THE THEOLOGICAL DIALECTIC OF CREATION AND DEATH IN HEBREW BIBLE WISDOM TRADITIONS

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van het doctoraat in de Godgeleerdheid en Godsdienstwetenschap aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen op gezag van de Rector Magnificus, dr. F. Zwarts, in het openbaar te verdedigen op donderdag 11 juni 2009 om 13:15 uur

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<td>ATD</td>
<td>Das Alte Testament Deutsch</td>
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<td>BA</td>
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<td>BAC</td>
<td>Bochumer Altertumswissenschaftliches Colloquium</td>
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SBA Stuttgarter biblische Aufsätze
SBB Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSS Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBS Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBTh Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SJ The Scottish Journal of Theology
SLJT St. Luke’s Journal of Theology
SO Symbolae osloenses
SPSH Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities
SSN Studia semitica neerlandica
STDJ Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STR Studies in Theology and Religion
TB Tyndale Bulletin
TBT The Bible Translator
TLZ Theologische Literaturzeitung
TQ Theologische Quartalschrift
TRev Theologische Revue
TR Theologische Rundschau
ThW Theologische Wissenschaft
TS Theological Studies
ThTo Theology Today
TW Theologie und Wirklichkeit
UBL Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UF Ugarit-Forschungen
VF Verkündigung und Forschung
VT Vetus Testamentum
VTSup Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZAW Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZBK Zürcher Bibelkommentare
ZDPV Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
ZTK Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche
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Werner Lategan
Stellenbosch, April 2009
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: APPROACHING DEATH AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THEOLOGIES OF CREATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE HEBREW BIBLE WISDOM TRADITION

The diverse and disparate theological voices encountered in the Hebrew Bible (HB) often present a challenge to biblical scholars. In particular if it is agreed that these theological voices should be allowed to operate simultaneously and in their own right, instead of trying to incorporate them within an all-encompassing framework. Creation and death as theological themes present some of the clearest instances of such theological disparity, not only between but also within diverse theological traditions. This also applies to the HB wisdom tradition (hereafter “wisdom tradition”). By means of a selection of texts associated with the wisdom tradition (cf. §1.6), this study will investigate the theological relation of creation and death in the context of each text and the broader tradition of which it forms a part. Further, an attempt is made to see how these texts interrelate, and how the diverse theological voices encountered therein may be held together in a meaningful theological discourse. In tracing the trajectory of how the theological construct of God as creator in the wisdom tradition offers a framework for making theological sense of the phenomenon of death, a plea is put forth for a constructive engagement with this theological diversity. Recognising and maintaining this theological diversity constitutes a creative tension, and an engagement herewith on the part of theologians could open up new avenues for theological reflection in diverse present day contexts.

2 To use the term “tradition” or “theological tradition” with regards to the HB presents an anachronism. But the HB does present us with differing views of the divine, and reflect different attitudes toward religious practices operative at different stages in Israelite society. These different views and attitudes have a legitimating function, voicing religious and ideological convictions of diverse religious functionaries.
4 This creation-death relation has not received that much attention within the field of HB studies. The work of C. Dohmen, Schöpfung und Tod: die Entfaltung theologischer und anthropologischer Konzeptionen in Gen 2/3 (SBB 17; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996) provides an example, but deals with the Jahwistic tradition, and has a different focus than this study.
5 J. Goldingay, Theological Diversity and Authority of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 39 rightly argues that a mere acceptance of the variety of perspectives in the HB is not enough, but “should be followed up by a consideration of how they are to be interrelated and allowed to function in practice, so that we hear all of them and not only those to which we are already attuned.”
6 Here “creative tension” implies that the theology of the HB is dialogical in nature, with contrasting views serving as a sounding board for one another, either confirming or challenging, but always in dialogue.
7 The development of theological tradition(s) does not mean that the older is replaced by the newer, even if the newer clashes with the older. Cf. H. Gese, Essays on Biblical Theology (trans. K. Crim; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 19.
1.1 Considering the Research Problem

