

# THE ADVANTAGE OF A COUNTRY IN ECCLESIASTES 5:8

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Ecclesiastes 5:8 reads: *Thus the greatest advantage in all the land is his; he controls a field that is cultivated* [ve-yitron 'eretz bakol hi' (Qere hu') melek le-sadeh ne'evad]. Barton observes: "This verse has been a crux to interpreters. The various renderings from that of Döderlein to that of Siegfried are, when compared, an eloquent testimony to the difficulty of the verse."<sup>1</sup> More recently, Gordis describes it as "An insuperable crux,"<sup>2</sup> and Whybray agrees that "Gordis's opinion about the impenetrable obscurity of this verse has much to be said for it."<sup>3</sup> Fox notes: "The Hebrew is obscure and no satisfactory solution has been proposed."<sup>4</sup> He felt that though it is difficult, still "it is possible to get at its gist."<sup>5</sup> To Crenshaw: "The meaning of this verse is totally obscure."<sup>6</sup>

What makes this verse of just seven words so difficult to interpret? In Longman's opinion it is the syntax and meaning of the words. He says:

It must be admitted that this verse is an extreme example of a problem that plagues commentators throughout the book. The syntax and meaning render the verse an "insuperable crux," and possible interpretations include positive and negative construals.<sup>7</sup>

The Masoretic Text presents awkward syntax, internal thematic incoherence, and contextual incongruity, and the range of interpretation could lead to the conclusion that there is some agreement only on the word "yitron," with the meaning of the preceding "vav" not entirely clear. As to the other words:

1. Does "eretz" refer to "land," "earth," or "country"?
2. Does "bakol" refer to persons or to things? Should it rather be "mikol"?
3. Which is the better text: "hi [Ketib]" or "hu [Qere]"? Should "hi' /hu'" be understood as neuter ["this"]?
4. Is "melek" an actual "king" or "owner"? Is "melek" a virtual "king"?

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5. Does the word "*ne'evad*" modify *le-sadeh* [for a field], or relate to *melek*?
6. Does the phrase *melek le-sadeh ne'evad* mean: (a) a superior land, whose king is servant of the Almighty; (b) a king set over a land; (c) a king who is subject to the land; (d) a king devoted to arable land; or (e) king of a kingdom which is served?<sup>8</sup>

How should *melek le-sadeh ne'evad* be interpreted in context? We suggest that the difficulties stem from a scribal addition of *kol sadeh ne'evad* [each field is cultivated] at the end of the verse; that at some point in its transmission a scribe, attempting to provide a better, more permanent, criterion for a country's relative advantage, added *kol sadeh ne'evad*, which eventually became part of the text.

#### THE MEANING OF THE VERSE

The Septuagint gives the first hemistich an unusual egalitarian sense in "also the abundance of the earth is for every one [*ve-yitron eretz bakol hi*]," reading *yitron* as "abundance" and *lekol* as "for every one." In the second hemistich, it seems in main to follow the Masoretic Text, translating *melek le-sadeh ne'evad* as "the king of a tilled field."<sup>9</sup> This is echoed and expanded by the Peshitta: "Moreover the riches of the earth are for all; the king, himself, is served by cultivating his own field," and makes the king till his field.<sup>10</sup>

One version of the Targum reads:

. . . and the advantage from the gains of the cultivation of the land is above everything: for when the people of the kingdom rebel and the king is placed in the open country because of them. If that king has no corn to eat he becomes a field hand subject to a man who works in the field.<sup>11</sup>

This unrealistic view attests to the Targumist's miscomprehension of the verse.

The Vulgate's "Moreover there is the king that reigns over all the land subject to him" strikes us as interpretative, uninformative, and incomplete.

