

possession of life. However, as argued above, man was the recipient of life (the *nepeš* or *rûah*) by the “breathing of God” (*nišmat hayyîm*). At this point, the commonality of mankind and other creatures ceases.

At the same time, the very fact that animal and human life and death are together characterized by *rûah* and *nepeš* on the one hand, and *mût* and *māwet* on the other, leads to the ineluctable conclusion that animal death prior to the fall is not in its essentials different from human life. It follows that the argument for the pre-Fall death of animals is extremely problematic, and, in fact, unsustainable. More positively, as we have also noted, Paul contends vigorously for his position that the “whole creation has been groaning” (*sustenádset*) awaiting redemption (i. e., “renewal”). He then uses the strong adverbial conjunction “not only, but also” (*ou monon dé, álla*) and continues “but we ourselves . . . groan (*stenadsomen*) inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:22–23).¹⁶

Fear God and Enjoy His Gifts: Qohelet’s Edenic Vision of Life

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the book of Ecclesiastes Qohelet sets out to examine life in a fallen world, life as it is lived, life “under the sun.” He investigates one situation after another, each time concluding that *hebel* prevails.¹ In Qohelet’s view, the sons of Adam and daughters of Eve must live in a world marked by sin and riddled with injustice: the fastest runner does not win the race and the strongest warrior does not win the battle (Eccl 9:11). In sum, the expected relationship between actions and rewards is broken.

In light of this broken relationship between actions and rewards—what we might call “injustice”—what should humans do? How are we to live and operate in this world? Qohelet answers these questions by calling for a return to Eden. He argues that we should a) enjoy God’s gifts, b) as God originally intended them to be enjoyed. Qohelet addresses the first aspect of faithful living—enjoyment—in several passages deemed the *carpe diem* texts. He addresses the second aspect—enjoyment as God intended—by exhorting his readers in several places to fear God. This essay will examine Qohelet’s two-fold solution to living in a fallen world by first examining Genesis’ picture of Eden and Qohelet’s use of it. The

¹⁶The two Greek verbs translated “groaning” and “groan,” though having slightly different nuances (the former “groan together,” the latter “groan to oneself”), share in common lament or complaint about an undesirable circumstance of some kind. BADG, 795, 766 respectively.

¹The meaning of *hebel* is highly debated and cannot detain the current discussion. For an overview of options, see Russell L. Meek, “The Meaning of 𐤁𐤀𐤋 in Qohelet: An Intertextual Suggestion,” in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, ed. Mark J. Boda; Tremper Longman III, and Cristian G. Rata (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 241–56; and the fuller discussion in idem., “The Meaning of Hebel in Ecclesiastes in Light of Qohelet’s Inner-Biblical Use of Genesis,” (PhD diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. 2014) 7–71

essay will then treat Qohelet's call to enjoyment within God's boundaries before concluding with a discussion of the modern theological implications of one of the gifts Qohelet highlights for enjoyment—one's spouse. We turn now to examining life in Eden before looking at Qohelet's call to return to that life.

In six days God created the heavens and the earth, filled them, and then rested on the seventh day.² Genesis 2 records that God planted a garden in Eden and placed the man there (Gen 2:8). This garden included "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen 2:9 ESV) along with the two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The garden was well watered, beautiful, and full of animals. God made the man the caretaker of this cosmic temple.³ Everything God created was good with one exception—the man was alone (Gen 2:18). As James McKeown points out, the pairs (as opposed to singles) of animals Adam names in the previous scene highlights their sexuality and therefore "accentuate[s] the loneliness of the human being."⁴ God rectifies this "not good" situation by putting the man into a deep sleep and making "a helper alongside him" (יִשְׁרָאֵל לְעֵזֶר).⁵ Genesis 2 concludes by stating that "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

The pictured painted in Genesis 1–2 is clear: God has created a good world, given Adam a mate, and the two are to care for the garden and fill it with children. The humans have good food and drink, good work, and good company. Nevertheless, the man and woman will soon rebel against God by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the curses for which give further insight into the creational ideal. These will be examined below as they relate to the assorted elements of Eden in Ecclesiastes.

