the Teacher to indicate his whole-hearted devotion to the task of finding meaning in this world.

under heaven. This phrase has the same sense as the more frequent refrain “under the sun” (see note on 1:3). It points to the Teacher’s intention to look at life apart from the revelation of God.

1:14 I observed. This phrase occurs regularly in the speech of the Teacher, particularly the first two chapters. What follows is a real-life description of the world that, at least in his mind, often conflicts with what he has been taught. The latter is signaled by the phrase “I know.”

1:15 What is wrong cannot be made right. The Heb. is more lit. rendered “what is bent/crooked cannot be straightened.” The NLT translation assumes a moral sense to the phrase, which certainly is in keeping with the Teacher’s later explicit assertions that there is injustice under the sun about which little, if anything, can be done (4:1-3). However, it is not absolutely certain that this phrase has a moral sense. In any case, there is no doubt about his assessment that the world has problems.

1:16 I said to myself. This phrase (lit., “I spoke with my heart”) and its variants signal self-reflection (see note on 2:1). The Teacher tries to honestly get a read on himself and his attitudes toward the world and ultimately God.

COMMENTARY

After introducing himself in good autobiographical style, the Teacher then alerts his hearers to his intention to “search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven” (1:13a). The Teacher is trying to discover something that makes life worth living, but he is also restricting his vision to that which takes place on earth. He no sooner tells us of his intention than he informs us of his unhappy conclusion. He doesn’t hold back when he states that it is God who has “dealt a tragic existence” to his human creatures. Certainly, as he will concede later, we can find some joy in this world and maybe even some relative purpose in life, but to find absolute meaning—that is beyond us. Life in this world is like “chasing the wind” (1:14). The wind seems substantial, but we cannot grab hold of it. This phrase, which will recur in the book, is a perfect illustration of meaningless activity. He concludes his first paragraph with a proverb about futility (1:15). There is something wrong with the world, and it cannot be fixed no matter how hard we try. Later on in his speech, the Teacher will go so far as to directly name God as the cause of the world’s inadequacy (7:13).

In the next paragraph, the Teacher begins by asserting his qualifications to conduct a search into the matter of the meaning of life under the sun. In 1:16, he associates himself with Solomon, again in a way that also signals to us that he is not really Solomon (see “Author” in the Introduction). Solomon, of course, had legendary wisdom (1 Kgs 3–4). But, if this really were Solomon, the statement that he was wiser than any king who ruled before him in Jerusalem (1:16) would make little sense, since only one other Israelite king ruled before him in Jerusalem, namely David. The point is that the wise man in the first part of the book explores different areas of life where meaning might be found by adopting the persona of Solomon. After all, no one had more wisdom, women, money, status, and pleasure than Solomon, and where did it get him? He ended his life an apostate, and the kingdom split in half! As the proverb that concludes the final paragraph of the chapter suggests, wisdom only brought him increased trouble in life.

◆ 2. Searching for meaning in pleasure (2:1-11)

I said to myself, “Come on, let’s try pleasure. Let’s look for the ‘good things’ in life.” But I found that this, too, was meaningless. ²So I said, “Laughter is silly. What good does it do to seek pleasure?” ³After much thought, I decided to cheer myself with wine. And while still seeking wisdom, I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world.

⁴I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. ⁵I made gardens and

parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. ⁷I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me. ⁸I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire!



Song of Songs

TREMPER LONGMAN III

INTRODUCTION TO *Song of Songs*

“KISS ME AND KISS ME AGAIN, for your love is sweeter than wine” (1:2). With this passionate expression, the Song of Songs opens. The woman expresses her intense desire to be in the intimate presence of her man. As we read on, we encounter not only expressions of desire and passion but also the rapturous sighs of their union.

So what is such a book doing in the canon of Holy Scripture? What has intimacy between a man and a woman to do with our knowledge of God? These are the questions that have concerned the church through the centuries and will concern us in the following pages of this commentary. As we reflect on these issues, it will soon become apparent that such a book does belong in the Bible. After all, God loves us as whole people, not as disembodied souls. He created us with body and soul integrally united together. He gave his people—male and female—the precious gift of sexual enjoyment within the parameters of marriage. This gift comes to life in the Song of Songs.

AUTHOR

The book begins, “This is Solomon’s song of songs, more wonderful than any other” (1:1). Contrary to popular understanding, this superscription does not clearly claim Solomonic authorship of the whole book. The book of Proverbs begins with a similar superscription, but it also names other authors besides Solomon in the body of the text (Prov 30:1; 31:1). Both books are collections of material, either proverbs or, in the case of the Song of Songs, love poems, as I will describe below. It is possible that Solomon wrote some of the poems that are now found in the collection, but it is unlikely that he wrote them all. For one thing, when Solomon is mentioned at the end of the book, it appears as if another party is critical of him—the famous monarch created a lot of trouble because of his love life (cf. 8:11-12; 1 Kgs 11:1-13). The perspective of the description of his wedding, which is the only other certain mention of Solomon, also shows some emotional distance (3:6-11).

