

Feats of Interpretative Virtuoso: Ancient Midrashic Rabbis on Qoheleth

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Abstract

This study looks at how ancient Midrashic rabbis interpreted the Book of Ecclesiastes (or Qoheleth). After exploring verse-by-verse Midrashic exegeses of the first three chapters, several patterns emerged. The basic observation is that Midrashic rabbis continually resorted to reinterpreting the original verse by expanding and modifying it in significant ways arguably beyond the scope of ancient Hebraic theology and cosmology. Rabbis appeared adamantly disinterested with culling out Qoheleth's intended ancient Hebraic biblical meaning or interpreting it within its own terms. The overwhelming tendency was to revise and rewrite verses, many times by force-feeding them through other biblical texts in highly speculative feats of interpretative virtuoso. For the most part, there was little concerted effort to rationally explore the deeper philosophical and theological implications of Qoheleth verses. Lastly, the findings here confirm that there were no objections or questions raised about Solomonic authorship, no heretical intimations, and no references to contradictions internal or external to the text.

Keywords: Qoheleth; Midrash; Ecclesiastes; textual meaning; ancient, rabbinical tradition; King Solomon; heretical views; rabbi; eisegesis; exegesis.

Generally speaking, Qoheleth Rabbah is simply a 'midrash' on Ecclesiastes or a compilation of written verse-by-verse rabbinic expressions and opinions about Ecclesiastes composed between the 5th and 8th centuries AD (**1**), an ancient form of exegetical commentary, more or less. Sometimes verses were not explained by the editor but, rather, simply applied to a real-life event or situation at that time, that is, it was revised and used in a new context. The Midrash editors felt quite free and creative to use a panoply of both current and much older literary devices to interpret Ecclesiastes, many times speculating imaginatively to add their own commentaries and interpretations to its content and even changing its structure.

So, then, the Midrash Qoheleth was not solely an exegetical commentary, strictly speaking, or an objective attempt to explicate the meaning of biblical text from the author's point of view. Rather, it was many times simultaneously an effort to apply the text to some recent situation or to make it conform to widely-held views at that point in time employing a great variety of narrative tools to do so, from folk tales, prayers, astrology, and poetry, to philosophical speculation, historical review, and even geographical considerations (Hirshman, 2016, 2001; Kiperwasser, 2007; Safrai et al., 2007).

If we start by looking at how wisdom is viewed within Ecclesiastes early on, it is not difficult to see that its conclusions depart substantially from traditional Judaic views about wisdom as stated:

“The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both. Then I said to myself, ‘As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?’ So, I said to myself, ‘This too is vanity’. For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!” (Eccl 2: 14-16)

Kohelet feels that since the fool and the wise man both die, neither has advantage over the other. The philosophical issues implicated in the question of why anybody should have an ‘advantage’ over anyone else, let alone ‘the fool’, are never considered. Nevertheless, neither the wise man nor the fool can avoid death, so wisdom does not proffer any great advantage to the wise man over the fool. The wisdom of the wise man terminates when life ends. Therefore, it is futile and ludicrous for the wise man to pursue wisdom.

However, the conventional Judaic view of wisdom is that it is a gift granted by God in the form of the ‘Holy Spirit’ which imparts understanding of the Word of God as revealed in the Jewish Old Testament and commands the duty to walk in those truths every day of earthly life. In this view, it is clear that death cannot defeat wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit from an omnipotent, sovereign, all-powerful God. Otherwise, it would suggest that this ‘God’ is not the all-powerful creator and ruler of the heavens and the earth as laid down in the Hebrew Bible, implying that the so-called ‘Holy Spirit’ is nothing but a puff of smoke.

Therefore, after death the wise man cannot be forgotten because he endures in the thoughts, behaviors, and words of others through the good life he had lived and the good things he had done. Living a life of wisdom leaves a legacy that survives beyond simply being alive in a fleshly or material sense (Longman, 1997a, 1997b). As Proverbs 10: 7 makes clear: “The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot.” So, then, we might ask the author of Ecclesiastes: From a traditional Old Testament Judaic point of view, why shouldn’t the memory of a wise man be remembered?

In terms of what exactly these passages mean to ancient rabbis, it is clear they didn’t have much to disagree with about the pre-determined certitude of mortality for the wise man as for the fool, as claimed by Kohelet. But they did have a lot to say about what happens after death. Like the conventional perspective, they believed the wise man is remembered long after his death, not forgotten completely after his death. The wise man has the goal or end of business in his mind from the very beginning (or ‘he has his eyes in his head’, as Qohelet notes), so he knows where it will end up if he steers the course properly, that is, if he maintains the right relationship with God through Torah study.

“‘The wise man, his eyes are in his head...’ – the wise man, his eyes are in his head, but the fool, his eyes are in his legs? Rather, when the wise man is still at the beginning of a matter, he knows what will be at its end. Rabbi Meir would call the end of a matter its beginning.” (Kohelet Rabbah, Parasha 2:14)

The sarcasm here about the bodily location of the fool’s eyes is poignant. On the other hand, the rabbis also implied that wisdom does not only derive from abstract Torah study. It can also be applied to the practical activities of everyday life, and they proceed to demonstrate this by providing numerous examples of how various biblical characters applied wisdom to daily life to gain advantage over the fool. Here the patriarch Abraham is portrayed as the wise man who resists the concerted efforts of the fool, Nimrod, who is himself also a king, to make him commit idolatry:

“Alternatively: ‘The wise man, his eyes are in his head’ – this is Abraham our patriarch; ‘but the fool walks in darkness’ – this is Nimrod. ‘I also know that one event will happen to

them all". (Kohelet Rabbah, Parasha 2: 14)

The question becomes: How does this practical example disprove the verse in Ecclesiastes? The rabbinic sages argued that one king was wise while the other was a fool, and both died, as Kohelet declared. But they did not share the same fate because Abraham was righteous while Nimrod was wicked. The Jewish people continue to remember Abraham especially when adversity strikes Israel (Exo 32: 13), but no one cares to cherish the memories of Nimrod's dastardly deeds nor use them as inspiration for anything. The piety and righteousness of the wisdom of Abraham live on as a legacy in the memory of others, and the Holy Spirit contained within those memories infuses and energizes them. The nations don't crave to remember the actions of Nimrod but, rather, Abraham (Kohelet Rabbah, Parasha 2:15).