Texts provide windows to realities inviting readers to look in. Stories about the beginning and end of life occupy a central place in this process of looking in. Stories about the beginning are inherent and foundational to the social fabric of all cultures, for without them people face chaos. Such stories of the beginning, which often find expression in the form of a creation account, are not mere fiction or fantasy, but constitute realities in which people live. In a similar way death is a universal concern and the tendency to personify death has been labelled archetypal, i.e. “corresponding to an innate structure or tendency of the human psyche.” Such personifications of death, often expressed in the form of aetiological accounts of death, are not merely poetical colourings, but real attempts at ascribing meaning to an otherwise tedious phenomenon. This study is concerned with the relation of these two phenomena, namely creation theologies, and attempts that ascribe meaning to the phenomenon of death. More specifically, how the phenomenon of death, as theological problem (§1.4), fits within the framework of theologies of creation. We will also consider to what extent the theological construct of God as creator offers a hermeneutical key for unlocking the complexities of this creation-death relation. As stated, the focus is limited to creation theologies associated with the wisdom tradition.

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14 Here the argument of C. Barth, Die Errettung vom Tode: Leben und Tod in den Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments, Edited by B. Janowski (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1997), 154 is relevant, namely that in the HB experiences of death are always experiences of God.
Creation and death are central and related theological themes in this tradition, and contribute to the construction of theological realities.\textsuperscript{16}

In considering the impact that death has on the evaluation of life, it has been argued that “Death is a cardinal validating fact of life. It stands sentinel at the end of every corridor of imagination and experience open to us, preventing our escape, turning us back on ourselves.”\textsuperscript{17} Vitality is dovetailed by knowledge of mortality. The inescapable reality of death prompts humans to ask existential questions concerning their origin and the meaningfulness of life in the wake of death. This is no different in the HB, and is particularly pertinent in the wisdom tradition. In the analysis of the selected texts we will also try to determine how death is negotiated in the search for meaning (Job 3; Qoh 11:7-12:8) and the celebration of vitality (Ps 104).

This brings into focus the perceived life-death relation operative in the selected texts. We will try to determine whether, in terms of this perceived relation, life and death are opposed to one another and as such constitute a binary opposition, or whether they present two sides of the same divinely created reality and as such constitute a complementary relation. In case of the former, death might be perceived as falling outside the boundaries of the divinely established creation, presenting a threat to life. As such it detracts from life and empties life, bringing life to an end. Because death is perceived as opposed to divine creation, it also distances from the creator. In case of the latter, death might be perceived as falling within the boundaries of divine creation, constituting a natural part thereof. As such death is perceived as the mere cessation of life, i.e. evaluated in biological terms, without any inherent, negative value attached to it. In this case it is the means of dying that becomes the qualifying principle.\textsuperscript{18} Analysis of the selected texts shows that the wisdom tradition does not contain a singular response to these questions. This lack of theological uniformity presents a theological opportunity rather than a theological conundrum, and the theological integration of such diverse responses is not wishful. Rather, a contextual approach (historical, literary, and theological) is preferable in dealing with the multi-faceted nature of the wisdom tradition.\textsuperscript{19} In this study we will opt for the latter and steer clear of the former.

1.2 Considering the Theological Character of the Hebrew Bible

Given the biblical theological interest of this study, the aim of this section is to reiterate that the theological\textsuperscript{20} nature of the HB is not agreed upon by all biblical scholars,\textsuperscript{21} and should not be taken as a given. Some scholars argue unambiguously

\textsuperscript{16} I.e. theological reality constituted in the context of the text as distinct from a material reality outside the text.
\textsuperscript{19} A contextual approach is not without shortcomings, as indicated by J. Goldingay, \textit{Theological Diversity and Authority of the Old Testament} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 33. Yet it offers a viable approach for dealing with the rich theological variety of the HB.
\textsuperscript{20} Here “theological” qualifies a text or tradition that contributes to the description of the relation between God and humans and is understood as such by the communities of faith that produced, used, and transmitted the texts and traditions. Credit is given to Ed Noort for suggestions in this regard.
that the HB is a theological book and that a presentation of the theology of the HB requires no particular justification.\textsuperscript{22} Others counter this view, arguing that the HB contains very little if any theology at all.\textsuperscript{23} Yet the fact remains that the writings of the HB function in the context of religious communities and as such require a response or theological interpretation.\textsuperscript{24} Arguments concerning the theological character of the HB impact on the perceived task of Old Testament theology.\textsuperscript{25} So e.g. the criticism has been raised that biblical theology has been too much a child of modernity, serving the purpose to further theological interpretation of Scripture, whose concern presupposes a setting within a particular religious community.\textsuperscript{26} This criticism has been seconded by some in the sense that biblical theology should not serve the confessional interests of a particular group.\textsuperscript{27} But a theological approach to the HB can be both descriptive and confessional, as long as it is not enslaved to specific ideological agendas.\textsuperscript{28} Approaches to the HB that claim to be merely descriptive are also not innocent undertakings, since description always reflects the interest of those responsible for the description.\textsuperscript{29} As such, descriptive and confessional approaches both require a critical self-awareness.\textsuperscript{30}