²This author holds to a literal, six-day creation. For discussion on the creation account, see, among others, J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds., *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

³The literature demonstrating Eden as a cosmic temple is vast. See, for example, J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 81–88; John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Gregory K. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005), 5–31; and T. Sordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2–3 and Symbolism of the Garden of Eden in Biblical Hebrew Literature*, Contributions to Exegesis and Theology 25 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 457–59.

⁴James McKeown, *Genesis*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 34.

⁵Rober Alter (*Genesis: Translation and Commentary* [New York: Norton, 1996], 9) rightly points out the difficulty in translating this phrase and argues that "helper" is too weak because the term usually "connotes active intervention on behalf of someone." He opts for "sustainer."

II. A RETURN TO EDEN

Scholars have long noted the apparent relationship between Genesis and Ecclesiastes,⁶ and a few studies in particular have argued that Qohelet draws from the Eden narrative. For example, Arian Verheij investigated Ecclesiastes 2:4–6 in and concluded that, through the use of repeated vocabulary, Qohelet attempted to recreate the garden of Eden in his description of his own opulence. Additionally, Stuart Weeks points out that Qohelet's description of his building projects in Ecclesiastes 2 serve no "obvious public function . . . [and] are not monumental, but geared to the generation and spending of wealth."⁷ Weeks' contention that the chapter is not a testament to Qohelet's kingship is important because he highlights that Qohelet's building project is not the luxurious projects that other ancient Near Eastern accounts describe but rather is a place where work is done and food is grown (i.e., fruit trees). In this way, Qohelet's garden calls to mind the garden of Eden, that place where Adam and Eve could eat from any of the trees in the garden except for one.

In addition to the garden language in Ecclesiastes 2 that echoes Eden, Craig Bartholomew notes briefly that Qohelet's six *carpe diem* passages are "the vision evoked with Eden in Genesis 2 and in the promises to the Israelites about the good land of Israel."⁸ Bartholomew also rightly states that these passages "celebrate creaturely human life as God has made it."⁹

Following Bartholomew's lead, I have demonstrated elsewhere that the repetition of vocabulary and thematic elements¹⁰ between the *carpe diem* passages and Genesis 2 indicate Qohelet is utilizing the Eden

⁶See the survey of literature in Meek, "The Meaning of קֹהֶלֶת in Qohelet," 241–56 and the fuller survey of literature in idem., "The Meaning of Hebel in Ecclesiastes in Light of Qohelet's Inner-Biblical Use of Genesis," 21–32. Contra Katharine J. Dell, "Exploring Intertextual Links between Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1–11," in *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*, LHBOTS 587 (New York: T & T Clark, 2014), 3–14.

⁷Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*, LHBOTS 541 (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 26–27.

⁸Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 152.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Thematic and lexical overlap are the two primary indicators that either inner-biblical allusion or inner-biblical exegesis is occurring in a passage. See, P. Beentjes, "Discovering a New Path of Intertextuality: Inverted Quotations and their Dynamics," in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategy in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. Fokkelman (Assen: van Gorcum, 1996), 31–49; Jeffrey M. Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008), 241–65; Michael A. Lyons, "Marking Innerbiblical Allusion in the Book of Ezekiel," *Biblica* 88 (2007), 245–50; Geoffrey D. Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 9 (2011), 283–309; Harry P. Nasuti, *Tradition History and the Psalms of Asaph*, SBLDS 88 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1988), 57, 195–96; Mark J. Boda, *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9*, BZAW, 277 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter), 3; Risto Nurmela, "The Growth of the Book of Isaiah," in *Bringing out the Treasure*, 247; R. J. Bautch, "Intertextuality in the Persian Period," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. J. L. Berquist; SemeiaSt 50 (Atlanta: Scholars, 2007), 35.