The rabbis then go on to provide other similar biblical examples to disprove Kohelet's statements that the fate of the wise and the fool are not the same such as contrasting Moses with the wicked Bilaam (a diviner mentioned in Numbers 22 of the Torah who instructed his king how to make the Israelites commit sin by copulating with foreign women and worshipping idols), and contrasting King David of Israel with the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, again citing other biblical texts to do so (II Chronicles 6: 42). The rabbis even speculate in other ways about how the wise man and the fool die differently: "... a drought year may come, and this one will eat at a high price and that one will eat at a low price. That is what is written: 'How can the wise man die like the fool?', the rabbis quip sarcastically by turning Kohelet's question against him (Kohelet Rabbah, Parasha 2: 15). The virtuoso feats of speculative interpretation by ancient Midrashic rabbis are simply boggle the imagination.

Therefore, it seems that the ancient rabbis are continually attempting to place Kohelet's claim within a biblical intertextual context to conclude that Kohelet's claim only applies to the fate of fools and sinners (the 'wicked'), not to the fate of the wise. Indeed, between Ecclesiastes 2:15 and 2:21 alone, rabbinic interpretations explicitly accessed and integrated into their deliberations 11 different biblical texts: (Isaiah 63: 11; II Chronicles 6: 42; Genesis 2: 7; 6: 5; Lamentations 1: 14; Psalms 33: 6; 37: 25; Daniel 8: 16; Ezekiel 1: 26; Proverbs 3: 19, 20). Allusions to Genesis and the prophets are particularly striking in providing and denying support for various Kohelet statements and for portraying it as a prophetic text.

They also utilize other resources to help them respond to Kohelet's statement. To some extent, it seems that at least some of these ancient rabbis very much personalized Kohelet's words and claims as an affront to their own professional lives and dedication. In their reactions, there is constant rephrasing of the questions posed by Kohelet. For example, Kohelet's "...why did I become wiser" becomes 'Why did I give my life for Torah?' during rabbinic self-reflection, reasoning, and deliberation (Kohelet Rabbah, Parasha 2: 15). In terms of rabbinic reactions to Kohelet's 'eat, drink, and be merry' advice, interpretations are varied and almost comical. At times, readers may even wonder if rabbis are looking at the right verse. Here is what Kohelet said in that verse:

"There is nothing better for a man than for him to eat and drink, and indulge his soul through his toil. This too, I saw, that it is from the hand of God" (Eccl 2: 24)

For the ancient Midrashic rabbis, this did not appear to be interpreted as a bow to Epicurean indulgence but, rather, viewed as a reference to Torah and good deeds. All of the many rabbis use an interpretative paradigm that reflected the meaning exactly as Kohelet stated it. There is nothing better than to eat, drink, and rejoice, as a way of bearing with the toil or hard work in life as long as Torah laws are respected and a right relationship with God is maintained. They reasoned it this way:

"Every instance in which eating and drinking is stated in this scroll (in other words, in Ecclesiastes); the verse is referring to Torah and good deeds. That will accompany him (man) in his toil (Ecclesiastes 8: 15) – in his world, in this world. 'During the days of his life' (Ecclesiastes 8: 15) – to the grave. Is there

food and drink in the grave that it accompanies a person to his grave? Rather, these are Torah and good deeds.” (Kohelet Rabbah, Parasha 2: 24)

The same sort of imaginative interpretative approach that we have seen from Midrashic rabbis towards the original first two chapters of Ecclesiastes continues into explanations and opinions of verses in the third chapter. This is the famous ‘a time for everything’ chapter broadly popularized across Western culture (2), especially modern American culture right up until recent times with the musical successes of indie supergroup ‘Boyz n the Moor’ (who are all females, by the way). The original verse Eccl 3: 1 begins as follows: “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven – “

Notice, if you will, the term “appointed” prior to the word ‘time’, suggesting noble divine direction and supervision of earthly events. By contrast, the cultural modification of the original phrase into ‘a time for everything’ just mentioned above has effectively extracted its divine connotations from Kohelet’s ancient Hebrew biblical point of view. All of these different times or events occurring in the earthly life of human beings are listed in the first eight verses of the original text: “A time to give birth...a time to plant...a time to kill...a time to weep...”, and so forth, all the way to the end, “...a time for war and a time for peace.”

In the next verse which immediately follows this fairly lengthy laundry list of earthly human events in everyone’s life (Eccl 3: 9), Kohelet essentially repeats the question he initially asked at the very beginning of his narrative: “What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?” Just exactly what is God’s purpose for the worker in all of this? What is the meaning of life for these workers from God’s point of view? Again, we can see here how Western culture has misappropriated and transformed the biblical meaning of this verse.

Up to now, Kohelet seems to have suggested that experience and reason cannot provide a satisfactory answer to this question about God’s purpose. The fact that this verse really represents a question posed to God is further substantiated by the verse that follows it: “I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves” (Eccl 3: 10). The deep poetic biblical meaning here denotes God’s intelligent design and purpose for human life and experience from the start of creation throughout human history.

The conventional interpretation of these verses does not appear difficult or challenging to comprehend from a biblical writer’s point of view. In other words, there is a divine plan where everything has been made appropriate in its own time from the beginning to the present time for all ages to come. Its organic structure cannot be fully overhauled, and all attempts to do so will lead to human disaster and increased suffering. It is not the lot of human beings to fathom what is that plan through our own labors or through our own reason and experience, Kohelet affirms.

The way to discover the divine meaning and purpose of our human lives or humanity in general is simply believing that each human being does have a role in God’s purpose and that particular role is a divine gift. If human beings have faith in God and freely submit their lives to honor Him in their everyday conduct, then God will do the navigation during their earthly life. This is the ancient Hebrew biblical message here.