Disagreement concerning the descriptive task of biblical theology coincides with the dispute concerning the nature of biblical texts. This includes the disagreement whether the biblical text should be seen as a witness to theological realities, or as a source for constructing theological realities. Childs maintained the notion of the text as witness,\textsuperscript{31} while Barr rejected this view, arguing that a text never witnesses to anything other than what the reader’s own personal theology regards as correct. He favoured the notion of the text as source, because it does not cancel out the possibility

\textsuperscript{22} R. Rendtorff, \textit{Theologie des Alten Testaments: Ein kanonischer Entwurf} (vol. 1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 1. His reasons for such an argument have more to do with the nature, function and intention of the writings of the HB.
\textsuperscript{23} E.g. D.H. Aaron, \textit{Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Images} (BRLAJ 4; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 17 for whom the HB contains beliefs and ideologies about God, social order and politics and ritual, but no theology. He sees scholarly attempts at dealing with the theology of the HB as imposing constructed theologies upon the HB and that such undertakings do not contribute to the furtherance of our understanding of Israelite ideas.
\textsuperscript{24} M. Sæbø, \textit{On the Way to Canon: Creative Tradition History in the Old Testament} (JSOTS 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 160 differentiates three main types of Old Testament Theology, namely a salvation theology with a historical emphasis (especially the unique deeds of God); theology of order (i.e. creation theology) associated with the sages; a cult theology (salvation theology with a cultic emphasis) associated with the priestly circle and psalmic literature.
\textsuperscript{25} J. Barr, \textit{The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective} (London: SCM, 1999), 1-17 indicates the variety of perceptions concerning the nature and task of biblical theology.
\textsuperscript{27} P.R. Davies, \textit{Whose Bible is It Anyway?} (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 51.
\textsuperscript{28} Idem, 78. But his claim that its confessional character will always serve Christian interests is not wholly warranted.
\textsuperscript{29} Ollenburger, “Discoursing Old Testament Theology,” 620.
of finding other meanings in the text.\textsuperscript{32} Barr made the important observation that the real question is not whether the text is regarded as a witness or as a source, but rather \textit{how} one decides whether it witnesses to a specific theological reality.\textsuperscript{33} That is, what hermeneutical framework or methodological approach governs our interpretation of texts? In case of methodological approaches the battle remains between those championing diachronic and those championing synchronic approaches for the purpose of discerning the theological realities operative in biblical texts. At least, in recent years, greater appreciation has developed for the contributions of both approaches, and indeed for their complementary nature.\textsuperscript{34} This notion is shared in this study, though it tends toward the synchronic. As such the first concern of this study is to determine how the distinct theological voices in the selected texts can be held together in a meaningful dialogue on the synchronic level.

\subsection*{1.2.1 Theological Diversity in the Hebrew Bible}

Scholars who uphold the notion of the theological character of the HB for the most part agree on its theological diversity. But such agreement does not imply unanimity concerning the way in which this diversity should be dealt with. Gerstenberger stresses the multi-faceted theological nature of the HB and points out that “Many difficulties that we have with contradictory concepts of God arise from the fact that we constantly attempt to bring together the most different statements about God logically under one heading.”\textsuperscript{35} In a similar manner Murphy argues that “one can live comfortably with the several theologies of the Old Testament, without the need of any hierarchical systematisation of its pluralism.”\textsuperscript{36} In agreement with these arguments this study does not entail a unifying approach.\textsuperscript{37} Rather, an argument is put forth that the theological potential of the HB is located in its theological diversity.\textsuperscript{38} The HB should be allowed to function in all its diversity, rather than attempt to encompass the divergent views within the parameters of one theoretical or theological framework.