The versions seem split on whether *ne'evad* modifies *le-sadeh* or relates to *melek*. The Septuagint and Peshitta (also Theodotion and Jerome) assume it modifies *le-sadeh*. The Targum and Vulgate seem to take it as relating to the king. The versions also conceive the verse as expressing some fundamental truth about the utility of land, its essential goodness and permanence, but could not integrate into this notion the role of a king. Their compromises appear contrived

and contextually incongruent, and this predicament plagued generations of exegetes.

Later exegetes feel that the verse points to farming as an essential endeavor; everyone must work the land in order to live, and even the ruler "cultivates" it by requiring subjects to farm it (Rashbam).<sup>12</sup> However, it is impossible to correlate this understanding with the text. Some consider farming an occupation that would honorably provide for its practitioners, and interpret Ecclesiastes 5:8 as "Agriculture has an advantage over everything else, for even a king is subject to the land" (Ibn Ezra, Gordis).<sup>13</sup> This meaning does not adequately reflect the MT nor logically fits the context. The verse does not mention "agriculture" as an advantage; at best it speaks about "land." It does not say "over everything" but "in everything," and has nothing that corresponds to "for even a." Finally, "is subject" for *ne'evad* is not attested to in the Hebrew Bible.

Some assume Ecclesiastes 5:7 describes a disfavored land, suffering under self-serving officials,<sup>14</sup> but then one would expect verse 5:8 to tell what makes a land favored. The couplet 5:7-8 should express a contrast similar to that in 10:16-17, where "Ecclesiastes contrasts an unlucky land, suffering from dissolute rulers, with a favored land, blessed with a responsible elite."<sup>15</sup> Yet, no disfavor is expressed in 5:7. On the contrary, Ecclesiastes advises readers not to be amazed by the social and judicial exploitation of the governing hierarchy. Varela suggests that 5:8 is a comment on the pretexts for justifying infringements and violations of the law. He renders it: "[And they will tell you that] all of this means progress for the country, and that the king is servant of the land."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, this modern concept of public relations is unrealistic.

Various exegetes tried to shift the focus of the verse from utility of agriculture, land, and field, to that of orderly government represented by the king. Barton attempts to capitalize on "law and order," noting that kings prevented plundering raids and thereby enabled secure cultivation of the land. His interpretation "An advantage to a country on the whole is a king," however, deletes a troublesome part of the verse, and without any explanation.<sup>17</sup> Lauha adds to the MT *she-yesh* reading "*she-yesh melek le-sadeh ne'evad* [that the cultivated country has a king]."<sup>18</sup> Ecclesiastes observes that there is advantage to a stable state government as protection against anarchy. Koh, noting that

"It is difficult to make sense of this very problematic verse," adopts Gordis' translation because it conveys Ecclesiastes' sympathy with his people. In this view, it parallels:

. . . the concern found in his opening remark to "not be surprised" at the corruption observed in the administration. It would further tie in with Ecclesiastes's mood of resignation. In verse 8 then, we have Ecclesiastes empathizing with the general populace that even he, as king, is indirectly subject to the maladministration of his own land.<sup>19</sup>

Galling's emendation "*melek la-sar we-la'oved* [king to minister and worker]" for the difficult "*melek le-sadeh ne'evad*" eliminates any reference to agriculture,<sup>20</sup> but is not orthographically convincing. Hertzberg observes: "The conjecture is clever, but cannot be established, [Galling contends] there is 'little likelihood that K. specifically sets his attention on the agricultural economy,' (but that was the only economy form in question!)." <sup>21</sup> Seow eliminates the king, reading "the advantage of land is in its yield; that is, if the field is cultivated for (its) yield [*we-yitron 'eretz be-kilah we'im le-kil sadeh ne'evad*]." He suggests that the root "*killkul*," from which the noun "*kilah*" was derived, means "to measure, measure out."<sup>22</sup> However, except for a single *qal* in Isaiah 40:12 (where it means "measure") it always occurs in the *hiphil*, in the sense "contain." The noun *kilah* does not occur in the Bible, and the extension of the semantic field to include "yield" or "provision" appears speculative.