For the first eight verses, Midrashic rabbis seem to be remaining true to the original versal texts of Ecclesiastes with the exception of the first verse: “A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven” (Midrash Qoheleth, Parasha 1). It is doubtful that Kohelet’s “appointed time” is equivalent to the Midrashic “season is set” given the strongly implied divine connotations of the former. It is equally doubtful that Kohelet’s “every event” is equivalent to the Midrashic “every experience”, the latter of which is only one kind of event in human life. The philosophical implications of these slight differences in these initial Midrashic interpretations will be expanded in the latter verses of Ecclesiastes. Suffice it to say at this point that Midrashic rabbis do not materially change the meaning of verses Eccl 3: 2-8.

However, it is a different story for the Midrashic question posed after Qoheleth’s list of human events: “What value, then, can the man of affairs get from what he earns?” (Midrash Qoheleth Rabbah, Parasha 3). How the Midrashic rabbis arrived at “value”, “man of affairs”, and “what he earns”, from Kohelet’s “profit”, “workers”, and “that in which he toils”, is puzzling. It is doubtful that Qoheleth’s use of the term ‘profit’ refers to monetary worth in the ancient biblical sense. Ostensibly, Qoheleth was not trying to convey a sense of financial advantage or

benefit to workers.

Profit has always been differentiated from value both in the popular and entrepreneurial senses. In ancient biblical terms, it meant accumulating something now that will provide an individual later with a benefit or an advantage such as the accumulated benefit that derives from studying and obeying the Word of God in the Bible. In fact, the business term 'profit' does contain shared adjectival meanings with advantage and benefit.

In business, 'profit' is simply revenues minus expenses, whereas 'value' means the present value of current and future profits. The term 'value' employed as a Midrashic substitute for the term 'profit' in the original text implies the idea of principles or standards of behavior and the exercise of judgment to determine what is important in human life, not monetary worth. Still, it is impossible to decipher precisely what was the actual intended Midrashic meaning. It is interesting that in the very next verse, the Midrashic rabbis revert to using business terminology rather than words that imply religious connotations: "I have observed the business that God gave man to be concerned with" (Midrash Qohelet, Parasha 3).

Here again, Midrashic rabbis are freely substituting original terms with their own. The original 'task' becomes the Midrashic 'business', the original 'sons of men' becomes the Midrashic 'man', and the original 'to occupy themselves' becomes the Midrashic 'to be concerned with'. Taken together, the Midrashic phrasal expression "the business that God gave man" lends itself well to the divine assignment of business enterprise itself.

Likewise, the Midrashic substitution of the simple term 'man' for the ancient biblical expression 'sons of men' also has wider philosophical implications. The original phrase refers to the collective sons of Adam frequently employed first in the Hebrew Bible (mostly in the Book of Ezekiel) and then again in the intertestamental apocalyptic apocrypha and the Greek New Testament. In ancient biblical terms, it is commonly used to refer to the inferior status of all men after the fall of the first man, Adam, after disobeying God's commandment, implying that the 'sons of men' are against God. The bland secular neutral term 'man' interposed by Midrashic rabbis obviates the absolute need for this particular ancient biblical interpretation.

The phrase 'concerned with' contains strong emotional connotations of worry and nervousness or anxiety about something. Something is making someone feel worried, alarmed, or distressed. Even if it is interpreted as meaning something that someone is interested in, it still doesn't seem to convey the intended meaning of the original text. The phrase 'occupied with', however, connotes different meanings altogether.

Apart from connoting being used by somebody such as in the expression the room is occupied at the moment, it largely connotes the doing of something rather than the emotional concern or interest about something. For Qoheleth, workers have been kept busy in a particular position or station in human life to which are attached a set of 'tasks' by virtue of divine judgment after the Adamic fall. If the Midrashic rabbinic interpreters have done anything at all, it seems that they have progressively secularized the original text.

In the next original verse, Qoheleth repeats the phrase he began the chapter with but, curiously enough, follows up his last verse where he mentions God's assignment of work 'tasks' to the 'sons of men' with another equally spiritual allusion:

"He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (Eccl 3: 11).

Again, the conventional biblical understanding of this verse is fairly straightforward. In ancient biblical terms, to say that God has "set eternity in their (men's) hearts" is to suggest that God has more or less installed a sense or feeling of another world which exists beyond the one directly experienced through the physical senses. The ancient biblical answer to the question, 'Is that all there is?', becomes a firm resounding, 'No, this world is not all there is.'

There is something beyond the constantly changing world that we see and experience which is everlasting and not subject to change. Literally, the ancient Hebrews believed that the Creator God of Genesis initially put something into the hearts of humanity that yearns for more than just earthly life, implying divine preparation of

human beings for something which exists beyond our earthly years of life, that is, after our death. What' more, human beings will not discover what that is during the course of their lifetime lest they use that knowledge for wrong intentions or purposes.

The Midrashic interpretation of this verse is as follows:

“He brings everything to pass precisely at its time. He also puts eternity in their mind, but without man ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass” (Midrash Qoheleth Rabbah, Parasha 3).

Again, the Midrashic rabbis continue to substitute secular terms for ancient biblical Hebrew terms while attempting to arrive at the intended meaning of the verse. The Midrashic ‘brings everything to pass’ is not Kohelet’s ‘made everything appropriate’ since the latter strongly implies the application of right judgment. The Midrashic ‘mind’ is surely not Kohelet’s ‘heart’ by any stretch of the imagination even at that time in biblical history since the former strongly implies reason or rationality (as does the subsequent term, ‘guessing’) while the latter refers exclusively to feelings or sense of feeling. There appears to be very little to no reflexivity whatsoever on the part of Midrashic rabbis about the wider philosophical implications of neither Qoheleth’s nor their own vocabulary.

In the following two original verses, Qoheleth again repeats his focus upon the infamous ‘eat, drink, and be merry’ theme cited earlier:

“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor – it is the gift of God” (Eccl 3: 12-13).

Qoheleth here seems to suggest that when a man eats and drinks it means that he feels good about his labor, and that this feeling is a gift from God. Qoheleth offers no discussion here about which social groups in any society may benefit most from this particular divine gift. In other words, for Qoheleth it is not a matter of making a modern socio-economic interpretation of God’s gift. In ancient biblical terms, we are surely here not being told by Qoheleth to ‘eat, drink, and be merry’ because that’s all there is until we die, and nothing is waiting for us afterwards. Rather, we are being advised or instructed how we should live our lives given that it is full of suffering, troubles, trials, and tribulations.