\textsuperscript{33} Idem, 14.
\textsuperscript{34} L.C. Jonker, \textit{Exclusivity and Variety: Perspectives on Multidimensional Exegesis} (CBET 19; Kampen: Kok, 1996) illustrates this need for both in order to avoid exegetical exclusivity.
\textsuperscript{37} B. Janowski et al., \textit{Theologie des Alten Testaments: Zwischenbilanz und Zukunftsperspektiven,}” in: B. Janowski et al., \textit{Theologie und Exegese des Alten Testaments / der Hebräischen Bibel: Zwischenbild und Zukunftsperspektiven} (SBS 200; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2005), 123. He highlights the diversified and often conflicting nature of theological themes and motifs in the HB, and argues that interpreters have to determine whether or not room is allowed for these texts to function theologically in their own right.
\textsuperscript{38} B.W. Andersen, \textit{From Creation to re-Creation: Old Testament Perspectives} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 75-96. It remains a task of biblical scholarship to differentiate between the theological dimensions in the different theological traditions or discourses of the HB, and to see how they are connected as part of the canonical writings.
In view of the texts that are analysed in this study we can again observe the argument of Gerstenberger that “theology in reality has exclusively to do with time-conditioned experiences of faith, statements and systems, in short with ideas of God and not with God in person or essence.”

He views the theological plurality and diversity in the HB in a positive light. Scholars engaged with the theology of the HB should be content with and engage with the contextual images of God in the HB and proceed with the understanding that present day theological claims and statements are equally context-bound and of limited validity.

Engaging with diversity and recognising the context-bound nature of theological statements contributes to the ongoing theological dialogue. The theological plurality of the HB presents an invitation to biblical scholars for critical and creative engagement. The fact that diverse theological perspectives and theological ways of imagining the divine were preserved, transmitted and allowed to function simultaneously in the HB points to the absence of theological normativity, but also toward a tolerance for theological plurality. In contrast with a modernist obsession with certainty and clear answers, the HB is much more open-ended in its theological argument. Allowing for diversity and appreciating this open-ended nature of HB theology stimulates dialogue and challenges theological arguments that have become rigid. This study proceeds with an awareness of the limits and boundaries of biblical theology, and recognises the conditioned nature of one’s reading of texts and ways of constructing theologies.

1.3 Creation as a Theological Problem in the Hebrew Bible

Creation as a central theological category in the HB has been rehabilitated to its rightful place, but during the first part of the twentieth century it was predominantly considered as foreign to or a late import into the theology of the HB.

This resulted from the conviction that the theology of the HB rests on the twin pillars of covenant and salvation history. The Old Testament theologies of Eichrodt and von Rad, have become rigid. This study proceeds with an awareness of the limits and boundaries of biblical theology, and recognises the conditioned nature of one’s reading of texts and ways of constructing theologies.

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40 Here the temptation should be avoided to consider the HB as if it contains clear evidence for the evolution of Israel’s religion from lower to higher forms over a long period of time. Cf. J.W. Rogerson, “What is Holiness,” in: S.C. Barton (ed.), *Holiness Past and Present* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 20.
written during the turbulent times prior to the Second World War and in its aftermath, contributed to this devaluation of creation as theological theme in the HB. When an appreciation for the place of creation theology in the HB did develop, scholars were confronted with HB’s lack of uniformity in this regard. Instead of a single creation theology, the HB contains numerous creation texts which at times constitute contesting theologies. Such contesting theologies may even be encountered in a specific theological tradition, or more specifically a particular book. This last instance is exemplified by the primordial history of Gen 1-11. In the creation theologies associated with the wisdom tradition such contesting creation theologies and perspectives of the creator may also be identified. Also within a specific book, as in the case of Job.

A further concern for the study of creation theologies in the HB is authentication and relevance. That is whether a creation theology can really be judged as Israelite, or whether it constitutes an adaptation of an already existing creation account, or the reintegration and re-appropriation of already existing creation motifs from Israel’s Umwelt toward a particular theological intent. Given that the latter, i.e. literary and

(OTS XLVII; Leiden: Brill, 2003). The first 107 pages of his book provide a good overview of the study of creation theology in HB scholarship.

44 W. Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments (3 vols.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1933-39). Creation is addressed only in the second volume of his trilogy.


46 Significantly von Rad became a protagonist for ascribing a central place to creation within the framework of the theology of the HB. Cf. G. Von Rad, Weisheit in Israel (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970) for the re-positioning of creation as central theme within the wisdom tradition of the HB.