An intriguing approach to Ecclesiastes in general and our verse in particular is provided by those who consider it to be a translation from Aramaic.<sup>23</sup> Zimmermann suggests that the original Aramaic version of Ecclesiastes 5:8 was probably "*ve-yitron 'ar'a' bekol hu' malka' le-chaqla' mishta'abda*." He says:

The key to the passage is that the translator tried to represent, *mishta'abda* with the *niphal*, *ne'evad*. For the usage, compare (sic!) '*ar'a' letasqa' mishta'abda*' Bava Metziah 73b. The meaning that our verse then bears is: "The advantage of land over everything is this: even a king is dependent on a field."<sup>24</sup>

Even assuming he is correct on the text being of Aramaic origin, his translation of "*mishta'abda*" as "is dependent" cannot be correct, and does not agree

with its sense "pledged" in Bava Metziah.<sup>25</sup> Also, it is difficult to see how this interpretation would thematically connect with Ecclesiastes 5:7.

Krüger has "*melek*" refer to one's complete control of the field; there is one king for every cultivated field; or, for each cultivated field its own king. He renders 5:8: "And it is an advantage for a land in all this, when every plowed field has (or: its own) king."<sup>26</sup> Tur-Sinai, invoking the Arabic *malaka*, had argued that the verse means "And the advantage in land above all is to own (*mlok*, cf. Arabic) a field that is tilled."<sup>27</sup> Ginsberg notes that this attributes to 'eretz a sense more properly represented by '*adamah*, leaves "above all [*ba-kol*]" problematic, and should not be linked with the following verse as Tur-Sinai tries to force it.<sup>28</sup>

Commentators' frustration with Ecclesiastes 5:8 is reflected in Jastrow's translation "and overtopping them all is the King," in which only "and" can be vouched for.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Jastrow says:

This translation of verse 8 is a mere venture. The text as it stands cannot be correct. The two words at the close "attached to the field" give no sense whatsoever, and may represent a misplaced gloss to "laborer" in v. 11 to indicate that the "laborer" meant is a farmer.

The preceding verse, he feels, suggests something on the lines of his translation: It is the king, above all, who is responsible for justice in the kingdom.<sup>30</sup>

Commentators' exasperation is expressed in resorts to literal translation or highly interpretative paraphrase, which highlight the fundamental difficulties. Crenshaw translates 5:8: "And an advantage of a land in everything is this – a king for a field that is being worked."<sup>31</sup> Eaton has: "But an advantage to a land for everyone is: a king over cultivated land."<sup>32</sup> Longman paraphrases "The profit of the land is taken by all; even the king benefits from the land."<sup>33</sup> Similar are "After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land" (NASB), and "But in all, a king is an advantage to a land with cultivated fields" (RSV).<sup>34</sup>

Exegetes also use multiple emendations to obtain a more reasonable text. Richter suggests the reading "*ve-yitron 'eretz be-hakol? hu' melek. lo sadeh na'avod* [And the profit the country in all that? (sarcastically). There is a king. For him, we must till]."<sup>35</sup> This emendation requires the following: (1) addition of a *heh* to *bakol*; (2) break-up of *le-sadeh* into *le+sadeh* and addition of a *waw* to the *lamed*; (3) repointing of *ne'evad*; (4) and, taking *be-*

*hakol* = *bekol zeh* [in all that]. It should be noted that *be-hakol* is not attested to in the Bible.

