Article

CBR

Currents in Biblical Research
2016, Vol. 14(3) 279–297

DOI: 10.1177/1476993X15586039
cbi.sagepub.com
SAGE

Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century Readings of *Hebel* (הֶבֶל) in Ecclesiastes

Russell L. Meek
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, USA

Abstract
The meaning of הֶבֶל is a *crux interpretum* for the book of Ecclesiastes. Notwithstanding some variation, Jerome's *vanitas* reading of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes dominated scholarship for several centuries. Since the rise of modern biblical scholarship, הֶבֶל as 'vanity' has been largely rejected; however, little consensus has been reached regarding the word's meaning. The result has been a rich history of interpretation as scholars develop various suggestions for how הֶבֶל should be understood in Ecclesiastes. This essay briefly sketches the history of interpretation of הֶבֶל, then surveys proposals for the meaning of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Keywords
Ecclesiastes, *hebel,* hermeneutics, history of interpretation, Qohelet, vanity, wisdom literature

Introduction

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen an explosion in proposals for how we should read הֶבֶל in the book of Ecclesiastes. This previously unseen interest in the meaning of הֶבֶל is important for the study of Ecclesiastes because the meaning of הֶבֶל is a *crux interpretum* for the book (Ellermeir 1967: 97). How one understands this single word will determine in large part one's view of the book as a whole, or perhaps vice versa (Shuster 2008: 229; Miller 1998: 437). For the first several centuries of the term's history of interpretation, Jewish scholars mostly agreed on how הֶבֶל should be read. Likewise, early Christian scholars

Present affiliation: Louisiana College, Pineville, USA.

Corresponding author:
Russell L. Meek, Louisiana College, 1140 College Drive, Pineville, LA 71360, USA.
Email: russell.meek@lacollege.edu

agreed for the most part on how to interpret הֶבֶל. However, the rise of historical criticism and the various hermeneutical strategies that followed it brought renewed interest in examining the term's meaning. This renewed interest, along with new hermeneutical lenses through which to read the book, resulted in a vast array of options for interpreting הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes.

This paper endeavors to sketch the history of interpretation of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes from its earliest interpreters into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While the primary focus is to establish the various ways in which modern-day scholars have read הֶבֶל, describing early readings of הֶבֶל provides a helpful framework for understanding the current conversation. Prior to the twentieth century, readings of הֶבֶל generally followed one of two trajectories according to whether the interpreter was Jewish or Christian. Therefore, I label as 'early' any interpretation that came before the twentieth century. I divide early readings into the subcategories of Jewish and Christian because each followed a distinct pattern of interpretation. Readings in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries do not follow the same schematization of Jewish and Christian interpretation, so I discuss readings from this period according only to how they interpret הֶבֶל.

Early Jewish Interpretation

The Septuagint uses a variety of terms to translate הֶבֶל, including κενὸς ('empty', 'void', 'vain'; Job 7.16), καταιγίς ('blast of wind'; Isa. 57.13), εἴδωλα ('idol'; Jer. 16.19), and μάτην ('in vain'; Ps. 38.7 [ET 39.6; Heb. 39.7]) (see Lavoie 2006: 222-23); however, it uses only ματαιότης to translate הֶבֶל in the book of Ecclesiastes. ματαιότης has a broad range of meaning that includes the metaphorical 'emptiness', 'transitory', 'vanity', and the more literal 'breath' (Beteram 1952). The Septaugintal translators had recourse to other terms to communicate a similar—though more limited—range of ideas, but their sole use of ματαιότης maintained the flexibility that הֶבֶל afforded its Hebrew readers and may indicate that they recognized the word's distinct usage as a *leitwort* in Ecclesiastes.

Whereas the LXX translators used ματαιότης, the recensions of Theodotion, Symmachus and Aquila used ἀτμός to translate הֶבֶל. Ἀτμός, used only to refer to 'vapor' or 'steam' (see e.g., Gen. 19.28; Lev. 16.13; Ezek. 8.11; Hos. 13.3; Joel 3.3), precludes the metaphorical interpretations allowed by ματαιότης.

Targum Qohelet, which used Ecclesiastes to supply missing details of Solomon's life (Longman 1998: 3), translated three (1.2 [2x]; 2.17) out of the 38 occurrences of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes with the Aramaic term הֶבֶל ('vapor', 'breath'). Its choice of Aramaic הֶבֶל to translate Hebrew הֶבֶל in these two verses reflects its concern with demonstrating Solomon's remorse over his apostasy, as he considers the future destruction of Jerusalem and the temple he built. Everything was 'vapor' in the sense that it did not last. For the rest of the occurrences of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes, Targum Qohelet uses the Aramaic term הֶבְלוּ ('vanity').

Midrash Rabbah Qohelet understands הֶבֶל to mean 'without substance'. This is indicated in the Midrash's discussion of Qohelet's iconic phrase הֲבֵל הֲבָלִים, where it stated that the phrase 'may be likened to a man who sets on the fire seven pots one on top of the other, and the steam from the topmost one has no substance in it, [and such is man]' (Cohen 1983: 5).

In a similar vein, the Zohar reads הֶבֶל as 'breath' in Ecclesiastes, though it interprets the term allegorically: 'Salomon désigne par là l'haleine des enfants qui vont à l'école et par laquelle le monde subsiste' ('Solomon means by that the breath of children who go to school and that the world remains'; Zohar 2.38b; de Pauly 1975: 3.183). Lavoie (2006: 223) points out that the Zohar interprets הֶבֶל to indicate that 'le monde n'existerait donc que grâce aux voix des enfants qui apprennent la Torah!' ('The world will therefore exist only through the voices of children who learn Torah!').