47 C. Westermann, Schöpfung (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1971).


51 Particularly three publications served as a driving force behind these questions, namely C.R. Darwin, The Origin of Species: by Means of Natural Selection (1859); G. Smith, The Chaldean Account of Genesis (1876); H. Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit (1895). In recent times the focus in HB scholarship has shifted from a historical or literary-critical approach to the theme of creation in the HB, to approaches that are more ecologically or theologically orientated. E.g. N.C. Habel (ed.), Readings from the Perspective of the Earth (EB 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

52 Transmitted theological traditions require recognition and authentication from those responsible for its transmission and from those receiving it.

theological cross-pollination, is often the case the question of theological significance arises. But in this regard the focus has rightly and often been re-directed to the question of purpose.\textsuperscript{54} That is, to what purpose were older creation accounts or motifs re-adapted and integrated in the theological traditions of the HB?\textsuperscript{55} How does the new theological mould into which it has been cast contribute in giving shape to the theological thrust of these creation theologies?\textsuperscript{56} This is a pertinent issue, seeing that the theology of the wisdom tradition is essentially creation theology.\textsuperscript{57} In the analysis of the selected texts we will return to this issue, and try to determine the purpose and intent of their particular creation theologies.

\subsection*{1.3.1 Creation Theology and the Significance of Worldview}

An inquiry into creation theologies or cosmologies necessarily brings into picture the notion of worldview or \emph{Wirklichkeitsverständnis}. The Israelites shared a basic tripartite worldview with their ancient Near Eastern neighbours,\textsuperscript{58} yet their view of the world had its peculiarities.\textsuperscript{59} Such peculiarities should not be studied in isolation from their \emph{Umwelt}.\textsuperscript{60} To speak of the worldview of ancient Israel or the HB is not tenable.\textsuperscript{61}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} See here E. Noort, \textit{Een Plek om te Zijn: Over de Theologie van het Land aan de hand van Jozua 8:30-35} (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 23 who argues for the continuing importance of ancient texts for theological reflection in the present and that these texts have a voice concerning the question of meaning in the presence.
\item \textsuperscript{55} In this regard T.N.D. Mettinger, “Intertextuality, Allusion and Vertical Context Systems in Some Job Passages,” in: H.A. McKay and D.J.A. Clines (eds.), \textit{Of Prophet’s Visions and the Wisdom of Sages} (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 257 rightly argues that “All literature participates in the discursive space of the culture to which it belongs. A new text can only be fully appreciated in terms of a prior body of discourse which it implicitly or explicitly takes up, cites, prolongs, refutes or transmutes.”
\item \textsuperscript{57} W. Zimmerli, “The Place and Limit of the Wisdom in the Framework of the Old Testament Theology.” \textit{SJT} 17 (1964): 146-158 at 148. He argued that “Wisdom thinks resolutely within the framework of a theology of creation. This is confirmed by the fact that God...never appears as the ‘God of Israel’ neither as the ‘God of the Fathers’ nor as Yahweh Zebaath, whereas occasionally he can be named Maker or Creator.” The primary metaphor for God in the wisdom tradition is that of creator.
\item \textsuperscript{58} R. Hendel, “Worldmaking in Ancient Israel.” \textit{JSOT} 56 (1992): 3-18, at 17 argues that “The world of Israelite religion is neither wholly discontinuous nor is it a random collection of features from older versions. It is a world made from previous worlds.” World construction by means of words always takes place within the context of already existing worlds.
\item \textsuperscript{61} C. Houtman, \textit{Der Himmel im Alten Testament: Israels Weltbild und Weltanschauung} (OtSt 30; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 283. R.A. Simkins, \textit{Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel} (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994) attempted to construct a unified worldview of the HB, but has
In its present canonical shape the material of the HB is diverse in its view of the world. At the same time it is rather consistent in its Weltanschauung, i.e. its perception of who is responsible for creation, providence etc.⁶² How the creator is perceived and portrayed remains diverse however.⁶³ As such it is preferable to speak of broadened worldviews in the HB, since new realities such as that brought about by the exile continue to give shape to already existing worldviews.⁶⁴ For this reason the worldview(s) of ancient Israel is neither monolithic nor static.⁶⁵ Since worldviews provide order, coherence and meaning to those who participate in it, it is comprehensible why changed socio-political and religious circumstance could lead to broadened or expanded worldviews. It could also happen, and often does, that there are variations in worldview among those who understand themselves to be part of the same religious tradition. To this we will return in the analysis of the selected texts, since they attest to such a variation in worldview within the wisdom tradition.⁶⁶