Fox suggests *melek le-sadeh ne'evad* be emended to *bekol sadeh ne'evad* [in every cultivated field], claiming that "Consonantly, this is a fairly minor change, from *mlksdh* to *bklstdh*."<sup>36</sup> Here are three changes: (1) transposition of the letters "*kaf*" and "*lamed*;" (2) replacement of "*mem*" with "*bet*," and elimination of a "*lamed*." Metathesis is quite frequent in the Bible, but neither in the paleoscript nor in the square script are "*mem*" and "*bet*" orthographically similar enough to be easily confused. The two voiced bilabial consonants, "*mem*" and "*bet*," are sometimes interchanged, but not frequently.<sup>37</sup> An extra letter can occur by dittography. Each emendation is relatively minor, still for three such errors (requiring emendations) to occur in a short word is rather unlikely. Yet, the major problem with the emendation is not so much the possibility of it having occurred as the reading that it produces. Fox feels that it

. . . yields a meaningful (if not entirely smooth) sentence [. . . ] The point of the sentence thus read is that a country that has all of its fields cultivated has an advantage over others. Far better for a country to be thoroughly agrarian rather than to be burdened with a stratified and self-serving bureaucracy.<sup>38</sup>

It is difficult to find the connection in such a comparison of apples and oranges.

This overview of the exegesis on Ecclesiastes 5:8, admittedly partial, is representative of the contextual dilemmas and textual incongruities that exegetes faced and tried to resolve. With all the interpretations that were discussed, when all is said and done, problems still persist.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE VERSE

*ve-yitron* – Some do not consider verses 5:7 and 5:8 thematically linked (Targum, Ibn Ezra, Zer-Kavod, et alia). In this case, the first "ו" would be introductory, introducing a new observation.<sup>39</sup> Most commentators, however, consider them thematically linked, translating the "ו" variously as "and," "also," "even," and "but." It seems that "however," or "still," would capture the contrast between the two verses without creating an unacceptable dissonance.

The noun "*yitron*" occurs only in Ecclesiastes (1:3, 2:11,13, 3:9, 5:8,15, 7:12, 10:10) and rabbinic Hebrew. Similar constructs in Ecclesiastes are "*zi-*

*kron*," "*chesron*," "*kishron*," and others. It has been understood as "that which remains [*yeter*] – the surplus, if any, on the balance-sheet of life," a metaphor drawn from the world of business.<sup>40</sup> Fox suggests that Ecclesiastes uses it in the strict sense of "surplus returns from one's investment of work."<sup>41</sup> The rabbis took it to mean "superfluous."<sup>42</sup> These interpretations would not fit the content of Ecclesiastes 5:8, which requires rendering *yitron* as "advantage."

*'eret*z – could refer to the planet earth, country, ground [*adamah*], or the inhabitants on earth. Those who consider Ecclesiastes 5:7 and 5:8 thematically linked, usually take *'eret*z as "country" (a polity), in line with *medinah* in 5:7. Those who take 5:8 as a stand alone verse usually take *'eret*z as "ground" (physical land), in line with *sadeh* in verse 5:8b.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the book, *'eret*z is used to mean planet earth (1:4, 5:1, 8:14, 16); netherworld (?) (3:21); country (7:20, 10:16, 17, 11:2); and ground (10:7, 11:3, 12:7), with no clear preference of meaning. Our solution uses the meaning "country."

*bakol* – has been taken to mean "in all respects" (Gen. 24:1; II Sam. 23:5); "more than all [*bakol=mikol*]" (Lev. 8:32); "in all things" (Ezra 10:17); "paramount," "in every way," "for all [*bakol=lekol*]" (KJV, NKJV)<sup>44</sup>; "to all" (I Chron. 7:5). Had Ecclesiastes wanted to say "more than all," he would have used "*mikol*," as he does in verses 2:7, 9, 10 (3t), and 6:2, and the same can be said for "*lekol*." It seems that we have to retain "in all" or "in everything."

*hi* (Qere *hu*) – It seems that the original *hi'* harmonized with the feminine *eret*z and referred to it. The Qere shifts the referent to the masculine *yitron* or *melek*. The ancient pronunciation of the two words was probably the same (as in the Ashkenazic pronunciation), and they might have been written in abbreviated form as just the letter "*heh*." If *hi'* is taken as original, it would lead to an understanding of *'eret*z as *'adamah* and the colloquialism "and the advantage of earth – she is 'king'!" that would leave *le-sadeh ne'evad* hanging. If *hi'* is taken as the neutral "this," the gender distinction is erased. The Qere would appear to provide the better reading.