The conventional view is that we are constantly being told by Qoheleth to enjoy our lives regardless of station, circumstances, and life conditions. God has given each human being time to enjoy the fruits of their labor whatever their stations in life might be. Whatever the toil of our human lives, God intends for us by design to be humble, joyous beings, to be reverentially grateful for the gifts of joy bestowed by God, and not to be griping ungratefully because we cannot unravel all of God’s mystery.

The Midrashic rabbis depart somewhat from this conventional understanding of Qoheleth:

“Thus, I realized that the only worthwhile thing there is for them is to enjoy themselves and do what is good in their lifetime; also, that whenever a man does eat and drink and get enjoyment out of all his wealth, it is a gift of God” (Midrash Qoheleth Rabbah, Parasha 3).

As we can see, yet another secular economic term is introduced by Midrashic rabbis and superimposed upon the text of Ecclesiastes. However, it must be remembered that Qoheleth was not talking at all about what it is better

for a man of 'wealth' to do but, rather, what is better for workers or laborers to do, consistent with previous verses.

Consonant with previous translational allusions, the clear implication from this Midrashic rabbinical translation is that Qoheleth is talking directly to all men of wealth rather than solely to the 'wealth' of workers or laborers, whatever that might mean. Since Qoheleth is intimating at spiritual 'wealth' rather than material 'wealth', it is highly unlikely that the Midrashic expression 'all his wealth' applies strictly to workers or laborers especially at that point in biblical history since few or any of them enjoyed any kind of substantial material 'wealth' to speak of beyond the view that 'labor' itself is to be interpreted as 'wealth' by the worker himself, a doubtful proposition at best.

What's more, it is also highly unlikely that Qoheleth intended to combine the ancient Hebraic notion of divine blessings from God with the business concept of wealth in order to assign a sacred status to the human owner or possessor of that wealth, namely, the businessman. Again, the ancient Hebrew biblical perspective focuses upon spiritual wealth, not material wealth, and whatever is gained in earthly life by whoever comes with enormous spiritual attachments. Arguably, the introduction of the notion man of wealth by Midrashic rabbis expands the range of future interpretative options into this possibility. Midrashic use of the general expression 'a man' certainly lends itself in meaning more easily to all social groups rather than only the workers or laborers whom Qoheleth was specifically addressing including businessmen.

At this point, we might stop to ask the Midrashic rabbis a few questions they failed to address: Whatever happened to the main theme of God installing eternity into the heart of man? Whatever happened to the key ancient biblical notion of 'doing good in one's lifetime', certainly Qoheleth's central focus? Whatever happened to Qoheleth's view of seeing good in labor? Here the newly-introduced Midrashic concept of 'wealth' consonant with the introduction of linked economic notions seems to have overshadowed Qoheleth's conceptual focus on the divine nature of labor. The original text of Eccl 3: 14 is as follows:

"I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him"

The Midrashic interpretation of this verse is mostly straightforward except as it relates to the last words, 'fear him'. The rabbis substitute the words 'revere Him' as if God is intentionally engaging in two separate activities: doing His works and establishing 'fear' in men. But Qoheleth uses the words 'fear Him' in reference to the previous phrase, 'God has so worked', which itself refers to a previous statement about everything God does, that is, all His activities in general.

So, then, from Qoheleth's point of view, whatever God does is final because it's perfect and needs no adjustments whatsoever. God didn't intentionally compel people to 'revere' Him as the rabbis seem to imply by saying, 'God has brought to pass'. The ancient Hebrew biblical meaning of the phrase 'brought to pass' is to cause or to make happen. The rabbis appear to have taken one divine activity and divided it into two separate activities, whereas Qoheleth was referring to one activity, namely, God's work being done in such a way as to make His purpose unknowable by human reason and experience.

The human desire to know His purpose coupled with God's undiscoverable design is what should motivate human beings to 'fear' God. Interestingly enough, it is precisely the word 'should' that the Midrashic rabbis have eliminated that would link Qoheleth's 'fear Him' with the implied unknowability of the purpose for what 'God does'. Qoheleth is once again speaking in line with other biblical texts, notably Proverbs 1: 7 and 9: 10, where it stresses that the beginning of knowledge and especially wisdom is the fear of God. But this 'fear' means having faith in God, that we are constantly before His eyes during our earthly life, and that we will be judged by God at the appointed time after death. It does not represent the fear of a tyrannical God. Although the Midrashic interpretation seems equivalent to Qoheleth's message, it seems to deviate a bit:

"I realized, too, that whatever God has brought to pass will

recur evermore; Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it – and God has brought to pass that men revere Him.” (Midrash Qoheleth Parasha 3)

Perhaps it will be recalled that the next original verse Eccl 3: 15 is nearly a restatement of previous phrases, with the exception of the enigmatic ending: “That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.” From an ancient biblical point of view, Qoheleth is stressing here God’s view of time and events occurring within it as an organic whole.

God’s view is wholistic, not broken down into parts like ‘past’, ‘present’, and ‘future’ as it is with human beings. Time is one fluid motion that cannot be broken down or compartmentalized. This means that what is occurring at the moment has already occurred in the past, and what will occur in the future has already occurred, or simply what was, is, and what will be, is. In other words, there is no time in God’s spiritual domain, eternity.

The last enigmatic phrase of the verse is a little more challenging, to say the least, even from an ancient biblical point of view. A literal interpretation suggests that God continually ‘seeks’ that which is being pursued, more or less. But what does that mean from a conventional point of view? In God’s eyes, human beings are already situated in God’s spiritual realm where there is no time and, therefore, no parts of time such as past, present, and future. In terms of looking at it from the land of eternal truth where time does not exist, human beings are always in the proverbial eternal moment of now.

So, then, why does “God seek what has passed by?”, if human beings are always in the eternal now? What is spiritually so significant that it would require God to seek something that ‘has passed by’? If we look at the verse a little more carefully from a biblical viewpoint, we may notice there are basically two parts: the first part is an indirect comment about the oneness of time (and by implication, all that occurs within it), while the second part implicitly refers to something God is ‘seeking’ in the past, something that ‘has passed by’.