The worldview of the HB wisdom tradition is governed by the concept of order.⁶⁷ This implies that the divinely established creation is an ordered world, and this order establishes and maintains the conditions necessary for life. In the earlier wisdom of Proverbs and the later wisdom of Job and Qohelet, divine creation is perceived to be governed by an inherent order.⁶⁸ A disturbance of this divinely established order in

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⁶² Houtman, *Der Himmel im Alten Testament*, 299-300.
⁶³ In this regard Stadelman, *The Hebrew Conception of the World*, 177 argued that “The whole vision of the world and of physical phenomena is coloured by the ancient Hebrews’ conviction that God is creator and preserver of the natural order. Hence, God is the pivotal point of the Hebrews universe, and to this fact the biblical authors submitted their understanding of the structure and purpose of the world.” In situations of crisis, especially the exile, this basic tenet was scrutinised within different theological traditions of the HB.
⁶⁴ R.K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (JSOTSup 241; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 229 highlights the relationship between biblical thought and the antecedent worldviews of the ancient Near East. Thus, Israelite thought drew on existing thought forms to create a new synthesis.
⁶⁵ See here N. Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1983), 22-31 who defines worldview as an individual’s or group’s “orientation to life.” Also Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion*, 4-5 who employs and adapts four dimensions of worldview as proposed by Smart, *Worldviews*, 7-8, namely the experiential, mythical, ritual and ethical.
⁶⁶ The selected texts do not contain personifications of wisdom as seen in Prov 1, 8, 9; Job 28; Sir 24; Wis 7-9. In the selected texts wisdom does not have a divine nature, but is a means of scrutinising creation one’s place in creation, as well as the creator and one’s relation with the creator. See also B. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1986).
⁶⁷ J. Sanders, “When Sacred Canopies Collide: The Reception of the Torah of Moses in the Wisdom Literature of the Second-Temple Period.” *JSJ* 32 (2001): 131. He utilises the categories drawn up by sociologist of religion Peter Berger, and argues that “…we may readily understand both the traditional sapiential approach to reality and the approach advocated by the Mosaic Torah as sacred canopies. Either the sapiential or the Mosaic tradition served to ‘legitimate the institutional world’ or to ‘integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality’ for those persons who accepted the one or the other.” A religious symbolic universe is seen as constituting a so-called sacred canopy.
creation can result in a disruption of the conditions necessary for life. When this perceived order becomes threatened, as in the exilic-postexilic period, some resistance or accommodation is expected in terms of worldview.69 This is particularly evident in the challenge posed to the principle of causality or Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang in the later wisdom tradition, as exemplified in Job and Qohelet. The result of such resistance and accommodation is that that which is judged as plausible remains. The incorporation of new ideas into already existing structures, such as that of proverbial wisdom, is not equal to assimilation, but rather the result of a process of negotiation.70 Older ideas often exist alongside new ideas and as such room for accommodation is possible within a new sacred canopy. This applies particularly to the wisdom traditions of the Second Temple period.71 The analysis of the selected texts, which were shaped during this period, also addresses the question of worldview reflected in their respective creation theologies. It is also considered to what extent these creation theologies reflect an expanded worldview, i.e. building on an already existing worldview, and what impact this had on the theological evaluation of death.

1.4 Death as a Theological Problem in the Hebrew Bible

The modern study of death in the HB is characterised by various phases, and little consensus exists on how best to present the diverse perceptions of the HB.72 For the most part the HB remains rather quiet concerning the theme of death, the dead and afterlife.73 For the most part we see only in a mirror, dimly (1 Cor 13:12).74 In view of such silence, death’s theological place in the HB continues to be debated.75 This

of the biblical literature it is the wisdom writings that gave pride of place to the presupposition of a world shaped and governed by a single all-wise, all-seeing and all-powerful Creator.”

69 Contexts of pluralism, characterised by competing worldviews, could lead to a relativising of traditional religious tenets. Cf. Sanders, “When Sacred Canopies Collide,” 133.

70 So e.g. the more universalistic priestly conception of the world made it easier for the scattered Jewish minorities to live in the multi-cultural and multi-religious context of the Persian Empire. Cf. Albertz, A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period Vol. II, 493.