Other early Jewish interpreters agree that the term refers primarily to temporality in some sense, thus holding on to the non-metaphorical meaning of 'breath', but often expanding it to include the broader concept of ephemerality and transience. For example, Saadiyah ben Gaon translates הֶבֶל with two Arabic terms: *mustaḫīl* (29x), which indicates insubstantiality, and *habā* (9x), which indicates 'dust that floats in the air' (Lavoie 2006: 224; see also Zafrani and Caquot 1989). The Karaite scholars Solomon ben Yeruhīm, David ben Abraham al-Fāsī and Yephet ben 'Ali recognize that הֶבֶל could carry the connotation of temporality, but they argue it primarily refers to 'instability' (Lavoie 2006: 224; see also Vajda 1971). Ben 'Ali (1969: 146) captures this sentiment well: 'It is generally held that [הֶבֶל] is an appellation for a ray of sunlight in which something like dust becomes visible. You stretch out your hand and grasp at it, but there is nothing in your hand'. Through comparing הֶבֶל to dust floating around in sunlight, 'Ali was able to capture the metaphorical ideas of instability and insubstantiality through reference to the more concrete meaning of 'vapor' or 'breath'. הֶבֶל can just barely be seen, but not grasped. Similarly, Ramban (1985: 1.161) understands הֶבֶל to refer to 'mist', commenting that it is like steam that comes from a person's mouth on a cold day (see Zlotowitz 1994: xxxvii-xxxviii).

Persian-Jewish interpretations of הֶבֶל seem to have moved slightly away from the more common readings presented above. For example, four thirteenth-century Persian-Jewish texts systematically translate הֶבֶל with *harzah*, whose range of meaning includes 'without profit', 'without reason', 'without result', 'evil', 'corrupt', 'disorderly' and 'foolish' (Lavoie 2006: 224; see also Lavoie and Mehramooz 2000: 489-508).

Notwithstanding slight variation, early Jewish interpretation primarily understood הֶבֶל to refer either to something that is insubstantial—such as mist or floating dust—or temporal, such as death itself (e.g., *b. B. Bathra* 100b [Rodkinson 1918]). This tradition of understanding הֶבֶל as communicating the concept of ephemerality or transience remained consistent throughout the *peshat* tradition

of medieval Jewish scholarship, which attempted to understand and apply the simplest meaning of the biblical text.

Early Christian Interpretation

Whereas early Jewish scholars were apt to understand הֶבֶל metaphorically in a way that communicated its denotative meaning of 'breath' or 'vapor', Christian interpretation tended toward a more negative understanding of הֶבֶל. However, Christian interpreters did not always agree as to the referent for vanity. For example, Gregory of Nyssa (1993: 34-36) argued that הֶבֶל referred to two distinct aspects of 'futility': ephemerality—things, such as words, that do not last—and purposelessness—activities that produce no lasting value. Gregory's reading of הֶבֶל illustrates its complexity in Ecclesiastes, where Qohelet uses it to refer to several different situations and their outcomes. His discussion is worth quoting at length:

> The insubstantial is deemed 'futile', that which has existence only in the utterance of the word. No substantial object is simultaneously indicated when the term is used, but it is a kind of idle and empty sound, expressed by syllables in the form of a word, striking the ear at random without meaning, the sort of word people make up for a joke but which means nothing. This then is one sort of futility. Another sense of 'futility' is the pointlessness of things done earnestly to no purpose, like the sandcastles children build, and shooting arrows at stars, and chasing the winds, and racing against one's own shadow and trying to step on its head, and anything else of the same kind which we find done pointlessly. All these activities are included in the meaning of 'futility' (1993: 34-36).

Also writing in the fourth century, Ambrose (see Dressler 1947–: 65.282) argued that הֶבֶל referred to those things that do not cause a person to know and love God, that is, everything that is temporal and physical. Before urging people to seek God, he illustrates his case with several examples: 'The circus is vanity, because it is totally without profit; horse racing is vanity, because it is counterfeit as regards salvation; the theater is vanity, every game is vanity. "All things are vanity!" as Ecclesiastes said, all things that are in this world'.

Valerian (see Dressler 1947–: 17.341) limited the 'vanity' of the world to 'devotion to riches and the pursuit of worldly pleasures'. Didymus the Blind, and John Chrysostom after him, each distinguished between types of vanities. For Didymus (see Wright 2005: 194), there were degrees of vanity, even though all was vain compared to the spiritual realm, or 'actual truth'. Thus, while Didymus held that the temporal must be avoided, he was unwilling to declare *everything* vanity except in comparison to the spiritual. Likewise, John Chrysostom (see Schaff 1994: 13.109) was unwilling to call God's creation vain—'heaven is not

vain, the earth is not vain—God forbid!'—instead limiting the realm of vanity to the things that humans make and do. These interpreters' restrictions concerning what should be considered vanity anticipated Martin Luther's (1972) criticisms of the *contemptus mundi* reading by several centuries.

Jerome produced his *Vulgate* (Weber 1975) in the late fourth century. His translation of הֶבֶל as *vanitas* ('vanity', 'emptiness', 'falsity', 'futility') quickly became the standard Christian translation, and his commentary 'became the standard interpretation' of Ecclesiastes until the Reformers (Bartholomew 2009: 28). *Vanitas*'s range of meaning is much more limited than that of either ματαιότης or הֶבֶל, and lacks both the connotation of temporality and the concrete imagery of 'breath' carried by these and other terms used to translate הֶבֶל. Instead, *vanitas* translates הֶבֶל 'according to the one connotation pertaining to value' (Fredericks 2010: 46). This reading, which made its way into modern translations 'virtually without competition' (Fredericks 2010: 47), robbed Ecclesiastes of much of its meaning by reducing הֶבֶל to a single idea: lack of value.

The natural outworking of Jerome's *vanitas* reading of Ecclesiastes is his overall approach to the book, the so-called *contemptus mundi* reading, which holds that הֶבֶל הַכֹּל means that the entire earthly realm ('all') lacks value ('is vanity') (Christianson 2007: 100-101). Despite exegetical difficulties that accompany it (Meek 2013: 243), this reading of Ecclesiastes—and its understanding of the meaning of הֶבֶל—quickly came to dominate interpretations throughout the Middle Ages and survived the protest of the Reformers to remain a prominent interpretation today. Nevertheless, along with John Chrysostom and Didymus the Blind, a few early Christian interpreters disagreed that *everything* lacks value. For example, Gregory of Argigentum declares that 'nothing is totally useless' (Ettlinger 1985: 320). Bonaventure (2005: 77) likewise contends that people's contempt for the world should only be contempt in that they value God that much more, for 'the person who despises the world, despises God'.