But again, why? The conventional answer is that God requires an account of everyone’s conduct in earthly life, and that account cannot be given until after one’s life is over. In other words, God will judge the conduct of each and every human being on earth after they have died, Qoheleth implies. So, death is not the end of the matter because God will pursue your past conduct and hold you to account for it. Melancholic existential message be gone!

Now, let’s see what the Midrashic rabbis have to say. In terms of the first part of the verse, interpretation seems to be consonant with the biblical meaning of the original text. The rabbis conjure up many speculative scenarios of what someone should say “if a person will say to you: is it possible that...”, then the answers should variously be: “It ‘already is’ or it ‘has already been’”. The rabbis draw on various biblical texts to conjure up these examples (Exo 14: 16, 29; Gen 4: 4; 7:1; 21: 1; 26: 28; Nehemiah 9: 7; Daniel 2: 46; II Kings 6: 17). But they do not draw on the traditional biblical implications of the first part of the original verse as previously explained.

However, for the ‘God seeks what has passed by’ phrase, they focus heavily on the word ‘seeks’ and replace it with the term ‘pursue’. Then they proceed to provide many examples of various ‘pursuits’ which have occurred in the Hebrew Bible based on a certain conception of what the word means which renders a meaning completely foreign to the original text. They begin interpretation by rephrasing Qoheleth’s phrase: “And God seeks the pursued”. Another rabbi responds by saying:

“God will always seek (to save) the pursued. You find a righteous man pursuing a righteous man: ‘and God seeks the pursued’. A wicked man pursuing a righteous man: ‘and God seeks the pursued’. A wicked man pursuing a wicked man: ‘and God seeks the pursued’. God seeks the pursued in any circumstance.”

Yet another rabbi comments at this point: “He (God) always seeks the blood of the pursued from the pursuers.” More biblical examples are then proffered to support this interpretation such as Cain pursuing Abel from Genesis,

Nimrod pursuing Abraham in Nehemiah, the Philistines pursuing Isaac also from Genesis, Esau pursuing Jacob from Psalms, his brothers pursuing Joseph in Egypt also from Psalms, the Pharaoh pursuing Moses from Psalms, and much more (Midrash Qoheleth, Parasha 3: 15). It is surely an understatement to assert that none of the rabbinical interpretations or opinions offered to clarify the meaning of the original verse Eccl 3: 15 actually clarified it from an ancient Hebrew biblical perspective or any other perspective, for that matter. All the rabbis have done at best is to make highly questionable intertextual associations to Qoheleth's verse.

The next original verse Eccl 3: 16 is as follows:

“Furthermore, I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness”

The traditional view of this verse is that Qoheleth is alluding to what it is like to live in a world without God. Taking God out of the world means there would be no righteousness and no justice, not even in places where justice could be expected to reside, namely, courts of law ('place of justice'). The implicit contrast here is between God's righteous 'justice' and man's morally bankrupt 'justice' in a world where there is no God. Ultimate justice, therefore, is not to be found in man's earthly life but, rather, with God in His own time. Qoheleth seems to be implying that true or ultimate 'justice' cannot be seen in earthly life, but afterwards with God's judgment. The continually running but implicit 'judgment' theme in Qoheleth surfaces here once again. Justice from the perspective of man's world is not ultimate perfect justice from God's perspective.

For their part, the Midrashic rabbis are still trying to apply Qoheleth's statements in highly speculative virtuoso interpretations wrapped around various biblical texts to justify them, stretching their imagination beyond rational capacity. One rabbi quipped sardonically:

“‘In the place of judgment, there is wickedness’ – in the place where the great Sanhedrin convenes and determines rulings for Israel, ‘there is wickedness’” (Midrash Qoheleth, Parasha 3: 16)

Then the same rabbi proceeds to paraphrase different situations in different biblical texts to supposedly illustrate injustices such as Jeremiah's description (39: 3) of how the Babylonian princes who murdered Hebrews inhabited the 'place of justice' (courthouse) after conquering them, and Isaiah's comment (1: 21) about how justice use to reside in the place of justice, 'but now murderers' do.

Again, many other biblical texts which contained the projected 'murder and blood' theme were linked by Midrashic rabbis to the concept of justice in the original text (Leviticus 17: 13; Ezekiel 24: 7, 8; Exodus 34: 6; Psalms 145: 9; and much more). At no point from beginning to end of deliberations do the rabbis stop to reflect upon the wider philosophical and theological issues raised or strongly implied by Qoheleth's verse.

In the next original verse Ecclesiastes, the theme of 'judgment' explicitly emerges to confirm and reinforce the validity of traditional biblical interpretations rendered in Qoheleth's previous statements in this chapter, if not from the beginning of the book:

“I said to myself, ‘God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man, for a time for every matter and for every deed is there’ (Eccl 3: 17).

The rabbis waste no time in getting to the heart of the matter from Qoheleth's perspective: “I said in my heart: The righteous and the wicked, God will judge” (Midrash Qoheleth, Parasha 3: 17). Then the rabbis proceed to bicker about exactly how God will judge the righteous and the wicked, but not speculate about their meanings. One rabbi asserts, “God will judge the righteous like the wicked”, while another rabbi claims, “God judges the righteous via the wicked,” containing quite different theological import than the former rabbi's assertion.

Except for the last paragraph, the remaining comments belong to the second rabbi drawing on the biblical example of what happened to the grandchildren of Nebuchadnezzar after being captured supposedly to demonstrate that the blood of the wicked is never avenged by God, only the blood of the righteous. Exactly how this biblical text was intended to apply to the original verse in question is beyond comprehension. The remaining commentary by the second rabbi noted above suddenly makes an attempt to revert back to Qoheleth's original verse, but takes a fragmentary approach that is hardly applicable:

“As there is a time for every purpose and for every action there’ – in this world, what a person wishes, he does; however, he is held to account there.” (Midrash Qoheleth, Parasha, 3: 17)

By statements contained in this verse, it is highly doubtful that Qoheleth intends or means to convey primarily that, “in this world, what a person wishes, he does”, although the second part of the rabbis’ interpretation would seem to meet with Qoheleth’s agreement, “he is held to account there”. But there is absolutely no effort to expound on or work out how that phrase fits into Qoheleth’s ancient Hebrew biblical perspective. Instead, most of the time is expended force-feeding various biblical texts into Qoheleth’s original verse evidently without fully comprehending the underlying ancient Hebrew biblical perspective itself or refusing to do so. In this way, rabbinical opinions and interpretations end up providing much more exegesis of the biblical texts they are drawing upon than the original Qoheleth text they are considering.