71 Remarkable about the sages of the Second Temple period is that they successfully sought such accommodation, but also retained the integrity of the wisdom tradition. Cf. Sanders, “When Sacred Canopies Collide,” 136. For R.E. Clements, Wisdom in Theology (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992), 63-64 the wisdom tradition of the exilic-postexilic context provided the Jews of the dispersion with the basis for a new, non-cultic, universalistic worldview.


74 A lack of evidence concerning the notion of an afterlife does not imply that there was no concern with the dead or what happened after the moment of death. It is particularly within the realm of ancient Israelite family religion that death and the proper relation of the living toward the dead played an important role. Cf. K. van der Toorn, Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life (SHCANE 7; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3.

75 The effect of changing perspectives on theological reflection is particularly clear concerning the subject of death and dying in HB, as argued by B.S. Childs, “Death and Dying in the Old Testament,” in: J.H. Marks and R.M. Good (eds.), Love and Death in the ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of
debate includes the question to what extent the HB perceptions of death reflect a development in changing historical contexts. In this regard it is often argued that before the Babylonian Exile death did not present a problem for the Israelites. Death was a biological inevitability and Sheol the final destination of all (e.g. Ps 6:6; 30:9; 39:13; 88:11-13; 146:4; Job 10:21; 14:10; Qoh 12:5). The only two exceptions in the HB are Enoch (Gen 5:21-24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11). In both cases, YHWH is the one that “takes” or “receives” (yql) them. Questions concerning the origin of death do not have a central place in the HB, which is more concerned with death’s impact on life. Further, YHWH is perceived as the God of life, the living God, who is first and foremost related to life. For this reason an aetiology of death is not essential. YHWH alone holds the key to life and death (cf. Deut 32:39). The condition that characterised the exilic-postexilic, particularly the Second Temple period, contributed to the theological challenge posed by death. So e.g. the prohibition of any contact with death, the attribution of death and mortality to a devilish intent instead of divine design, as well as the development of the notion of resurrection, point to attempts at making sense of the phenomenon of death in a context of transition. This is also seen in the relation between resurrection and judgment after death, as a means of accounting for the premature death of the righteous, resulting from persecution.

Marvin H. Pope (Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters Publishing Company, 1987), 89-91. He suggested that “a fruitful avenue for theological reflection on death and dying in the OT would be one which would reckon not only with the original sociological setting of a biblical text, but also with the later audiences who received, transmitted and transformed the ancient literature to serve a new religious function.”

Friedman and Overton, Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence, 55 argue against the use of biblical texts in order to trace a linear development of Israelite ideas concerning death and afterlife, since these texts are not representative of the views of an entire community.


B.B. Schmidt, “Memory as Immortality: Countering the Dreaded ‘Death after Death’ in Ancient Israelite Society,” in: A.J. Avery-Peck and J. Neusner (eds.), Death, Life after Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaisms of Antiquity (HOS 49; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 87-100, at 97. He points to the similarities between Enoch and the figures from Mesopotamian sources, such as Enmeduranki as post-flood king and Utnapishtim, a flood hero.


Schmidt, “Memory as Immortality,” 96-97.
Death in the HB and Israelite religion has been variously studied and includes archaeological, \(^{84}\) philological / semantic \(^{85}\) and theological \(^{86}\) approaches. The various occurrences of death in the HB have been categorised as mythical (death as an independent power in opposition to the created order, e.g. Job 18:13; Jer 9:21) \(^{87}\) metaphorical \(^{88}\) (death as metaphor for those things that detract from life as YHWH intends it, e.g. 1 Sam 2:6-7) or biological (death as cessation of life, e.g. Ps 90:1-6). \(^{89}\) Such a categorisation is useful, but does not account for those instances where different presentations of death occur in the same theological context. This is a weakness of a contextual approach, regarding all HB perspectives on death as historically conditioned. These diverse perspectives were preserved by communal decision, and the incorporation of such a diversity of perceptions indicates that no


\(^{88}\) M.J. Mulder, *Kanaänitische Goden in het Oude Testament* (Den Haag: Van Keulen, 1965), 65-70 considers some of these uses of *temin* in the HB.