Even though there was little deviation from Jerome's reading of הֶבֶל from the fourth century throughout the Middle Ages (Eliason 1989: 57), some Reformation scholars—most notably Luther (1972: 4)—argued sharply against the *contemptus mundi* reading because they felt it denigrated God's good creation and led people to retreat from affairs in which they should actively engage. Luther made no attempt to hide his 'contempt' for a reading of Ecclesiastes that he thought encouraged abdication of responsibility to engage in the affairs of the world. He stated:

> No less noxious for a proper understanding of this book has been the influence of many of the saintly and illustrious theologians in the church, who thought that in this book Solomon was teaching what they call 'the contempt of the world', that is, the contempt of things that have been created and established by God (Luther 1972: 4).

Instead, Luther (1972: 10) argued that the true 'vanity' in life was the 'vanity of the human heart', that is, the inability of humans to be properly content with God's gifts. Consequently, though Luther translated and interpreted הֶבֶל as 'vanity', he disagreed with previous interpretations of its referent. For Luther, human sinfulness is the locus of vanity: God's creation is good, but the human inability to be content with God's gifts is the height of vanity. Despite this transition in interpreting הֶבֶל during the Reformation—from 'vanity' of the world to 'vanity' of human works and sinfulness—there was no real debate regarding the *meaning* of הֶבֶל. Christian interpreters continued to follow Jerome's reading of 'vanity'.

Summary of Early Patterns of Reading הֶבֶל

Early readings of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes followed two basic trajectories. Early Jewish interpreters drew on the term's denotative meaning to understand it primarily in its metaphorical sense of temporality or brevity. Their reading of הֶבֶל allowed for the Hebrew term's broader range of meaning to be explored in interpreting the book as a whole. Early Christian interpreters understood הֶבֶל strictly as a value judgment: vanity. For most interpreters, Qohelet declared that the entire world was valueless, which led them to interpret the book as justification for abandoning temporal reality in favor of the spiritual. Some, however, qualified the *contemptus mundi* reading so that it referred only to the things that humans make and do, thus avoiding the charge that Ecclesiastes devalued God's good creation. The Reformers continued the latter interpretation, identifying 'vanity' with human sinfulness. The dominant reading of הֶבֶל remained 'vanity' until the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which have seen a marked increase in proposals for the meaning of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes.

Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century Readings of הֶבֶל

While early interpretations of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes could be demarcated cleanly between Christian and Jewish interpreters and examined on a fairly straight chronological line, such is not the case for readings of the past two centuries. Therefore, this section treats together scholars who take a similar approach to reading הֶבֶל.

a. הֶבֶל *as Incomprehensible, Unknowable, Mystery*

Staples (1943) posits 'incomprehensible' as the meaning of הֶבֶל, rather than the more negative translations 'vanity' or 'futile'. He argues that two phrases generally used to explain the meaning of הֶבֶל—רְעוּת רוּחַ and רַעְיוֹן רוּחַ—are in fact not synonymous with הֶבֶל; rather, 'they describe the same thing from two different points of view' (1943: 97). That is, both phrases describe a thing's

incomprehensibility. According to Staples, a person's רוּחַ—something deeper than reason—leads him or her to pursue things that cannot be grasped, and therein lies the problem, especially for Qohelet, within whom a battle rages because humans are driven to understand that which cannot be understood. In examining the objects of Qohelet's הֶבֶל statements, Staples argues that each object—God's work, labor, joy, wisdom, the wise person, the shared fate of humans and beasts, life itself, words, profit, and evil—are united by the simple fact that humans could not understand them. Consequently, in Staples's view, הֶבֶל should not be understood negatively, nor should the book as a whole be seen as unorthodox. Rather, it should be read as pointing to life's mysteries:

> They are mysteries which are unfathomable to his finite mind. He [Qohelet] recognizes God as the creator of all things, as the director of the universe, and that the universe is essentially good. In this respect our author is not greatly different from Zophar in Job 11:7ff and the author of Job, chapter 38. The attitude of the book, as summed up in 5:1, 'God is in the heavens and you are upon the earth', is like that of the remainder of the Old Testament (Staples 1943: 104).

Similarly, Bartholomew holds that הֶבֶל is best understood as 'enigmatic' (2009: 97) (as does Ogden 1987). Bartholomew contends that הֶבֶל is a live metaphor whose meaning is controlled by its immediate context. In order to allow for the various nuances that הֶבֶל carries in the Hebrew text, Bartholomew opts for a term with a wide range of meaning in English. For him, Qohelet uses הֶבֶל to describe situations that to him—and to readers today—are thoroughly mysterious, though the context determines exactly how they are mysterious. The choice of a single metaphorical term allows Bartholomew to account for the framing statements of 1.2 and 12.8, about which Fox (1999: 36) has argued that 'we must look for a concept that applies to all occurrences, or failing that, to the great majority of them. Then the summary statement "all is *hebel*" can use the word in the sense established in the particulars'.

Seow (1997, 2000) argues that הֶבֶל means 'beyond mortal grasp'. In order to arrive at this metaphorical meaning of הֶבֶל, Seow focuses on the literal connotation of 'vapor' or 'breath', creating for readers a vivid picture of a person attempting to grab something that cannot be held: 'What is *hebel* cannot be grasped—neither physically nor intellectually. It cannot be controlled' (Seow 1997: 102). Seow states that determining the referent for each הֶבֶל judgment is not entirely important, for the ambiguity indicates that situations—things that cannot be fully understood by mortals—and things—physical objects that literally cannot be held, such as vapor—are both in view. In Seow's view, everything in life is 'imprehensible': 'nothing that human beings accomplish or possess or try to grapple with is ultimately within mortal grasp' (Seow 2000: 15).

b. הֶבֶל as Absurd

Fox (1986) rejects previous proposals for translating הֶבֶל because he feels that they do not convey the full meaning of the term. He further criticizes those who translate הֶבֶל with different terms according to the context in Ecclesiastes because 'the *hebel* leitmotiv disintegrates if the word is assigned several different meanings' (1986: 413-14). In his view, only a broad abstract term can compensate for (1) the frame (1.2 and 12.8) and (2) the various ways Qohelet uses הֶבֶל throughout Ecclesiastes. He prefers 'absurd', which he draws from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where it indicates 'absence of a rational relationship between (legitimate) expectations and outcomes' (Meek 2013: 244). Fox connects Camus's use of absurd with Qohelet's use of הֶבֶל because, in his view, הֶבֶל refers to 'the manifestly irrational or meaningless' (1986: 411), or those situations in which the deed-consequence principle is non-operative.