In the end, most of the time the reader is at monumental pains to perceive the logical connection between the two different sets of biblical texts and on the basis of what specific biblical criteria one set is being employed to confirm ideas and claims contained in the other. In other words, Qoheleth’s verses collectively, and the rabbi’s opinions or expressions or interpretations, read largely as two separate commentaries. Once again, rabbinical interpretations offer precious little genuine understanding of all the profound philosophical and theological issues contained and implied in Qoheleth’s original verse.

The next group of original verses in Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 represent Qoheleth’s infamous compare-man-to-beast statements which are one verse away from concluding the chapter. Let us put them all together here and afterwards try to surmise what Qoheleth is actually saying from a traditional ancient Hebrew perspective:

“I said to myself concerning the sons of men, ‘God has surely tested them in order for them to see that they are but beasts’. For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust. Who knows that the breath of man ascends upwards and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?” (Eccl 3: 18-21).

Apart from the fact that Qoheleth does not here deal with several aspects of the man-beast relationship which exhibit themselves in ancient Hebraic religious practices such as animal sacrifices, for example, what exactly is Qoheleth saying here? In line with previous intimations and affirmations, the idea of God doing something to ‘test’ human beings explicitly invokes the ancient biblical principle of divine judgment. Indeed, the original Hebrew word translated into English as ‘tested’ connotes the meaning of something being purified.

So, then, what is God using to ‘test’ or ‘purify’ humankind? Qoheleth seems to continually emphasize that they are similar to ‘beasts’ or animals in that both are subject to death. Fine, but how is that a divine ‘test’? Presumably, death is both the teacher and the test of humankind. Although human beings may think they have so many advantages over animals (wisdom, intelligence, power, and so forth), the truth is that these advantages are

smoke and mirrors, says Qoheleth, because their fate is the same, that is, they both die.

However, humanity is actually in a worse situation than animals, suggests Qoheleth since, ostensibly, God has not placed eternity into the hearts of animals as He has the hearts of human beings, so far as we know or care to believe. The implication, of course, is that animals are oblivious to eternity; they don't have a yearning for something more after life, supposedly. Like all animals, human beings cannot use their earthly experience to know that there is something more after their breath has expired. When breath expires, therefore, both man and animal return to dust, Qoheleth asserts. How can human beings really know if that breath goes to heaven ('ascends upward') while the breath of animals remains on earth somehow ('descends downwards'), Qoheleth poses the logical question. Sure, we believe there is a spirit, but can we observe it? So, then, how can we possibly know where something that we can't observe goes after life on earth? From Qoheleth's perspective, the answer is simple: we cannot, except through faith in God.

Qoheleth seems to suggest that this situation is a bit unfair, that is, death is more unfair to human beings than to animals because God has placed the yearning for something more into their hearts. Of course, the assumption is that God has not done the same for animals, but in a different way. The philosophical point and its real-life implications are not pursued. Nevertheless, both man and beast have but one life (breath or spirit) and one fate (death), an apparent reference to Genesis 2: 7 where God created man from dust of the ground and then "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life..."

It's not clear at all that this comparison of man with animals is applicable to Genesis in such a manner nor consistent with other biblical texts. What's more, the doubts Qoheleth expresses about the ultimate destination of the 'breath' from human beings and animals after earthly expiration in verse 3: 21 also seem to be inconsistent with other biblical texts, not to mention Qoheleth's own concluding statements ("and the spirit will return to God who gave it." (Eccl 12: 7). However, for the purposes of biblical exegesis, of course, we must take him at his word.

The traditional biblical view of the man-beast relationship is usually founded upon Leviticus and especially Genesis even though the actual treatment of animals is not specifically mentioned there. Nevertheless, the Creation narrative provides an account of what the Bible says about animals and how we should treat them. Right from the beginning of creation, God establishes the parameters of the man-animal relationship. In Gen 28, He gives man dominion (conceived as authority, not domination) over all created earth, but which carries responsibilities. Man is divinely assigned the responsibility to control and protect all of God's creation, and man must take this sacred role extremely seriously.

However, after the sinful fall of man, arguably there is an implied change in the man-animal relationship. After man sins by disobeying God, He prepares an animal skin to cover Adam and Eve, implying that some animal(s) had to die to provide the skin for those coverings. In other words, disobedience of God's Words introduced death into the world, the first death being those animals used to satisfy human needs. But those human needs did not encompass the killing of animals for food or sustenance until Gen 9: 3 in His covenant with Noah after the flood. Even then, God still commands human beings to subserviently care for animals, not just use them exclusively to satisfy human needs. Righteous human beings care for the 'needs' of animals (Prov 12: 10) broadly defined as food, shelter, protection (from abuse and senseless killing), affection, and reproduction, in honor of and deference to God's Creation.

So, then, how does all this talk about caring for animals square with rampant animal sacrifice in the ancient Hebrew Bible? It's important to note here that ancient Hebraic animal sacrifice was not the senseless slaughter of animals to appease the angry gods typical in contemporary fictional filmmaking. We have all heard and seen films or read books about what occurred in the temples of various cultures over history including the pagan practices in the temples of ancient Greece.

To anyone who's ever read any of the classical Greek writings of Homer (such as 'The Iliad') and the ancient Mesopotamians (such as the Epic of Gilgamesh), this appeasing-the-gods sacrificial approach towards animals is quite dominant. What results in our understanding of animal sacrifice becomes pagan practices appeasing pagan gods, not the biblical view (Caruana, 2020; Kay, 1989; Sherman, 2020; Sifkin, 2006). But the genuine biblical view is quite another story. In this view, God introduces animal sacrifice as a controlled and prescribed way of dealing

with the sins and rebellion of the Jewish people against Him.