narrative to portray what life *should* look like for those who are faithful and obedient to Yahweh.¹¹ In sum, these six passages (Eccl 2:24–26; 3:10–15, 16–22; 5:18–20 [ET 17–19]; 8:10–15; 9:7–10; 11:7–10) have in common with Genesis 2 multiple repeated terms, approximate synonyms, and overlapping thematic elements. The preponderance of terms together with overlapping thematic elements strongly suggests that the similarities between Genesis 2 and the *carpe diem* is more than coincidental (see Tables 1 and 2).¹² That Qohelet alludes to life in the garden of Eden will be made more clear in the rest of the article, which addresses 1) Qohelet's vision of life as it relates to the garden of Eden and 2) the implications of Qohelet's vision may be for the Christian church today.

Table 1 Overlapping Lexical/Syntactical Features
(*Carpe Diem* Passages // Gen 2:4–25)

	Eccl 2:24– 26	Eccl 3:10– 15, 16– 22	Eccl 5:18– 20 (17– 19)	Eccl 8:10– 15	Eccl 9:7– 10	Eccl 11:8– 10	Gen 2:4–25
Repeated Terms	בָּאֵדָם	הָאֵדָם	הָאֵדָם	לָאֵדָם	טוֹב	הָאֵדָם	הָאֵדָם
	טוֹב	טוֹב	טוֹבָה	טוֹב	טוֹב	וַיִּשְׂבָּחַהּ	טוֹב
	שְׂאִיבֶל	שְׂאִיבֶל	לְאִיבֶל	לְאִיבֶל	אִיבֶל		אִיבֶל הָאִיבֶל אִיבֶלָה
	הָאֵלֶּהִים	אֱלֹהִים	הָאֱלֹהִים	הָאֱלֹהִים	הָאֱלֹהִים	הָאֱלֹהִים	אֱלֹהִים
Approximate Synonyms	בְּעֵמֶלָה	עֵמֶלָה	עֵמֶלָה	בְּעֵמֶלָה	וּבְעֵמֶלָה		אֲשֶׁרָה
		עֵמֶלָה	עֵמֶלָה		אֲשֶׁרָה		אֲשֶׁרָה
		בְּעֵמֶלָה	עֵמֶלָה	עֵמֶלָה	עֵמֶלָה	עֵמֶלָה	עֵמֶלָה

Table 2 Overlapping Thematic Features
(*Carpe Diem* Passages // Gen 2:4–25)

	<i>Carpe Diem</i> Passages	Genesis 2:15–25
Repeated Themes	Enjoyment of spouse	Enjoyment of spouse
	Enjoyment of food	Enjoyment of food
	Enjoyment of work	Enjoyment of work

¹¹Meek, "The Meaning of עֵמֶלָה in Qohelet," 247–48.

¹²See Meek, "The Meaning of Hebel in Ecclesiastes in Light of Qohelet's Inner-Biblical Use of Genesis," 21–32.

III. CARPE DIEM: ELEMENTS OF EDEN IN ECCLESIASTES

The six *carpe diem* passages (Eccl 2:24–26; 3:10–15, 16–22; 5:18–20 [ET 17–19]; 8:10–15; 9:7–10; 11:7–10) present the same basic message: since life is uncontrollable and full of injustice, we humans should enjoy the gifts of God when God so allows it. That is, humans should return, as God allows it, to their pre-fall existence. This section examines four features of the *carpe diem* passages that illustrate Qohelet's solution to living in this world gone wrong: 1) the gifts are fundamental features of life in the garden of Eden; 2) the gifts are from God and cannot be enjoyed apart from him; 3) the gifts are ultimately ephemeral and can only be enjoyed while humans have breath; and 4) humans are constantly in danger of misusing these gifts, so they must be enjoyed within the bounds God previously established.

1. Features of Life in Eden

In response to the frustration caused by injustice "under the sun," Qohelet recommends that people take joy in a few particular activities, all of which were part of humanity's pre-fall, Edenic existence. Ecclesiastes 2:24–26 lists eating, drinking, and taking joy in one's toil, or work (see also 3:10–15; 16–22 [working only]; 5:18–20; 8:10–15 [eating and drinking only]). In the garden of Eden, God permitted humans to eat from any tree in the garden, including the tree of life, except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16). Genesis 2:16 stresses the freedom to eat by using the infinitive absolute form with the imperfect form of the verb אָכַל to intensify God's granting of permission to eat from every other tree.¹³ God tells the man that he most definitely can eat from whatever tree in the garden he wishes.