Several scholars anticipated Fox's view that הֶבֶל should be understood as absurd. For example, Barucq (1968: 55-56) uses *absurdité*, 'in keeping with certain modern philosophies', because in his view הֶבֶל communicates the idea of 'something inconsistent, as the breath, nothingness; that remains a mystery to humans'. For him, the inability of humans to 'pierce the mystery' of God's actions reveals 'the bankruptcy of wisdom' (1968: 56). Pennacchini (1977) follows Barucq in translating הֶבֶל with absurd (Italian *assurdi*), which he argues refers primarily to human limitations. Thus, Barucq and Pennacchini differ from Fox in that they see הֶבֶל as communicating primarily mysteriousness or incomprehensibility rather than irrationality or meaninglessness. Michel (1989: 40-51) is much closer to Fox's view when he uses 'pointless' (*sinnlos*) to translate הֶבֶל, as his reading moves closer to the idea of absurdity.

More recently, Schoors (2013: 38-46) has followed Fox in translating הֶבֶל with absurd. For Schoors, as Fox, הֶבֶל must be translated with a single term because it functions as a key word for Ecclesiastes. Schoors clarifies that absurd must be read in its existential context and offers the following definition: 'it refers to a disparity between two phenomena that are thought to be linked by a bond of harmony or causality but are actually disjunct or even conflicting' (2013: 43).

c. הֶבֶל as Zero, Nothing, Void, Empty

Another approach is to render הֶבֶל simply as 'zero' or 'nothing'. Ginsberg (1950) prefers 'zero', though his proposal has not gained popularity. Loretz (1964) contends that הֶבֶל refers to 'the worthless, powerless, helpless' and thus offers 'nothing' (*Nichtig*) for a translation (p. 223). Galling (1964) holds the same view, as do Levine (1997: 83) and Frydrych (2002: 46) some 30 years later. Ehlich (1996) argues for 'nothingness' (Nichtigkeit) according to its use in philosophy. Ravasi (1991: 23) thinks that 'empty' (*vuoto*) offers the best translation because it is 'not as abstract and Western as "nothing"'.

d. הֶבֶל *as Vanity*

Despite increasing opposition to the use of 'vanity' to translate הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes, some supporters have remained steadfast. Like many of those who read הֶבֶל as 'vanity', Mitchell (1913) takes a very dim view of the book, which likely colors his understanding of הֶבֶל. He states that, before later redaction,

> The fact is that there is no gospel of any kind in the book of Ecclesiastes in its original form and dimensions. Its shallow philosophy ignores all that is best and noblest in human character and experience, and thus robs youth of its dreams, manhood of its rewards, and old age of its consolations. What wonder, then, that the author found life empty and closed, as he began, with the pessimistic refrain, 'Vanity of vanities! all is vanity' (p. 138).

Devine (1916: 197) likewise sees the message of the book as pessimistic; however, he holds that Qohelet's message is not that everything is 'vanity', but that '[a]ll human effort to explain the destinies of men, apart from God, are in vain'. Whybray (1982, 1989), on the other hand, takes a positive view of the book, yet understands הֶבֶל as 'vanity'.

Carrière (1997) uses הֶבֶל as 'vanity' to bring cohesion to the book of Ecclesiastes. Perry (1993), who views the book as a dialogue between interlocutors, also renders הֶבֶל with 'vanity'. Several German scholars also think 'vanity' (German *eitel/Eitelkeit*) is the most fitting reading, including Hertzberg (1932), Zimmerli (1962), and Lauha (1983). However, Lauha utilizes vanity simply because, in his view, there is no single term that is suitable for use in all instances of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes. Glasser (1970: 18-20) and Kidner (1976: 22) follow suit by translating הֶבֶל with 'vanity', but allowing context to determine the word's meaning (e.g., 'pointless', 'futile', etc.).

Finally, some scholars translate הֶבֶל with 'vanity', but provide nuanced definitions. Loader (1986) translates הֶבֶל with 'vanity', but understands it in the sense of 'meaningless'. Similarly, O'Donnell (2014) states that he understands הֶבֶל as an onomatopoeic term for 'breath', but he translates it as 'vanity' throughout his work. Further, O'Donnell's understanding of הֶבֶל as an 'as-in-your-mouth, curse-filled concept' (p. 9) indicates that he does not fully embrace its more neutral denotative meaning. Castellino (1968: 17) uses 'vanity', but thinks it describes those things that 'hav[e] at most but a flimsy reality and an utter inability lastingly to satisfy a man'. For him, then, הֶבֶל is 'irreality, insubstantiality, non-entity', despite his choice of 'vanity' to translate its occurrences. Gordis (1951) likewise understands הֶבֶל to refer to that which is insubstantial and temporary despite his translation of 'vanity'. Murphy (1991, 1992) utilizes 'vanity', but argues that 'the categories of Qoheleth are "know/not know"' and suggests 'that the nuance is incomprehensible rather than irrational' (1991: 573).

e. הֶבֶל as Breath, Vapor, Transience, Ephemeral

Following the tradition of early Jewish interpreters, many modern scholars understand הֶבֶל primarily according to its denotative meaning. Fredericks (1993, 2010) is perhaps the most well-known proponent of this view. He argues that הֶבֶל must be read in Ecclesiastes according to its range of meaning throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible; a unique meaning for the term in Ecclesiastes will not do. Thus, he demonstrates the nuance of transience is communicated in other biblical texts that use הֶבֶל, such as Pss. 144.3, 4; 78.33. Based on this usage elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and his exegesis of Ecclesiastes, Fredericks holds that 'transience' or 'brevity' is the most accurate way to render הֶבֶל into English. Fredericks argues that his view of הֶבֶל dramatically alters how one reads Ecclesiastes: 'First, the book describes the human condition as being limited in its duration and in the duration of its efforts, yet without emptying life of true, though temporary value. Secondly, the book consoles rather than disturbs the realist' (1993: 31).