*melek* – has been understood to mean an actual king, or a land-owner who is "king," or repointed as "*molek* [possessor, owner]."<sup>46</sup> Some saw in *melek le-sadeh ne'evad* reference to agricultural land owned by the king. However, there is no evidence that this land had any obvious advantages over privately owned land.

*le-sadeh* – with the "lamed" taken by some to mean "from,"<sup>47</sup> though the evidence (Ps. 29:10; I Chron. 9:27) for this is not convincing. The prefixed "ב" – dropped in the NJPS – has an element of direction and cannot mean "by," "the," "with," or "upon," as in some translations. Some understood *sa-deh* as *pars pro toto*. Döderlein emended *le-sadeh* to *le-Shadai* obtaining "Superior land, whose king is servant of the Almighty." This is not supported by the *niphal ne'evad*.

*ne'evad* – the *niphal* of 'vd [has been worked], that is, cultivated or tilled (Deut. 21:4, Ezra 36:9, 34), could be viewed as modifying *le-sadeh* [for a field being worked] (Septuagint, Theodotion, and Peshitta), or might relate to *melek* [a king to a tilled-field] (MT). Some try to extract a meaning via the 'eved [servant, slave], translating "that makes himself servant" (Delitzsch, Hertzberg), "that is devoted, committed" (Hitzig) et alia. Whitley suggests a middle sense of "cultivates for himself," "is served by," or "benefits."<sup>48</sup> There is no support for these meanings in biblical or mishnaic Hebrew, where it always means "tilled, cultivated."

This analysis suggests the MT should be essentially preserved, and that we should not venture beyond the normal sense of its words.

#### SOLUTION

It is generally held that Ecclesiastes 4:17-5:8 is an integral unit with 4:17-5:6 and 5:7-8 as sub-units.<sup>49</sup> A few commentators feel that 4:17-5:6 should be expanded to include 5:7-8. However, Spangenberg is right in stating that "at least two objections negate this demarcation: (1) 5:7-8 deals with political and not with religious matters; (2) 4,17-5,6 does not focus on the plight of the oppressed."<sup>50</sup> Thus, we view Ecclesiastes 5:7-8 as an independent unit.

Intertextual analysis sought historical parallels for the situation described in 5:7-8. Lexical parallelism of the Hebrew and Greek of the Septuagint led to the perception that these verses echo the story of Mephibosheth, the infirm son of Jonathan (II Kg. 8:15).<sup>51</sup> Others felt that the verse refers to the satrapial system of the Persians,<sup>52</sup> or place our verse within the framework of the Ptolemaic rulers.<sup>53</sup> It seems, however, that it should be more properly perceived within the framework of the tension between tribal rule and a centralized government led by a king, that finds clear expression in II Samuel 8. The tribal hierarchy is certainly much simpler, more transparent, and less



corrupt. It served the Israelites well during their wanderings in the desert and conquest of the land because of such unifying figures as Moses and Joshua. However, in the time of the Judges the tribal structure started to be ineffective, forcing the Israelites to demand a king despite the burden that a kingdom would obviously entail.

Ecclesiastes, it seems, addresses nostalgic sympathies for tribalism which occasionally surfaces when man faces a formidable corrupt bureaucracy. Just as Samuel was well aware of the concomitants of kingship, so Ecclesiastes understands that a royal bureaucratic hierarchy would be oppressive, inflexible, and exploitative. Social and judicial oppression is endemic to such centralized governments, but he feels that nothing can be done about it, and man should not even voice his amazement [*'al titmah*] about this thing [*chefetz*]. Yet the system is not all bad. A more thorough inspection would reveal that despite the shortcomings, there is advantage to having a king in everything [*bakol*].<sup>54</sup> It is from this perspective, we believe, that Ecclesiastes 5:8 should be understood.