Since all things were "good," we may assume that eating from every tree save one was enjoyable. The curse points to this original goodness as well, for God states that the man will now eat "in pain" (Gen 3:17). That eating "in pain" forms part of Yahweh's curse implies that previously eating was *not* in pain; rather, it was to be enjoyed freely. Qohelet's encouragement to enjoy eating—if God allows it—thus indicates his desire for a return to Eden, the time when humans could eat freely without pain. While the Genesis narrative does not explicitly mention

¹³See Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, Biblical Languages: Hebrew 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 158. The authors note that by using the infinitive absolute, "speakers/narrators express their conviction of the verity of their statements regarding an action. When a speaker has used this construction, a listener would not be able to claim at a later date that the speakers had not expressed themselves [sic] clearly enough" (emphasis in original). Also note Bruce Naidoff, who states, "there is no idea of permission here ('you may eat'), but rather one of open invitation and encouragement" ("A Man to Work the Soil: A New Interpretation of Genesis 2–3," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 5 [1978], 5).

drinking, we can assume that drinking without pain was also the norm in Eden.

Many of the *carpe diem* passages also note that humans should enjoy work when God so allows (Ecl 2:24–26; 3:10–15; 16–22; 5:18–20).¹⁴ This gift is also an important component of the pre-fall Eden in Genesis 2:15. Here the narrator states that God put the man in the garden of Eden “to work it and keep it” (ESV).¹⁵ Thus, work is a normal part of human existence and did not originally have negative connotations. However, God’s curse on the man and the ground after the fall included *difficult* work.¹⁶ The man would now eat bread “by the sweat of [his] face,”¹⁷ the ground would produce “thistles and thorns,” and as noted above, the man would eat “in pain.” When Qohelet urges enjoyment of work, then, he is calling for a return to this time before the fall, in which humans worked as part of the divine order and enjoyed the fruit from every tree in the garden.¹⁸

The majority of *carpe diem* passages list eating, drinking, and working as tasks humans should enjoy. Ecclesiastes 9:7–10, however, also lists enjoyment of one’s wife as a gift from God.¹⁹ The passage reads,

¹⁴On God’s role in allowing or disallowing joy in Ecclesiastes, see Dominic Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, JSOTSup 316 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 129–39.

¹⁵Paul F. Scotcher (“Lessons from Paradise on Work, Marriage and Freedom: A Study of Genesis 2:4–3:4,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 28 [2004], 81) makes the point that in both the biblical account of human origins and in other ancient Near Eastern accounts of human origins, humans are created for work. The primary difference lies in the purpose of that work. In the ancient Near Eastern accounts, humans were created to work as slaves for the gods, whereas in Genesis humans were given work as a means for enjoyment. See also Ronald A. Simkins, “Work and Creation,” *Bible Today* 47 (2009), 225–31. For an anthology of ancient Near Eastern creation accounts, see Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible*, CBQMS 26 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1994).

¹⁶Bernhard Lang notes this dual nature of work, first as blessing and later as curse. See Bernhard Lang, “Der arbeitende Mensch in der Bibel: Eine kulturgeschichtliche Skizze,” in *Arbeit im Mittelalter. Vorstellungen und Wirklichkeit*, ed. Verena Postel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), 36–40.

¹⁷However, note that Sandra Richter, drawing on the work of Daniel Fleming, argues that “by the sweat of your brow” is “an old ancient Near Eastern idiom . . . [that] speaks of anxiety—perspiration-inducing fear” (*The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008], 111). Also see Daniel E. Fleming, “By the Sweat of Your Brow: Adam, Anat, Athirat and Ashurbanipal,” in *Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible*, Manchester, September 1992, ed. George J. Brooke, et al. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), 93–100.