The Song of Songs, a sensual psalter, is composed of a number of different poems. Like the Psalms, they were written by a number of different authors and bound together into a loose literary unity by a single editor.

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

Once the true nature of the Song of Songs as an anthology is identified, the question of the date of the book is seen to be complex. There are really two questions: (1) the date of the individual poems and (2) the date of the final composition, the time the book was brought together into a literary unity. Since there is no definitive statement of author or date (see the discussion under "Author"), we cannot come to a dogmatic conclusion concerning the date of the book. As an anthology, it is possible that the individual poems span a lengthy period of time, beginning with Solomon (c. 970 BC) and extending onward. The final author/editor of the whole composition did not leave clues concerning his identity or his time period, though it surely came to a close by the end of the Old Testament time period around the end of the fourth century BC. As with Ecclesiastes, it is fortunate that our inability to date the book does not impede our ability to understand it.

AUDIENCE

The Song of Songs reveals no signs of being addressed to a specific audience. Our uncertainty is heightened by the fact that we cannot date the book. At best, we can look at the contents of the book and guess who specifically is in mind. The book describes passionate love between a man and a woman. From their attitudes and expressions, it is highly probable that they were young and entering into this kind of relationship for the first time. Thus, the book might be seen as a text that is addressed to young married and marriageable men and women in Israel. Perhaps this is why the book even today is found useful in premarital counseling. However, older married couples can also find new passion in their relationship by reading the Song.

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

The Hebrew text (the MT) of the Song is without major problems and is strongly supported by the Greek, Syriac, and Latin versions. The Aramaic Targum is an early interpretive paraphrase and adopts an allegorical approach to the Song. As such, it bears witness not so much to the text as to the early history of interpretation. There were four manuscripts of the Song discovered at the Dead Sea (see Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich 1999:611-622), though they rarely deviate from the Masoretic Text.

At the time of our earliest evidence, it appears that the presence of the Song in the canon was questioned due to the sexual nature of the material. According to Beckwith, it is one of five books (the others are Esther, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Ezekiel) about which a minority of early rabbis expressed doubt (1985:1-2, 275-276, 282-284, 308-322). The predominant opinion, though, was articulated by Rabbi Akiba around AD 100 when he said: "God forbid!—no man in Israel ever disputed about the Song of Songs [that he should say] that it does not render the hands unclean, for all the ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies" (quoted in Murphy 1990:6). The rabbinic expression "to make the hands unclean" is a difficult one for moderns to understand. It is the idea that something is so holy

OUTLINE**Superscription (1:1)**

- I. First Love Poem: The Woman's Pursuit (1:2-4)
- II. Second Love Poem: Dark but Beautiful (1:5-6)
- III. Third Love Poem: Teasing Lovers (1:7-8)
- IV. Fourth Love Poem: A Beautiful Mare (1:9-11)
- V. Fifth Love Poem: Intimate Fragrances (1:12-14)
- VI. Sixth Love Poem: Outdoor Love (1:15-17)
- VII. Seventh Love Poem: Flowers and Trees (2:1-7)
- VIII. Eighth Love Poem: Springtime (2:8-17)
- IX. Ninth Love Poem: Seeking and Not Finding (3:1-5)
- X. Tenth Love Poem: A Royal Wedding Procession (3:6-11)
- XI. Eleventh Love Poem: From Head to Breasts (4:1-7)
- XII. Twelfth Love Poem: The Invitation (4:8-9)
- XIII. Thirteenth Love Poem: The Garden of Love (4:10-5:1)
- XIV. Fourteenth Love Poem: Seeking and Not Finding, Again (5:2-6:3)
- XV. Fifteenth Love Poem: An Army with Banners (6:4-10)
- XVI. Sixteenth Love Poem: In the Nut Grove (6:11-12)
- XVII. Seventeenth Love Poem: The Dancing Shulammitte (6:13-7:9)
- XVIII. Eighteenth Love Poem: I Will Give You My Love (7:10-13)
- XIX. Nineteenth Love Poem: Yearning for Love (8:1-4)
- XX. Twentieth Love Poem: Love More Powerful than Death (8:5-7)
- XXI. Twenty-first Love Poem: Protecting the Sister (8:8-10)
- XXII. Twenty-second Love Poem: The Owner of the Vineyard (8:11-12)
- XXIII. Twenty-third Love Poem: Be Like a Gazelle (8:13-14)

COMMENTARY ON
Song of Songs

◆ Superscription (1:1)

This is Solomon's song of songs, more wonderful than any other.