Leviticus makes clear that all humans are sinful and corrupt including Hebrews, and they will not stop sinning. They were in desperate need of a divine reparation program to cleanse and purify themselves, their community, and the temple itself from endless sin and corruption so that God Himself could reside among them. From this ancient Hebrew biblical perspective, sacrificing an animal was a reenactment of the introduction of sin and death into the world by Adam's disobedience. Adam released into the world sin, death, and corruption which multiplies ceaselessly until it destroys itself. On a smaller scale but just as crucial, the life and death of any community is at stake in the symbolic death of an animal.

Needless to say, sin, corruption, and defilement could easily devastate entire Jewish communities. The ancient Israelis understood the blood of an animal to represent the animal's life itself, the very opposite of death. Consequently, sprinkling it around the temple was conceived as a symbolic effort to cleanse it of all sin, death, and corruption, sort of like a spiritual detergent. Since God was viewed as residing in the temple, washing and purifying the temple was seen as a primary way of maintaining God's sacred presence in the midst of the Jewish people. In other words, animal sacrifices performed atonement functions for the ancient Israelis when performed under strict conditions set down by God Himself (Lev 17: 1-16).

To protect the animals, God warned that no man should kill any animal before it was presented to Him in the temple lest he be cast out of his community forevermore. What's more, the atonement was also for the souls of the Hebrew, not just their sins. In this way, God would forgive their sins and maintain a proper relationship with them. Therefore, an ancient biblical understanding of animal sacrifice is that it symbolically represents God's grace, justice and approval of the Israeli people, a far cry from being an appeasement to an angry God.

What do the Midrashic rabbis have to say about the man-beast comparisons Qoheleth makes in Eccl 3: 18-21? When a noblewoman asked a rabbi what the first verse question meant ('Who knows the spirit of the sons of man? Does it go upward?'), the rabbi answered, afterwards adding a supportive biblical reference of I Samuel 25: 29:

"It is taught: Both the soul of the righteous and the soul of the wicked, all of them ascend on High; however, the souls of the righteous are placed in the treasury, while the souls of the wicked are cast down to the earth..." (Midrash Qoheleth Rabbah, Parasha 3: 21)

Then the noblewoman asked another question: "And what is this that is written: 'And the spirit of the animal, does it go down to the earth?'" The same rabbi responded: "These are the souls of the wicked, who descend to Gehenna below...", afterwards adding a supporting biblical reference from Ezekiel 31: 15.

It would seem that the noblewoman's questions are sincere. Qoheleth does not explicate exactly what the terms 'upwards' and 'downwards' means, nor really what the term 'beasts' means or the expression 'sons of man', for that matter. Evidently, the noblewoman does not derive from that same cosmological point of view. Qoheleth's inquiry about where the spirit of humans and animals ('beasts') go after death is genuine because he knows no one has ever gone into the afterlife and returned to tell him about the facts of the matter. Qoheleth assumes that God has withheld this information from human beings to keep it a mystery, lest that knowledge be used by them for ill purposes.

So, then, the rabbi in question really doesn't deal with Qoheleth's factual assertions in verse 21, preferring instead to drive a comparison between the 'souls of the righteous' and 'the souls of the wicked' with the terms 'upwards' and 'downwards'. Qoheleth is implying that he has no factual information upon which to claim that animals have or don't have a spirit or 'soul'. So therefore, he cannot conclude whether it goes 'upwards' or 'downwards' after its 'breath' expires (it dies).

He does not use the term 'soul', as the rabbi prefers. What's more, Qoheleth does not equate the 'soul' or 'spirit' of 'beasts' with wickedness neither in animals themselves nor in human beings. The terms 'righteous', 'wicked', and 'soul' or 'spirit' are completely absent from Qoheleth's verse here. This raises a number of interesting

questions regarding the rabbinical interpretative approach. Since that is true, one wonders why the rabbi would equate animals or 'beasts' with wickedness if it is surely not a central part of Qoheleth's thinking. Qoheleth is not saying that the 'breath' of animals descends 'downwards' and that of 'man' ascends 'upwards' but, rather, intimating that this is incorrect thinking to begin with. Many contemporary Jews and Christians who have ever nurtured a loving pet would surely beg to disagree with the rabbinic suggestion here.

In the last verse of Chapter 3, Qoheleth essentially repeats what he has said previously about the best way for man to view his life on earth, only this time adding a few interesting additional considerations:

"I have seen that nothing is better than that man be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?" (Eccl 3: 22)

It's curious that rabbis have precious little to add to such profound speculations except to repeat and rephrase the question:

"'I saw that there is nothing better than...for who will bring him to see?' Who will bring David to see what Solomon did? Who will bring Solomon to see what will be after him, what Rehavam did?" (Midrash Qoheleth Rabbah, Parasha 3: 22)

Although difficult to surmise, this is the sum total of the rabbinic response to Qoheleth's thought here despite its profound implications for the purpose of human conduct on earth. Qoheleth seems to be suggesting that human beings should be content with whatever work they obtain since it is a blessing from God. In this view, there is to be no room for angrily rejecting one's lot in life; just remain faithful and simply make the best of it whether or not it improves. The instruction is to drink the bitter juices of life faithfully without using them as an excuse to complain, sin, or engage in perversity. Qoheleth's belief is that after all is said and done in your life on earth, God will sweeten those juices for you.

It is precisely this particular notion of divine judgment after earthly life that the rabbis are completely oblivious to, preferring instead to take a much more functional perspective of Qoheleth's statements. In this verse, Qoheleth is talking about how all men should view their 'work' in earthly life, not how Qoheleth himself cannot return from the afterlife after death to see if his lineage is handling his wealth properly.

What's more, in the same way the rabbis don't really deal with Qoheleth's intimations about divine judgment of everyone's conduct on earth. Whether or not your lineage is acting responsibly with the wealth you bequeathed after your death has nothing to do with Qoheleth's underlying message about God rendering a judgment over your soul after your death based on your earthly conduct during earthly life. The rabbis are completely clueless on this central theological point.

Conclusion

This study represents the first part of a two-phase investigation into how ancient Hebrew rabbis conceived of the biblical ideas, principles, and messages contained in Ecclesiastes. It explored verse-by-verse Midrashic exegeses of the first three chapters of the Book of Ecclesiastes in order to identify interpretative patterns in how ancient rabbinical translators arrived at textual meaning. Generally, what is demonstrated here is that Midrashic rabbis continuously resorted to reinterpreting the original verse in such a way that it commonly expanded and modified it beyond the intended scope of its ancient Hebrew biblical meaning.