¹⁸For further discussion on the various ways Qohelet engages work, including the work of God and the work of humans, see Hinkley G. Mitchell, “‘Work’ in Ecclesiastes,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 32 (1913), 123–38. For more recent discussion, see sections devoted to these passages (Ecl 2:24–26; 3:10–15; 16–22; 5:18–20) in the exhaustive commentary by Antoon Schoors, *Ecclesiastes*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Peeters: Leuven, 2013).

¹⁹Though we will not discuss the passage fully here, Aron Pinker argues that Ecclesiastes 11:9–12:1a, which includes the final *carpe diem* passage (Ecl 11:7–10), is an

Go, eat with joy your bread and drink your wine with a good heart, for God has already accepted your works. At all times may your garments be white, and do not let oil be lacking upon your head. Enjoy life with a wife whom you love all the days of your brief life that he has given you under the sun, all the days of your brevity. For it is your portion in life and in your labor that you have labored under the sun. All that your hand finds to do, do it with your strength, for there is no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, where you are going.

Here Qohelet expands his admonition to enjoy to enjoying life with the wife one loves.²⁰ Qohelet’s inclusion of enjoying life with one’s spouse again points the reader toward the garden of Eden. There, before the fall, a husband and wife lived in perfect unity and harmony. Adam and Eve enjoyed each other’s company without the interference of sin and its damaging effects. They did not bicker or misunderstand one another. They did not have to fight for time together, nor did they have to struggle to love each other. Adam perfectly enjoyed life with the woman he loved.

Listen to Adam’s statement upon seeing Eve the first time: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2:23 ESV). The text goes on to say this is why a man leaves his parents and clings to his wife. This picture of matrimony coheres perfectly with Genesis’ first mention of the creation of humans. When God created Adam and Eve he declared that everything was “very good” (Gen 1:28) and blessed humans with the command to be fruitful and multiply. That is, God’s original design was for a man and a woman to live in harmony, procreate, and raise children together. All this in perfect unity.

admonition to find a wife. Like the present article, he sees the garden of Eden narrative as the backdrop to Qohelet’s discussion of marriage. See Aron Pinker, “Qohelet’s Nuanced View on Matrimony—A New Interpretation of Qohelet 11:9–12:1a within Its Pedagogical Milieu,” *Australian Biblical Review* 59 (2011), 13–30.

²⁰Some debate exists over whether נָשָׂא should be understood as “woman” or “wife.” Mitchell Dahood (“Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth,” *Biblica* 33 [1952], 211) argues the anarthrous term can only be understood as wife. Daniel C. Fredericks (“Ecclesiastes,” in *Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs*, Daniel C. Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes, Apollos Old Testament Commentary [Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2010], 209–10) understands the term as “a woman” but insists it refers to a singular wife chosen out of love. Craig Bartholomew (*Ecclesiastes*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009], 304–05) rightly points out that “woman” without the definite article can refer to a person’s wife in particular contexts (e.g., Gen 30:4; 1 Sam 25:43; Deut 22:22). Given the theological context of the *carpe diem* passages (creation), “the case for this woman’s being one’s wife is compelling. See also Johan Yeong Sik Pakh, “A Syntactical Consideration of *שִׁחַ* in Qoh. ix 9,” *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001), 370–80. After a thorough examination of the term, Pakh concludes that the term “can only mean ‘wife’” (“A Syntactical Consideration . . .,” 379). See also the translation by Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 226.

As was the case with eating, drinking, and enjoying work, God's curse after the fall implies Adam and Eve had a more perfect union before they rebelled against God. Instead of the perfect relationship that characterized their pre-fall condition, God says in Genesis 3:16 that now problems will plague their relationship: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Leaving aside the manifold questions of what this passage may or may not mean *exactly*, it at least portends something ominous.²¹ Whereas before the fall the man and woman cleaved to each other, the man exclaimed that she is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," and they (presumably) lived together in harmony, now there will be conflict between them. The man and the woman, united before God in creation and now in sin, must contend with each other because they ate from the tree. Thus, when Qohelet encourages his readers to "enjoy life with the wife whom you love," (Eccl 9:9), he is pointing back to a time when such enjoyment was customary, a time before her desire was for him and he ruled over her.²² And in this Qohelet rounds out his view of how humans should live in the present—they should "turn back time" to before the fall, to a time when eating, drinking, working, and marriage was fully enjoyable and not yet marred by sin.