NOTES

1:1 *Solomon's song of songs*. The relationship between song of songs and Solomon is expressed by a Heb. preposition that could be translated in a variety of ways (of, by, for, to, concerning). The NLT appropriately preserves some of the uncertainty in its translation.

COMMENTARY

The superscription is like a title page in a modern book. We are introduced to the content of what follows in the bulk of the book. Here, we learn that the composition that follows is the "song of songs." We often use this phrase as the title of the book, and that is in keeping with the ancient practice of using the first phrase of a text as its title. The expression "song of songs" tells us that what follows was likely sung with musical accompaniment. The form of the expression (similar to the phrases "Holy of Holies" and "King of Kings") indicates that, in the opinion of the one who wrote the superscription, what follows is the most sublime song of all. The NLT captures this idea by referring to the Song as "more wonderful than any other" (1:1). The expression "song of songs" also informs the reader that the book is a unity (song) composed of many different poems (of songs). The superscription also connects this book to Solomon, Israel's third king. See the Introduction (under "Author") for a discussion of this.

◆ I. First Love Poem: The Woman's Pursuit (1:2-4)

*Young Woman**

²Kiss me and kiss me again,
for your love is sweeter than wine.
³How fragrant your cologne;
your name is like its spreading
fragrance.
No wonder all the young women
love you!

⁴Take me with you; come,
let's run!

The king has brought me into his
bedroom.

Young Women of Jerusalem

How happy we are for you,
O king.

We praise your love even more
than wine.

Young Woman
How right they are to adore you.

1:1 The headings identifying the speakers are not in the original text, though the Hebrew usually gives clues by means of the gender of the person speaking.

NOTES

1:3 *your name is like its spreading fragrance.* Lit., “your name is poured out oil.” The metaphor is well captured by the NLT in that this would be fragrant oil that has been spilled, its wonderful smell filling the room.

1:4 *The king has brought me into his bedroom.* Notice that in the first part of this verse, the man is addressed in the second person and then in the concluding part he is referred to in the third person. Indeed, throughout this poem, the woman uses both second and third person to address the man. This is a poetic device called *enallage*, but since modern readers are thrown off by this ancient poetic convention, the NLT often harmonizes the references to the man in this poem, rendering them in the second person.

COMMENTARY

The woman speaks first. Indeed, the woman speaks more often than the man in the Song (see LaCocque 1998:41). She is not bashful or timid. She desires the man, and she tells him of her love. Here, she wants him to kiss her and take her away into his bedroom, the most intimate of all rooms of a house. She wants to be alone with him.

We should notice how she describes his desirability in a very sensuous way. She wants the intimate *touch* of a kiss. She describes his love as sweet to the *taste*. His name, which here has the connotation of reputation, has the *smell* of cologne. Love in the Song has a very physical side; it is expressed unabashedly through the union of two bodies. In reference to taste, she compares his love to wine, a thick liquid that lingers on the palette. Furthermore, love can lift the human spirit in the same way as wine; both intoxicate.

The woman refers to the man as the king. This language is not to be taken literally or applied to the man throughout the Song of Songs. It is poetic language. In her eyes, he is king. Later, she will refer to him as a shepherd (see 1:7-8). These are not two different characters, but two different ways of referring to the man.

In this first poem, we are introduced to the young women. Here they are not named, but we detect their presence by the use of the first person plural in 1:4b. Elsewhere in the book, they are called the “young women,” the “daughters of Jerusalem,” and the “daughters of Zion.” These women are always treated and referred to as a group. They are a group of friends of the young woman. Their presence serves different purposes in the Song. In 1:4 they function as an external attestation to the qualities of the young man. They agree with the young woman that this man is indeed desirable. Further, at the end of the poem they celebrate the love that they see existing between the two.

At the end of this poem, we see that the woman speaks one last time. She speaks to her king-lover and affirms that “they,” the young women, are right when they adore him. She is not jealous but rather takes their words as a confirmation of her own judgment.