Multiple other scholars translate הֶבֶל with a term such as 'breath', 'brevity', 'transience', or other terms that derive directly from its concrete meaning of 'breath' or 'vapor'. Farmer (1991) translates הֶבֶל with 'breath' in order to enable readers to see the metaphorical nature of 'all is הֶבֶל'. Perdue (1994) allows for the possibility that Qohelet utilizes הֶבֶל according to various nuances, but also argues that it must be understood as pointing to the ephemeral in most instances: 'Instead of essentially regarding all of life and its activities as meaningless and absurd, Qoheleth primarily laments the fact that life passes so quickly' (Perdue 1994: 207).

Lohfink (1998; see also 1980, 1989) uses the phrase 'breath of wind' (*Windhauch*) and argues that it has only an anthropological meaning. Vonach (2004), similarly to Fredericks (1993), rejects the idea that Ecclesiastes is pessimistic and thus prefers 'transitoriness' (*Vergänglichkeit*). Scott (1965: 209) argues for 'breath', but understands it in the sense of meaningless or futile, thus holding a more negative reading of הֶבֶל. Dor-Shav (2008) bases his reading of הֶבֶל as 'transience' on the fleeting nature of Abel in Genesis 4, whom he connects with the use of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes. He further argues that what he sees as the three-part structure of Ecclesiastes, in which Qohelet progresses from a more negative view of the world to a more positive view of the world, cannot be understood unless הֶבֶל is read as 'transience' (2009: 18-20). Bolin (2005: 247-48) follows this view, but holds that הֶבֶל refers to a particular type of transience: 'More specifically, הבל describes the insubstantiality of human existence, which, like vapor, is fleeting, transient, and vanishes without a trace'. Other proponents of this translation include McNeile (1904: 95-112), Barton (1908: 69), Schultz (2005: 266) and Alter (2010).

f. הֶבֶל as Multiple Terms

Despite Fox's (1999) insistence that the use of הֶבֶל in the framing statements of 1.2 and 12.8 dictates that a single term be used to translate הֶבֶל, some scholars

hold that the best option is to translate it according to its individual context. Webb (2000: 90), following Peterson (1992), states that 'it is a mistake to try to nail this word down, as though one "right" meaning could be found in it for Ecclesiastes'. Peterson (1992: 153) contends that '[v]arious meanings glance off the surface of the word as the context shifts: futility, spuriousness, illusion, fraud'. Meek (1960: 330) argues that הֶבֶל 'has manifestly the sense of futility', but that context must determine how one translates הֶבֶל. He offers 'futile', 'empty', 'sorry', 'senseless' and 'transient' (1960: 331). Lauha (1983: 19-25; mentioned above) holds that 'vanity' is the best translation for הֶבֶל, but argues that in various contexts it carries different connotations, such as 'frailness' (*Hinfälligkeit*), 'transience' (*Vergänglichkeit*), 'uselessness' (*Nutzlosigkeit*), 'futility' (*Vergeblichkeit)* and 'deficiency of all of existence' (*Gebrechlichkeit des ganzen Daseins*).

Crenshaw (1987: 57) argues that Ecclesiastes uses two nuances of הֶבֶל: the temporal and the existential. In instances where the first nuance is in mind, Crenshaw prefers terms that denote ephemerality. When used existentially, he prefers terms such as 'futility' and 'absurdity' to communicate the author's meaning. Crenshaw (2013: 30) later articulates that Qohelet's use of הֶבֶל 'illustrates the utter futility of attaining definitive knowledge'. For Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes records Qohelet's search for 'the essence of reality', which was 'elusive' (2013: 48). That elusive reality is what Qohelet refers to when he uses the term הֶבֶל.

g. הֶבֶל *as a Symbol with Multiple Referents*

Miller (2002) outlines what he sees as the deficiencies of previous approaches to translating הֶבֶל and concludes that הֶבֶל should be understood as 'a "symbol", an image which holds together a *set* of meanings, or "referents", that can neither be exhausted nor adequately expressed by any single meaning' (p. 15). Miller argues that each of the multiple referents for הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes 'finds connection with some aspect of *hebel's* material sense: its insubstantiality, transience, or foulness' (p. 15). Qohelet therefore uses הֶבֶל as a symbol that encompasses all of the referents to show that 'all human experience is *hebel* in one way or another' (p. 15). Thus, while not offering a single term to translate each occurrence of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes, Miller does maintain the all-encompassing nature of Qohelet's use of הֶבֶל in 1.2 and 12.8 while also allowing for the word's variances in usage in Ecclesiastes. This approach differs from simply translating הֶבֶל with different words according to its context by arguing that every use of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes points to one of four referents that are inherent in the word itself.

Fuhr (2013: 48) follows Miller and calls הֶבֶל a 'tensive symbol' that refers to multiple referents. Whereas Miller sees three categories of referents for הֶבֶל, Fuhr argues for four families: the 'transience family', 'vanity family', 'irony family' and 'frustration family' (p. 48). Fuhr argues that הֶבֶל cannot be translated simply with glosses; instead, he notes that 'perhaps the most accurate rendering

is to simply transliterate and understand his [Qohelet's] reflections as "hevel"' (p. 49).