2. Gifts from God

Qohelet lists enjoyment of eating, drinking, working, and one's spouse as *gifts*—things that humans cannot gain other than from the hand of God. Qohelet paints a picture of what life was like before the fall—fully enjoyable. But to return to that pre-fall existence is far beyond the bounds of humanity. Since sin and death entered the world, it has been up

²¹Various interpretations of this aspect of the curse include a "desire for independence that will conflict with his demand for submission" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987], 89); "the desire to contend with him for leadership in their relationship" (Susan T. Foh, "What Is the Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 [1975], 383); see also Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, NAC 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 251; and Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 202; the "basic instinct of woman" to reproduce (John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan], 2001); Walton cites H. Chanan Brichio (*Names of God* [New York: Oxford, 1998], 90) for support; desire and domination as opposed love and cherishing (Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008], 76); see also Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 94; John J. Schmitt argues that the man will not "rule" over the woman, but rather the will be "like" each other, particularly in sexual desire. See Schmitt, "Like Eve, Like Adam: *msl* in Gen 3:16," *Biblica* 71 (1991), 1–22. Richard M. Davidson ("The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3," *Andrew University Seminary Studies* 26 [1988], 121–31) argues that Gen 3:16 involves both cursing and blessing—the woman is not subjected to her husband (curse), but his role is now to protect her (blessing).

²²Again, significant debate exists over the meaning of this phrase. See note 21 above for possible interpretations.

to God to remedy the situation.²³ Adam and Eve have already demonstrated what happens when humans try to "enjoy" God's gifts without his approval. Thus, just as God alone provides salvation, God alone provides gifts for our enjoyment. If not for God, his gifts could not be enjoyed—"apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?" (Eccl 2:25).

To state it another way, Qohelet's envisioned return to Eden cannot and will not occur without God's blessing. If we are to enjoy even a small piece of good life after the fall, it must come from God's hand. Further, we should also note that the gifts Qohelet lists (e.g., food, drink, work, a spouse) are things to which all humans—those loyal to Yahweh and those who are not—potentially have access. Therefore, while a complete return to Eden only happens through Jesus Christ, as the New Testament teaches, everyone—not followers of Yahweh only—whom God allows can enjoy his gifts.

3. Ephemeral Things

There is a common—and significant—feature of these gifts of eating, drinking, working, and enjoying one's spouse: they are all utterly ephemeral. In Qohelet's vision of how his readers should live in light of the oppressiveness of life under the sun, the pre-fall, good gifts from God must be enjoyed now because the taint of death has rendered them ephemeral. Just as the curse made enjoyment of food, drink, work, and a spouse much more difficult, to say the least, death made them transitory.²⁴

The brevity of God's gifts is especially true as it relates to taking joy in one's spouse. Qohelet notes in 9:9: Enjoy life with a wife whom you love all the days of your brief life that he has given you under the sun, all the days of your brevity. While the meaning of *hebel* is certainly debated, the context and syntax of this verse indicates *hebel* here refers to life's brevity.²⁵ If such is the case, then Qohelet is highlighting the enjoyment of one's spouse while such enjoyment is possible.

²³There are several excellent books that deal with the metanarrative, or big picture, of the biblical story of redemption that began in Gen 3:15 when Yahweh promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. See, among others, Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael G. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014); T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003).

²⁴See the excellent treatment by Daniel C. Fredericks, *Coping with Transience: Ecclesiastes on Brevity in Life*, The Biblical Seminar 18 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

²⁵The phrase "all the days of your *hebel* life" parallels the phrase "all the days of your *hebel*" that comes after it, thus indicating that *hebel* here relates to life span ("all the days"). Further, the previous pericope (9:1–6) addresses death, and the final verse in this pericope (v. 10) also refers to death, indicating also that *hebel* here points to life's brevity. For discussion of the meaning of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes, see note 1 above.