We suggest that verse 5:8 originally read *ve-yitron 'eretz bakol hu' melekh* [still the advantage of a country in everything is a king].<sup>55</sup> This would be an apt statement of Ecclesiastes' perspective on the governing system. History shows that civilization naturally opts for centralized governments because of the advantages they offer.<sup>56</sup> Those who adhere to tribalism remain underdeveloped societies to this day. Ecclesiastes understands the disadvantages and advantages of a central government and forthrightly expresses them in verses 5:7-8.

Perhaps a scribe or redactor did not grasp the depth of Ecclesiastes' perception, and reasoned that every country has a king, good or bad. Sometimes kings involve a country in ruinous or divisive wars. The advantage of a king would be of a temporary nature. To make kingship a relative advantage for a country did not seem to him proper. He had a better criterion: *kol sadeh ne'evad* [each field is fully cultivated]. In his view, a country with all of its fields cultivated has a distinct advantage over others, that would be a permanent advantage, since it guarantees prosperity under any rule. Reverence for the existing text, however, did not permit him to replace Ecclesiastes' text with his own. As was standard procedure, he wrote his own observation on the margin of the manuscript and it eventually made its way into the text,

creating *ve-yitron eretz bakol hu melek kol sadeh ne'evad*, which did not make much sense. Perhaps one "k" of *melek kol* was deleted to make the verse more meaningful or dropped out by haplography. The result was still an "insuperable crux."

#### CONCLUSION

Ecclesiastes in 5:7-8 deals with the inherent value of a central government headed by a king. While aware of such a system's shortcomings, he emphasizes that the advantage of having a king can be seen in everything. Verse 5:8 comes from a scribe's or redactor's misunderstanding of that intent. Supposing Ecclesiastes set up a criterion for evaluating one country in regard to another, he thought the criterion of having a king improper. Appending *kol sadeh ne'evad* as a substitute for *hu' melek* would seem reasonable. However, Ecclesiastes did not try to compare countries with respect to their kings, but rather asserted that having a king is an advantage to a country. Once the scribal appendage is removed, the text reads well and is contextually meaningful.

#### NOTES

1. G. A. Barton, *International Critical Commentary Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908) p. 131.
2. Robert Gordis, *Ecclesiastes – The Man and his world, a study of Ecclesiastes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) p. 250.
3. R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) p. 98.
4. M.V. Fox, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004) p. 35.
5. M. V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up, A reading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) p. 234.
6. J. L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes, A Commentary*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987) p. 119.
7. T. Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 158.
8. Barton, p. 125.
9. L.C.L. Brenton (trans.), *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986) [1851] p. 823. Brenton translates: "Also the abundance of the earth is for every one: the king is *dependent on* the tilled field." This interpretation has no contextual cohesion.
10. G.M. Lamsa, (trans.), *Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text* (New York: Harper Row, 1968) [1933] p. 689.
11. P.S. Knobel, *Targum of Ecclesiastes*. Aramaic Bible 13. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991) p. 34. He gives another version: "The advantage of the gain of the cultivation of the land is above everything and it is fitting even for a king to be a servant obligated to the cultivation of his

field."

12. S. Japhet and R.B. Salters, *The Commentary of R. Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on Ecclesiastes*. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985) p. 92.

13. Gordis, 250. He says: "Not only is this view in harmony with the emphasis on agriculture in Josephus and rabbinic literature, but it would anticipate the standpoint of the Sadducees, who identified themselves with the country party against the urban Pharisees.... Vv. 7 and 8 would thus constitute a brief if not fragmentary comment on the political and the economic system of the day."