Meek (2013, 2014) also follows Miller in understanding הֶבֶל as a symbol that calls readers to a specific set of referents. However, Meek connects הֶבֶל with the narrative of Abel in Genesis 4 and suggests that the term refers to at least one of two aspects of Abel's life: transience and/or injustice.

h. Various Other Proposals for הֶבֶל

Many scholars utilize more colorful language to translate הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes. For example Crüsemann (1979: 80) uses 'dung' (*Scheisse)*, Tamez (2001: 251) agrees with Fox's term 'absurd', but states, 'In everyday life, there are more trivial or less elegant words, such as "garbage" and "s[%$]t", that better express the malaise produced by a situation of impotence before a crushing reality'. Zimmerman (1973: 131), somewhat humorously, offers 'flatulence'.

Hobbins (2013) has argued for 'crock'. He attempts to translate הֶבֶל with an abstract term because abstract terms do not allow for the latitude that 'multivalent metaphors' offer. Such latitude is necessary in order to communicate all that is intended by Qohelet's use of הֶבֶל, which 'is a master metaphor that stands for things that are devoid of sense' (p. 163). He holds that 'crock' is a suitable translation for הֶבֶל because, in his view, crock has 'approximately the same semantic range as הֶבֶל' and is 'an equivalent metaphor...perhaps better than any other available' (p. 166). For example, in Eccl. 11.8b, הֶבֶל does not refer to 'ephemerality, an allusion, or absurdity', but rather 'crock; specifically, decrepitude, days of darkness' (p. 165).

Jarick (2000), following Knopf (1930), argues that הֶבֶל refers to the concept of change. While Jarick offers 'everything is changing' as a paraphrase of the framing statements in 1.2 and 12.8, he acknowledges that the term does not exactly mean 'change'. However, he insists that 'the very notion of change is inherent within the concept of breath' (2000: 85).

Shuster (2008) sees Ecclesiastes as a philosophical text and compares it with Heidegger's work because both have been viewed as existentialist. He sees הֶבֶל as a 'metaphor of vapor as a stand-in for the Heideggerian notion of contingency' (p. 231). Thus, הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes refers to the fact that the human experience is tied, in some sense, to history—it is in essence contingent.

Rudman (2007: 122) argues that הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes, as well as in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, is used 'in contexts where the author is trying to express the idea of a thing or course of action being chaotic'. He examines the use of הֶבֶל with various vocabulary clusters, each of which he argues communicates the idea of that which is chaotic, or anti-Yhwh. For him, the multiple nuances of הֶבֶל found in the Hebrew Bible are tied together by this one overarching theme, and thus the primary argument for the author of Ecclesiastes is that the 'world [is] under the dominion of chaos' (p. 141).

Weeks (2012) insists that הֶבֶל must be understood as a metaphor in order to remain consistent with the framing statements. While holding on to the various nuances of הֶבֶל, Weeks states that the term 'seems principally to represent for Qohelet [what] is bound up with a misapprehension of the world, and their place in it, by humans' (p. 119). He goes on to argue, 'What confronts humans is *hebel* because it is misleading or illusory, but what they typically do in response to it is also *hebel* because it is misguided or deluded' (p. 119). Thus, while recognizing the difficulty of translating הֶבֶל into English because of a lack of equivalent term(s), Weeks proposes 'illusion' and 'human delusion' (see also Weeks 2010: 81, where he offers 'illusory' and 'deceptive'). Sneed (2012: 162) follows suit by offering 'futility' or 'illusion' as the most appropriate rendering of הֶבֶל.

Other proposals include Burkitt (1921: 28) and Whitley (1979: 68), who agree that 'bubble' accurately captures the meaning of הֶבֶל. Ingram (2006: 109) argues that הֶבֶל communicates the idea of ambiguity and accordingly offers 'ambiguous'/'ambiguity' as translations. Shields (2006: 121) highlights Qohelet's emotional response to the situations he deems הֶבֶל, and argues, 'Senseless may come closer to expressing Qoheleth's intent in many instances'. Longman (1998) thinks that 'meaningless' is the most appropriate translation, while Gianto (1992) similarly argues for 'futility'. Good (1965: 176-83) and Polk (1976) each contend for 'irony'/'ironic' as the most suitable translation for הֶבֶל.

Conclusion

Prior to the twentieth century, readings of הֶבֶל were somewhat predictable. Jewish interpreters understood הֶבֶל primarily in a metaphorical sense that extended from its denotative meaning, breath or vapor. Early Christian interpreters, on the other hand, almost exclusively followed Jerome's popular *vanitas* reading and interpreted both הֶבֶל and the book of Ecclesiastes accordingly. The preceding survey of research demonstrated that during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries Christian and Jewish scholars alike significantly expanded their understandings of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes. However, rather than solving the problems created by this *crux interpretum*, these expanded understandings have left readers with a much wider variety of interpretive options from which to choose. Given the great degree to which scholars disagree over how הֶבֶל should be read in Ecclesiastes, a consensus is unlikely in the near future. This essay has sought to orient readers to the quickly changing and ballooning landscape of research into the meaning of הֶבֶל in Ecclesiastes, and perhaps provide a starting place for the one interpretation to rule them all.

Bibliography

Alter, R.
2010 *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton).