The implication of this passage, of course, is that enjoyment of a spouse is no longer possible once a person goes to the grave ("All that your hand finds to do, do it with your strength, for there is no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, where you are going," (Eccl 9:10)). However, we can easily apply the same concept of brevity to the day-to-day aspects of living. Because of the fall, one does not have to look far to see those who are arguing, angry, and frustrated with each other. In the pre-fall world, such was unthinkable. But after the fall these complications to enjoyment are a foregone conclusion, and, therefore, God's gifts must be enjoyed because they are here today and gone tomorrow: all things have been marked by the fall.

4. Enjoyment within God's Boundaries

Finally, we must fear God. That is, we must enjoy God's gifts within God's boundaries. While Qohelet calls for a return to Eden, humans need help figuring out how to get there. We are frail creatures, prone to wander and prone to misuse God's gifts. During life "under the sun," we take God's gift of eating and turn it into gluttony; we take God's gift of drinking and turn it into drunkenness; we take God's gift of work and derive our value from it; and we take God's gift of a spouse and turn it into pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, and abuse. Because of the human propensity to sin, Qohelet admonishes his reader to enjoy God's gifts within the appropriate boundaries.

Qohelet states in 3:14 that God has done what he has done so that people will fear him. Again in 5:1-7 he tells the reader that God must be feared, a statement that concludes a series of warnings regarding proper religious and cultic activity. And in 8:13 Qohelet warns that life will not always go well for the wicked, even if it seems so, "because he does not fear before God." The clearest example of Qohelet's warning comes in 12:13, the book's hermeneutical lens.²⁶ The author states, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of humanity." For Qohelet, the fear of God must guide his readers' actions and thus provide the boundaries within which to enjoy God's gifts. For, as he states in the very next verse, "God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Eccl 12:14 ESV).

²⁶Of course, some scholars see this verse as a scribal addition. See, e.g. K. Siegfried, *Prediger und Hoheslied übersetzt und erklärt*, HAT II, 3/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1898); George A. Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1908; Kurt Galling, "Qohelet-studien," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 50 (1932), 276-99; Martin Rose, *Rien de nouveau: Nouvelles approches du livre de Qohélet* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1999). On Ecclesiastes as a literary unity, see esp. Michael V. Fox, "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 48 (1977): 83-106; idem., *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, JSOT Supplement Series 71 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989).

IV. THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF QOHELET'S EDENIC VISION OF LIFE

The preceding discussion outlined four aspects of Qohelet's vision for life in light of the injustices and brevity humanity faces. We can derive multiple theological implications for the Christian life today from the preceding discussion, but we will narrow the focus to examining the theological implications of Qohelet's admonition to enjoy life with one's spouse.

First, as is clear enough, Qohelet's ancient and modern readers must recognize that one's spouse and (by extension) family are gifts from God. Thus, if God so allows us to marry, we should strive to enjoy our marriage. This includes practical things such as spending time together and enjoying physical and emotional intimacy. Enjoying these simple pleasures in life honors God because he is the very one who gave them to us. Moreover, as some know all too well, one's family can be a gift that passes too quickly. This applies not only to the death that consumes us all but also to the demands of life itself. Any couple who has a child realizes quickly they must now deliberately capture the time they once had in largesse. A spouse is an earthly gift that must be enjoyed *now* because we do not know what tomorrow brings. This enjoyment-when-possible reminds us both of life's brevity—and therefore causing us to contemplate its end—and that God sovereignly gives when he so desires. A person's job is not to control when and how God gives gifts, but rather to enjoy them when they come.