◆ II. Second Love Poem: Dark but Beautiful (1:5-6)

<p>⁵I am dark but beautiful, O women of Jerusalem— dark as the tents of Kedar, dark as the curtains of Solomon's tents. ⁶Don't stare at me because I am dark—</p>	<p>the sun has darkened my skin. My brothers were angry with me; they forced me to care for their vineyards, so I couldn't care for myself—my own vineyard.</p>
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NOTES

1:5 *but beautiful*. The NLT properly translates the conjunction *waw* [TH2050.1, ZH2256] with the adversative “but” here; the context in 1:6 indicates that the woman is displeased with her dark complexion. The woman’s unhappiness with her dark skin has nothing to do with race but rather the artificial coloring of the skin by exposure to the sun. It makes her look like a country bumpkin, a low-class laborer.

tents of Kedar . . . Solomon's tents. Kedar is a tribe of nomads from the Syro-Arabian desert, mentioned often in the Bible (Gen 25:13; Jer 49:28-29). We have no other indication of the color of their tents, but the passage here suggests that they were widely known as being dark in color, perhaps woven from brown or black goat hair, as some modern Bedouin tents are. The same could be said of the curtains of Solomon’s tents.

1:6 *so I couldn't care for myself—my own vineyard*. Lit., “my own vineyard I could not guard.” The NLT rightly interprets the meaning of the metaphor of guarding her own vineyard because the vineyard is a reference to her own appearance.

COMMENTARY

This poem is a self-description by the woman. She presents an apology for her appearance and explains why she has come to look the way she does. Her skin is, at least from her perspective, unattractively darkened by exposure to the sun (for a contrary viewpoint, see Pope 1978:322). This state of affairs has been brought about by her brothers, who have forced her to labor in the vineyards. They have so forced her because they were angry with her, but the text does not tell us why. Brothers played a large role in their sisters’ marriage arrangements, according to ancient Near Eastern and biblical custom (cf. Gen 34). They may be angry about what they might consider their sister’s rather forward relationship with the man (cf. 8:8-10).

In this poem, we are introduced for the first time to the vineyard, which is often used as an image for the woman’s sexuality. Throughout the ancient Near East and the Song, the vineyard, the garden, and the orchard are all used to signify the place of lovemaking and, especially, the woman’s sexuality (see Paul 1997). This does not mean that it is always a symbol of the woman. Here, the woman is working in the field, which must be understood literally first in order to explain how she got her unwanted dark skin. We are to think of real physical labor, though this may also suggest a more poetic reference—in this case, to her sex appeal. The verse seems to state that the work in the vineyard of her brothers has meant that she cannot take care of her own appearance. The NLT has rightly captured the meaning of the last sentence of verse 6 by the rendering “so I couldn’t care for myself—my own

vineyard." Though we feel sorry for the woman, we respect her self-assertion in the face of her brothers, who are standing in the way of her true love.

◆ III. Third Love Poem: Teasing Lovers (1:7-8)

<p>⁷Tell me, my love, where are you leading your flock today? Where will you rest your sheep at noon? For why should I wander like a prostitute* among your friends and their flocks?</p>	<p><i>Young Man</i> ⁸If you don't know, O most beautiful woman, follow the trail of my flock, and graze your young goats by the shepherds' tents.</p>
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1:7 Hebrew *like a veiled woman*.

NOTES

1:7 *wander*. In the Heb. the woman simply asks why she should be like a prostitute. The NLT introduces the idea of wandering, since that is the implication of the comment. If the man does not give her directions, then she will have to proceed from tent to tent and look like a prostitute who is trying to get a customer.

like a prostitute. Lit., "like a veiled woman" (cf. NLT mg). The NLT rightly understands that the veil is a prostitute's veil in this context (Gen 38:14-15) and so makes the ancient implication clear to the modern reader. An alternate understanding of the line is provided by G. R. Driver (1974) and J. A. Emerton (1993). Preferring the other of the two ancient Semitic roots spelled *'th* as the source of the word *'otyah*, they interpret the phrase as indicating that the woman does not want to be left "picking lice," an expression equivalent to our "twiddling thumbs." The NEB has adopted this reading.

COMMENTARY

In this poem, we get our first interchange between the young woman and the young man. Indeed, this is the first time that we hear directly from the young man. The woman invites him to an intimate noontime meeting, and he responds with a provocative tease. Her invitation has a playful tone about it as well, with sexually charged overtones. She asks for directions as to where she might meet him at noon and then implies that she would still try to find him anyway. She fears lest she look like a paid woman (a prostitute) who goes out to the shepherds during their breaks in her attempt to find him. The man responds to her question indirectly, leaving an air of mystery, but also implying that he desires her company.

◆ IV. Fourth Love Poem: A Beautiful Mare (1:9-11)

<p>⁹You are as exciting, my darling, as a mare among Pharaoh's stallions.</p>	<p>How lovely is your neck, enhanced by a string of jewels.</p>
<p>¹⁰How lovely are your cheeks; your earrings set them afire!</p>	<p>¹¹We will make for you earrings of gold and beads of silver.</p>