Bartholomew, C.G.
2009 *Ecclesiastes* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids: Baker).
Barton, G.A.
1908 *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark).
Barucq, A.
1968 *Ecclésiaste* (VS, 3; Paris: Beauchesne).
ben 'Ali, Y.
1969 'The Arabic Commentary of Yephet ben 'Ali on the Book of Ecclesiastes, Chapters 1–6' (trans. R.M. Bland; PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley).
Beteram, G.
1952 'Hebräischer und griechischer Qohelet: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der hellenistischen Bible', *ZAW* 64: 210-23.
Bohn, T.
2005 'Rivalry and Resignation: Girard and Qoheleth on the Divine-Human Relationship', *Bib* 85: 245-59.
Bonaventure
2005 *St. Bonaventure's Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (ed. and trans. R.J. Karris and C. Murray; Works of St. Bonaventure, 7; Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute).
Burkitt, F.C.
1921 'Is Ecclesiastes a Translation', *JTS* 23: 22-28.
Carrière, J.-M.
1997 '"Tout est vanité": l'un des concepts de Qohélet', *EstBib* 55: 463-77.
Castellino, G.
1968 'Qohelet and His Wisdom', *CBQ* 30: 15-28.
Chopineau, J.
1971 'Hevel en Hebreu biblique: Contribution a l'etude des rapports entre semantique et l'exegese de l'Ancien Testament' (PhD dissertation, University of Strasbourg, 1971).
Christianson, E.S.
2007 *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell).
Cohen, A. (trans.)
1983 *Midrash Rabbah*, VII: *Ecclesiastes* (New York: Soncino, 3rd edn [1939]).
Crenshaw, J.
1983 'Qoheleth in Current Research', *HAR* 7: 41-56.
1987 *Ecclesiastes* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster).
2013 *Qoheleth: The Ironic Wink* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press).
Crüsemann, F.
1979 'Die unveränderbare Welt: Überlegungen zur "Krisis der Weisheit" beim Prediger (Kohelet)', in Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (eds.), *Der Gott der kleinen Leute* (Munich: Kaiser): 80-104.
Devine, M.
1916 *Ecclesiastes, or the Confessions of an Adventurous Soul* (London: Macmillan).
Dor-Shav, E.
2008 'Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless: Part I', *JBQ* 36: 211-21.
2009 'Ecclesiastes, Fleeting and Timeless: Part II', *JBQ* 37: 17-23.

Dressler, H., *et al.* (eds.)
1947– *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (130 vols.; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).
Ehlich, K.
1996 'Hebel—Metaphern der Nichtigkeit', in A.A. Diesel, R.G. Lehmann, E. Otto and A. Wagner (eds.), *'Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit ...': Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit: Diethelm Michel zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZAW, 241; Berlin: de Gruyter): 49-64.
Eliason, E.J.
1989 '*Vanitas Vanitatum*: "Piers Plowman", Ecclesiastes, and Contempt of the World' (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia).
Ellermeir, F.
1967 *Qohelet I/1: Untersuchungen zum Buche Qohelet* (Herzber: Junger).
Ettlinger, G.H.
1985 'The Form and Method of the Commentary on Ecclesiastes by Gregory of Agrigentum', in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Papers of the Ninth International Conference on Patristic Studies* (Studia Patristica, 18.1; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian): 317-20.
Farmer, K.
1991 *Who Knows What is Good? A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
Fox, M.V.
1986 'The Meaning of *Hebel* for Qohelet', *JBL* 105: 409-27.
1999 *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
Fredericks, D.C.
1993 *Coping with Transience: Ecclesiastes on the Brevity in Life* (Biblical Seminar, 18; Sheffield: JSOT Press).
2010 'Ecclesiastes', in D.C. Fredericks and D.J. Estes (eds.), *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs* (ApOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press): 17-263.
Frydrych, T.
2002 *Living under the Sun: An Examination of Proverbs and Qoheleth* (VTSup, 90; Leiden: Brill).
Fuhr, R.A., Jr.
2013 *An Analysis of the Inter-Dependency of the Prominent Motifs within the Book of Qohelet* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 151; New York: Peter Lang).
Galling, K.
1964 'Der Prediger', in Galling, *Die fünf Megilloth* (HAT, 18; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck): 73-125.
Gianto, A.
1992 'The Theme of Enjoyment in Qohelet', *Bib* 73: 528-33.
Ginsberg, H.L.
1950 *Studies in Koheleth* (Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 17; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America).
Glasser, E.
1970 *Le procès du Bonheur par Qohelet* (Lectio Divina, 61; Paris: Cerf).
Good, E.M.
1965 'Qoheleth: The Limits of Wisdom', in Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster): 168-95.

Gordis, R.
1951 *Koheleth—The Man and his World* (Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 19; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America).
Gregory of Nyssa
1993 *Gregory of Nyssa Homilies on Ecclesiastes: An English Version with Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Seventh International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (St. Andrews, September 5–10, 1990)* (ed. Stuart G. Hall; Berlin: de Gruyter).
Hertzberg, H.W.
1932 *Der Prediger* (KAT, 16; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung).
Hobbins, J.F.
2013 'The Poetry of Qohelet', in Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III and Cristian Rata (eds.), *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns): 163-94.
Ingram, D.
2006 *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (LHBOTS, 431; London: T & T Clark).
Jarick, J.
2000 'The Hebrew Book of Changes: Reflections on *Hakkōl Hebel* and *Lakkōl Z^{e}mān* in Ecclesiastes', *JSOT* 90: 79-99.
Kidner, D.
1976 *A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance: Ecclesiastes and the Way of the World* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press).
Knopf, C.S.
1930 'The Optimism of Koheleth', *JBL* 49: 195-99.
Lauha, A.
1983 '*Omnia Vanitas*: Die Bedentung von *hbl* bei Kohelet', in J. Kilunen *et al.* (eds.), *Glaube und Gerechtigkeity: In Memoriam Rafael Gyllenberg* (Suomen Eksegeetissen Seutan Julkaisuja, 38; Helsinki: Finnish exegtische Gesellschaft): 19-25.
Lavoie, J.J.
2006 '*Habel habalim hakol habel:* Historie de l'interprétation d'une formule celebre et enjeux culturels', *Science et Esprit* 53: 219-49.
Lavoie, J.J., and M. Mehramooz
2000 'Le Texte Hébreu et la Traduction Judéo-Persane du Qohélet à Partir des Manuscrits 116 et 117 de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France', *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 56: 489-508.
Levine, É.
1997 'The Humor in Qohelet', *ZAW* 109: 71-83.
Loader, J. A.
1986 *Ecclesiastes* (Text and Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
Lohfink, N.
1980 *Kohelet* (NEchtB, 1; Würtzburg: Echter Verlag).
1989 'Koh 1,2—"alles is Windhauch"—universale oder anthropologische Aussage?', in R. Mosis and L. Ruppert (eds.), *Der Weg zum Menschen: zur philosophischen und theologischen Anthropologie für Alfons Deissler* (Freiberg: Herder): 201-16.

1998 'Zu הבל im Buch Kohelet', in Lohfink, *Studien zu Kohelet* (SBAB, 26; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk): 215-58.

Longman, T.
1998 *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).