14. Some commentators understand Ecclesiastes 5:7-8 homiletically, in a "Fear of God" sense, taking *shamar* as alluding to God (cf. Rashi, Metzudot, Ewald, Delitzsch).

15. Fox, *A Time to Tear*, 234. Both Michel and Murphy consider the king a corrective for the situation of corrupt officials in 5:7. Cf. D. Michel, *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Ecclesiastes*, BZAW 183, Berlin/New York: deGruyter (1989) p. 144 and R.E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC 23A, (Dallas: World Books, 1992) p. 51.

16. A.T. Varela, "A New Approach to Ecclesiastes 5:8-9" *BT* 27 (1976) pp. 240-241.

17. Barton, p. 127. Herod was said to have prevented plundering raids (Josephus, *Ant.* xvi, 9.1; xvii 2.1).

18. A. Lauha, *Ecclesiastes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978) p. 105.

19. Y.V. Koh, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006) pp. 54-55, n. 167.

20. K. Galling, *Der Prediger* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1969) p. 101.

21. H.W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger*, KAT 17/4. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963) pp. 118-125.

22. C.L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, AB 18c (New York: Doubleday, 1997) p. 204.

23. Gordis, pp. 413-414. See his comments on the Aramaic provenance of Ecclesiastes and related references. Gordis asserts that this theory "won no adherence from any scholar except its original proponents, and may safely be pronounced unacceptable."

24. F. Zimmermann, "The Aramaic provenance of Ecclesiastes" *JQR* 36 (1947) p. 38.

25. M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. (New York: Traditional Press, 1903) p. 542a. Jastrow explains that '*ar'a' letasqa' mishta'abda'* means "the land is pledged to the *tasqa* (a Persian land-tax)." See also 1608b, where *sha'abed* is defined as "(1) to subject, subjugate, surrender; to obligate, pledge; (2) to vex, persecute, attempt to destroy."

26. T. Krüger, *Ecclesiastes* (trans. O. C. Jr. Dean) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) p. 115. Krüger considers Ecclesiastes 5:8 an example of instances in the book that are objectively ambiguous; i.e., "sentences or passages are ambiguous with regard to their semantics, their syntax or their pragmatics quite irrespective of the judgment of different readers." The verse can be interpreted, "It is an advantage for a land in all this, when there is a king for the plowed field (i.e.: when all plowed fields have one king," or "It is an advantage for a land in all this, when there is a king for a plowed field (i.e., when every plowed field has its own king)." The first interpretation fits an understanding of verse 7 as an apology of the system of hierarchic government, and the second interpretation continues verse 7 as a critique of the system of government. However, the purpose of such ambiguities is not clear.