The gift of a spouse must also be enjoyed within the boundaries established by God. The most obvious boundary God establishes is that sex is to be between one man and one woman within the covenant of a marriage relationship. God established this pattern at creation by creating Eve for Adam, reaffirmed it through laws regarding appropriate sexual relationships, and demonstrated the heart of laws governing sexuality during the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus pointed out that lusting after another person is the same as committing the physical act of adultery.

Further, if God's curse on Eve indicates anything about the pre-fall relationship between Adam and Eve, then the two enjoyed a peaceful relationship with each other. It was only after sin that Eve's desire would be for her husband, who would in turn rule over her. In Qohelet's view, then, enjoying one's spouse within God's boundaries means returning to Eden, where God saw that everything was "good." In this place there was no adultery, no lust, no angry words, and no contending with one another. In sum, an Edenic vision of marriage includes much more than sexual fidelity; it is a picture of a man and a woman living in harmony together before God, taking time to enjoy one another whenever possible, and therefore honoring God in their marriage as a gift he's given, a brief respite in this fleeting and often unjust life.

The New Testament makes even more explicit the theological implications of marriage. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul spends several verses instructing husbands and wives in how to live in relationship with each other (5:22–33).²⁷ He exhorts wives to “submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (5:22), with the justification that “the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church” (5:23). Therefore, “wives should submit in everything to their husbands” just as the church submits to Christ. Paul is admonishing his readers to reverse the curse, that is, to return to Eden, the time before “Your desire will be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16). Paul next tells husbands to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,” which includes loving “their wives as their own bodies” (Eph 5:25, 28). Paul then explicitly connects the marriage he describes with humanity’s pre-fall state by citing Gen 2:24. Recognizing the mystery of the two-flesh union, Paul tells his readers “that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32).

Paul therefore calls his readers to the same type of marriage relationship to which Qohelet calls his readers—one that reflects the Edenic state of union in which humans existed before sin entered the world. The loving husband and submissive wife represent a reversal of the curse God placed on Adam and Eve because they ate from the one tree. However, Paul further teases out the implications of such a marriage. Not only is a spouse God’s gift to be enjoyed within the appropriate boundaries, but a rightly ordered marriage portrays the gospel to a watching world. The husband who loves his wife, sacrifices for her, treats her with respect and dignity, and protects her as he would protect his own body gives those around him a concrete picture of what it means to live in right relationship with God. That husband gives unbelievers a small glimpse of the mystery that Jesus Christ, the God-man, deigned to put on human flesh, live a perfect life, die a shameful death, and raise to new life three days later—all for the sake of his bride, that he might reconcile humans to God, and thus once and for all reverse the curse Adam and Eve placed us under when they ate of the one tree. Thus, and most importantly, fearing God and enjoying one’s spouse has far-reaching gospel implications, for it displays to the watching world the “love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39 ESV).

²⁷For a compelling exposition of this passage and its gospel implications, see Russell D. Moore, “Untitled,” (sermon, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary chapel service, Kansas City, MO, March 5, 2014; <http://www.mbts.edu/news/video/march-5-2014-dr-russell-moore/>).

Ancient-Future Hermeneutics: Postmodernism, Biblical Inerrancy, and the Rule of Faith¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades many theologians and philosophers have turned to a study of hermeneutics. This has proved to be a fruitful development. Ideas from the postmodern tradition have been particularly effective stimuli to thought and discussion, and some thinkers, such as Kevin Vanhoozer,² have done exceptional work integrating postmodern insights with traditional Christianity.

It is my intention in this paper to explore one area of possible integration that has not yet received sufficient attention, if indeed it has been attempted at all, by contemporary theologians. At first glance, it may seem that few theological traditions could be more antithetical than postmodern theology and biblical inerrancy. Yet, I contend, inerrancy and postmodern theology are not (or are not entirely) antithetical. To the contrary, central components of these traditions are consistent and can be integrated. Moreover, the integration of these very insights has already been accomplished in the writings of Augustine.

What are these insights? Primarily these: The authority of the human authors of the Christian Scriptures is such that whatever is included in

¹The title “Ancient-Future Hermeneutics” is influenced by Robert E. Weber, especially his work *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

²Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).