Loretz, O.
1964 *Qohelet und der alte Orient* (Freiburg: Herder).

Luther, M.
1972 *Luther's Works: Volume 15: Notes on Ecclesiastes* (repr.; trans. Jarislov Pelikan; St Louis: Concordia [1532]).

McKenna, J.E.
1992 'The Concept of Hebel in the Book of Ecclesiastes', *SJT* 45: 19-28.

McNeile, A.H.
1904 *An Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Meek, R.L.
2013 'The Meaning of הֶבֶל in Qohelet: An Intertextual Suggestion', in Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III and Cristian Rata (eds.), *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns): 241-56.
2014 'The Meaning of *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes in Light of Qohelet's Inner-Biblical Use of Genesis' (PhD dissertation, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary).

Meek, T.J.
1960 'Translating the Hebrew Bible', *JBL* 79: 328-38.

Michel, D.
1989 *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qohelet* (BZAW, 183; Berlin: de Gruyter).

Miller, D.B.
1998 'Qohelet's Symbolic Use of הֶבֶל', *JBL* 117: 437-54.
2002 *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: The Place of Hebel in Qohelet's Work* (Academia Biblica, 2; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature).

Mitchell, H.G.
1913 '"Work" in Ecclesiastes', *JBL* 2: 123-38.

Murphy, R.M.
1991 'On Translating Ecclesiastes', *CBQ* 53: 571-79.
1992 *Ecclesiastes* (WBC, 23A; Dallas: Word).

O'Donnell, D.S.
2014 *Ecclesiastes* (Reformed Expository Commentary; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R).

Ogden, G.
1987 'Vanity it Certainly is Not', *BT* 38: 301-307.

de Pauly, J. (trans.)
1975 *Sepher ha-Zohar (Le Livre de la Splendeur)* (7 vols.; Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose).

Pennacchini, B.
1977 'Qohelet ovvero il libro degli assurdi', *Euntes Docete* 30: 491-510.

Perdue, L.
1994 *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon).

Perry, T.A.
1993 *Dialogues with Kohelet: The Book of Ecclesiastes. Translation and Commentary* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press).
Peterson, E.H.
1992 *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
Polk, T.
1976 'The Wisdom of Irony: A Study of *Hebel* and its Relation to Joy and the Fear of God in Ecclesiastes', *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 6: 3-17.
Ramban (Nachmanides)
1985 *Writings and Discourses* (2 vols.; trans. Ch.B. Chavel; New York: Shilo).
Ravasi, G.
1991 *Qohelet* (La Parola di Dio; Cinisello Balsamo: Paoline, 2nd edn [1988]).
Rodkinson, M.L. (ed. and trans.)
1918 *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Original Text Edited, Corrected, Formulated, and Translated into English. Volume V: Tract Baba Bathra* (Boston: The Talmud Society).
Rudman, D.
2007 'The Use of הבל as an Indicator of Chaos in Ecclesiastes', in A. Berlejung and P. Van Hecke (eds.), *The Language of Qohelet in its Context: Essays in Honour of Prof. A. Schoors on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (OLA, 168; Leuven: Peeters): 121-41.
Schaff, P. (ed.)
1994 *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series* (repr.; 14 vols.; Peabody: Hendrickson [1887–1894]).
Schoors, A.
2013 *Ecclesiastes* (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters).
Schultz, R.
2005 'A Sense of Timing: A Neglected Aspect of Qoheleth's Wisdom', in R.L. Troxel, K.G. Friebel and D.R. Magary (eds.), *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns): 257-67.
Scott, R.B.Y.
1965 *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (AB, 18; New York: Doubleday).
Seow, C.L.
1997 *Ecclesiastes* (AB, 18C; New York: Doubleday).
2000 'Beyond Mortal Grasp: The Usage of *Hebel* in Ecclesiastes', *ABR* 48: 1-16.
Shields, M.A.
2006 *The End of Wisdom: A Reappraisal of the Historical and Canonical Function of Ecclesiastes* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns).
Shuster, M.
2008 'Being as Breath, Vapor as Joy: Using Martin Heidegger to Re-read the Book of Ecclesiastes', *JSOT* 33: 219-44.
Sneed, M.R.
2012 *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes: A Social-Science Perspective* (Society of Biblical Literature Ancient Israel and its Literature, 12; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature).
Staples, W.E.
1943 'The "Vanity" of Ecclesiastes', *JNES* 2: 95-104.

Tamez, E.
2001 'Ecclesiastes: A Reading from the Periphery', *Int* 55: 250-59.
Vajda, D.
1971 *Deux commentaires Karaïtes sur l'Ecclesiaste* (Leiden: Brill).
Vonach, A.
2004 'Das Dilemma der Vergänglichketin: ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Wortwurzel *hbl* bei Kohelet', in H.M. Niemann and M. Augustin (eds.), *'Basel und Bibel': Collected Communications of the XVIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT), Basel 2001* (BEATAJ, 51; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang): 299-33.
Webb, B.G.
2000 *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).
Weber, R.
1975 *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 2nd edn).
Weeks, S.
2010 *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature* (T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies; London: T&T Clark).
2012 *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (LHBOTS, 541; London: T&T Clark).
Whitley, C.F.
1979 *Koheleth: His Language and Thought* (BZAW, 148; Berlin: de Gruyter).
Whybray, R.N.
1982 'Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy', *JSOT* 23: 87-98.
1989 *Ecclesiastes* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
Wright, J.R. (ed.)
2005 *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (ACCS, 9; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).
Zafrani, H., and A. Caquot
1989 *La version arabe de la Bible de Sa'dya Gaon: L'Ecclesiaste et son Commentaire: Le livre de Vascèse* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose).
Zimmerli, W.
1962 *Das Buch des Predigers Salomo* (ATD, 16.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).
Zimmerman, F.
1973 *The Inner World of Qohelet: With Translation and Commentary* (New York: KTAV).
Zlotowitz, M.
1994 *Koheles: Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashi and Rabbinic Sources* (Artscroll Tanach; New York: Mesorah, 2nd edn [1976]).