27. N.H. Torczyner [Tur-Sinai], *Shir Ha-shirim* (1943) p. 23.

28. H.L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Ecclesiastes* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950) p. 14.
29. M. Jastrow, *A Gentle Cynic, Being a Translation of the Book of Ecclesiastes, Commonly Known as Ecclesiastes, Stripped of Later Additions, also its Origin, Growth, and Interpretation*. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1919) p. 218.
30. Jastrow, *A Gentle Cynic*, p. 218. n. 82.
31. Crenshaw, p. 115.
32. M.A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983) p. 101.
33. Longman, p. 157.
34. The JB translation of Ecclesiastes 5:8, "you will hear talk of 'the common good' and 'the service of the king'," is very strange, to say the least.
35. H. F. Richter, "Ecclesiastes – Philosoph und Poet," in *Ecclesiastes In The Context of Wisdom* (ed. A. Schoors) (Leuven: University Press, 1998) p. 447.
36. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, p. 234.
37. In the Qere-Ketib system we found the following cases of *mem/bet* confusion: Joshua 3:16, 22:7, 24:15, II Kings 5:12, 12:10, 23:33, Daniel 11:18. Also, Barodak for Marodak in II Kings 20:12, and in Isaiah 15:9 Dimon (MT) but Dibon ך in 1QIs<sup>a</sup>.
38. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, p. 234. Fox adds that in a similar spirit, Ecclesiastes praises the possession of a *nachalah*, a landed inheritance, in 7:11.
39. M. Zer-Kavod, *Ecclesiastes*. In *Chamesh Megilot*. (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1973) p. 30, n. 24.
40. E.H. Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1881) p. 104.
41. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, p. xxi.
42. Exodus Rabbah 10:1 we find: "Our Rabbis said, what is this 'And the advantage of the land in all things' (Ecclesiastes 5:8)? Even things you see as superfluous in this world – like flies, fleas, and mosquitoes – they are part of the greater scheme of the creation of the world, as it says (Gen. 1:31), 'And God saw all that God has created, and behold it was very good.'"
43. Zer-Kavod, 30. Zer-Kavod's interpretation of 'eret' as 'avadat adamah has no support.
44. In some MSS Est 9:2 has *lifneihem* instead of *bifneihem* (cf. *Tanach Koren* pocket edition (1983), p. 13, at the end of the volume). A *bet/lamed* confusion is not attested in the Ketib-Qere system, nor are *lamed* and *bet* orthographically similar enough in the paleoscript or square script to be confused by a scribe.
45. The Ketib-Qere contains a number of gender confusions. The *hi'hu'* confusion occurs also in I Chronicles 29:16, I Kings 17:15, Isaiah 30:32, Psalm 73:16, and Job 31:11. *Sifre* (60a) reads here *hi'*.
46. H.L. Ginsberg, *Studies in Ecclesiastes* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950) pp. 9-10. In the Arabic *mlk* means "to own, or gain possession of." Cf. NJPS.
47. C.F. Whitley, *Ecclesiastesh*. BZAW 148 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979) p. 51. Cf. also NKJV and NIV.
48. Whitley, pp. 50-51.
49. Hertzberg, pp. 118-124.
50. I.J.J. Spangenberg, "A Century of Wrestling with Ecclesiastes, The Research History of the Book, Illustrated with a Discussion of Ecclesiastes 4,17-5,6." in *Ecclesiastes In The Context of Wisdom* (ed. A. Schoors) (Leuven: University Press, 1998) pp. 84-85.

51. F. Vinet, "Le Texte Grec de l'Ecclésiaste e ses Caractéristiques, Une Relecture Critique de l'Histoire de la Royauté," in *Ecclesiastes In The Context of Wisdom*, op. cit., p. 299. Vinet argues that the anti-royal passages in Ecclesiastes (1:2, 5:5, 7-8, 8:2-4, 9:1-14, 10:20) reflect a critical re-lecture of the history of Israelite kings.

52. Barton, p. 59.

53. L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück (Eccl. 2:24). Ecclesiastes im Spannungsfeld jüdischer Weisheit und hellenistischer Philosophie*. (Freiburg: Herder, 1994) pp. 139-140. Schwienhorst-Schönberger believes Ptolemaic taxation drove the Israelite free farmers into debt-slavery. Ecclesiastes advocates in 5:8 turning the land into "land of the king" and placing it under the king's direct control, rather than of a hierarchy of officials.

54. Barton, p. 127. In "an advantage to a country on the whole is a king" he might have had in mind the reading *ve-yitron 'eretz bakol hu' melek*. Two problems with this interpretation are: (1) *bakol* is not "on the whole" in biblical Hebrew, and (2) the dropping of *le-sadeh ne'evad* is not explained.

55. For instance, Josephus reports that the unpopular King Herod won some approval when he forced the people of Trachontis to stop living by robbery. He says: "the king would not permit them to rob; and so they abstained from that unjust way of living upon their neighbors, which procured Herod a great reputation for his care" (*Ant.* 16:272).

56. Longman, pp. 158-159. reads 5:7-8 negatively, with governmental oppression, exploitation of the poor, and even the king using his position to profit off the land.