Verse-by-verse comparisons between Midrashic rabbinical interpretations and Qoheleth's view and the conventional biblical interpretation demonstrate that rabbis appeared to be disinterested with culling out Qoheleth's intended biblical message nor the exact ancient Hebrew biblical meaning of the concepts, phrases, expressions, and principles which it contained. Despite some notable similarities between Midrashic

interpretations and conventional Hebraic biblical interpretations here and there, the overwhelming tendency was to revise and rewrite Qoheleth's texts to make it palatable to some present-day situation or concern, or to render it consistent even in a forced way to intertextual biblical references.

Relevancy to some recent situation or event, or relationship to widely held views, was the dominant exegetical method accomplished through a wide range of literary tools (such as intertextual references). For the most part, it was evident that the Midrashic interpretative aim was not an objective attempt to elucidate the meaning of Qoheleth's verse from Qoheleth's point of view. Neither was there sustained, concerted effort expended to explore the deeper philosophical and theological implications of Qoheleth's verses.

Instead, the effort was largely to substitute concepts, phrases, and expressions contained in Qoheleth's verse with their own concepts, phrases, and expressions whether or not they fit into the versal meaning and whether or not it made any logical sense whatsoever in terms of ancient Hebrew biblical theology and cosmology. When the underlying ancient Hebrew biblical theological lesson fails to be learned properly or understood clearly, Midrashic rabbinical authorities resorted to force-feeding questionable biblical texts into Qoheleth's verse. It is doubtful at best that Qoheleth himself would have concurred.

Reinterpret, substitute, and rewrite appears to have been the dominant interpretative orientation that Midrashic rabbis adopted towards the versal texts in Ecclesiastes. Consequently, Qoheleth's 'eat, drink, and be happy' expression was replaced by doing 'Torah and good deeds'; Qoheleth's 'God seeks the past' becomes 'God pursues the murderers of Israelis'; Qoheleth's the 'fool' becomes the Midrashic 'wicked' and 'sinners'; Qoheleth's 'profit' becomes interpreted literally as 'value', 'what he earns', and 'wealth'; Qoheleth's 'heart' becomes the Midrashic secular 'mind'; Qoheleth's ancient Hebrew biblical notion of 'fear God' becomes the Midrashic 'revere Him' totally divorced from the wider ancient biblical implications for what is the beginning of wisdom; Qoheleth's 'spirit of the animal' becomes the Midrashic 'souls of the wicked descending downwards'; and so on and so forth. In a word, to repeat the general pattern of interpretation observed in this study, the Midrashic rabbis were generally not interested a great deal in deriving the profound underlying ancient Hebrew theological messages of Qoheleth's verses. Consequently, there is a noticeably pronounced endemic tendency to avoid exploring the deeper philosophical and theological issues Qoheleth brought to the surface. From the beginning, they were content to apply Qoheleth's statements to speculative scenarios wrapped around various biblical texts even when the relationship was patently inapplicable. At the end of the Midrashic rabbinical interpretative exercise, usually the reader is left stunned at how rabbis steadfastly avoid meaningful exploration of many of Qoheleth's profound speculations.

The overall impression readers are left with is that Midrashic rabbis mostly agreed with what Qoheleth said without understanding very well the profundity of the ancient Hebrew biblical messages being conveyed, and disagreement with very few of Qoheleth's verses usually occurred after they had in some way if not totally misread or misinterpreted the verse in question. For example, they disagreed that the fate of man is the same as the fate of animals ('beasts'), but that comparison by Qoheleth was only one in a string of verses about the relationship between men and beasts in which he is trying to demonstrate the more fundamental biblical principle that living earthly life without God reduces the 'sons of men' to the same material physical level of existence as animals, devoid of spiritual significance and meaning, supposedly.

Lastly, from our detailed verse-by-verse review of Midrashic rabbinical interpretations above, it's notable that there was not one instance of rabbis accusing Qoheleth of containing any heretical views on any topic whatsoever, contrary to the findings of some biblical scholars in studies of other rabbinical texts, notably Vayikra Rabbah 28:1 whose origins date between the 5th and 7th centuries AD. In other words, Midrashic rabbis seem to have wholly accepted the sacred status of the Book of Ecclesiastes at the time they rendered interpretations (Hirshman, 2016, 2001; Kiperwasser, 2021, 2007; Kugel, 2001).

Endnotes

1. As Neusner (2014, p. xi) makes clear, 'midrash' is simply a way of interpreting and explaining Scripture

(or a form of biblical exegesis) used by ancient Judaic religious authorities to extract meaning. Ancient Judaic biblical exegesis derived from one of three different modes: reading Scripture through established prophecy, systematic paraphrasing by Aramaic and Greek translators, or reinterpreting scriptural text as parable which includes allegorical readings. Essentially, it is an expansive form of Judaic biblical exegesis which employs a rabbinic interpretative method found in the Talmud whereby the rabbis literally quiz the text by asking question to it and try to discern value within passages, expressions, words, sentences, letters, even words left unsaid – the message behind and beyond the text, as it were. There are many collections of these rabbinic interpretations set down in writings which were formulated during the period 400t-1200 AD.

2. The impact of Ecclesiastes upon Western culture in terms of art, literature, poetry, film, music, and most of the other 'Arts' from the Renaissance onwards has been monumental, to say the least, although its influence spreads more broadly into many other regions of Western culture. In terms of literature, Ecclesiastes is explicitly known to have influenced: Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Leo Tolstoy, Ernest Hemingway, George Bernard Shaw, Henry James, George Orwell, and more. In terms of its known influence upon Western music, the following are notable: Stevie Wonder, Los Lobos, Pete Seeger (the famous American folk singer and activist during the 1940s-1950s), Boygenius (a recent American indie supergroup), Alec Roth (famed British composer who produced the opera 'Arion and the Dolphin' based on the myth of Arion), Pete Townshend (musician, co-founder, and lead songwriter of the famed 1960s-1970s British rock band, The Who), and more. Even Oliver Stone's famous film, 'Platoon', begins by quoting Ecclesiastes 11: 9 ("Rejoice, young man, during your childhood...")! (Christianson, 2012).

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