\(^{89}\) Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 2-4.
single perspective gained a normative status.\textsuperscript{90} The lack of uniformity in the HB regarding the theme of death, and the lack of scholarly consensus regarding the interpretation of archaeological and literary sources, contributes to the complex theological character of death. In this study death is not investigated as an independent theme. Rather, the intention is to determine how it is perceived in the context of creation theologies, particularly that of the wisdom tradition.\textsuperscript{91} Coinciding herewith is the relation of death, the dead and the realm of the dead with the creator,\textsuperscript{92} but also the proper relation of the living toward the dead.\textsuperscript{93} By means of analysing the selected texts we want to determine how death, including the creator-death relation, is perceived and responded to theologically.\textsuperscript{94}

As stated, death is variously perceived in the HB, but human mortality is presented as a given.\textsuperscript{95} This given has led to the argument that HB perceptions of death offer a contrasting interlude between the religions of the ANE and the mentality of the modern West.\textsuperscript{96} For the most part the HB perceives death and mortality as a natural and acceptable condition. This contributes to arguments that Israelite religion is essentially a \textit{Diesseitsreligion}. Religions of the ANE,\textsuperscript{97} as well as Christianity and the modern West, often perceive death as something from without, as an autonomous or divine power,\textsuperscript{98} as an enemy of the created order, or as an inappropriate condition that

\textsuperscript{90} In this regard Childs, “Death and Dying in the Old Testament,” 91 aptly argues that “a most fruitful avenue for the theological reflection on death and dying in the Old Testament would be one which would reckon, not only with the original sociological setting of a biblical text, but with the later audiences who received, transmitted, and transformed the ancient literature to serve a new religious function.”


\textsuperscript{92} Feldman, \textit{Biblical and Post-biblical Defilement and Mourning}, 16.

\textsuperscript{93} A good example concerns the so-called cult (i.e. veneration) of the dead. Here opinion can still be divided between the minimalists and the maximalists. In this regard E. Bloch-Smith, “Death in the Life of Israel,” in: B.M. Gittlen (ed.), \textit{Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and Religion of Israel} (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 139 rightly refers to the so-called cycle of interpretation concerning the dead in the HB, and argues that “Initially the dead were attributed an active role, only later to be consigned to Sheol. They were again resurrected and at present are being stripped of their powers.” The negative tendencies are viewed with suspicion by Bloch-Smith, identifying so-called “theological forces” at work.

\textsuperscript{94} C. Barth, \textit{Diesseits und Jenseits im Glauben des späten Israel} (SBS 72; Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1974), 102 argued that despite the development of a \textit{Jenseiterwartung} in the postbiblical period, a continuity of and commitment to tradition is also visible in Jewish faith in this regard. I.e. earlier thought and tradition is not merely brushed aside, but rather engaged with.

\textsuperscript{95} In the intertestamental Wisdom of Solomon human mortality is decried as the result of the envy of a “devil” (\textit{diabhulos}; 2:23-24), rather than the design of the divine creator (1:12-13). This view is absent in the HB, which for the most part accepted human mortality as part of the original design of creation. Ideas and practices of the ANE concerning death, the dead and the realm of the dead were adapted in the HB and at times became polemical (Lev 19:28; 20:1-11), but in some instances these ideas and practices continued (e.g. 1 Sam 28; Isa 8:19).

\textsuperscript{96} Bailey, \textit{Biblical Perspectives on Death}, 2-4.

\textsuperscript{97} In Israel and its \textit{Umwelt} the death of the other challenged individuals and communities to consider their own mortality. The response to this challenge is seen in some of the earliest literature from the ANE. Myths and cosmogonies provided a means for ancient peoples who “tried to grapple with the reasons for death and its mechanics.” Cf. S. Campbell and A. Green (eds.), \textit{The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East} (OM 51; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), ix.

\textsuperscript{98} Even when mortality belongs to mankind and Gilgamesh is told so, Tablet 10 lines 304-307 of the Gilgamesh Epic state:

“No one sees death,
modern medical research might someday overcome.\textsuperscript{99} That is, prolonging life by trying to extend the boundaries of death.\textsuperscript{100} But perceptions of death in the HB, the ANE or the modern western world are not so clear cut.\textsuperscript{101} Such a distinction does however highlight the predominant HB view of death and mortality as natural, acceptable and inevitable, even if it is at times lamentable.\textsuperscript{102} This distinction should however not lead to a domestication of HB perspectives on death, since a too strong emphasis on the biological understanding of death could demean the radical intersection of death with life, which is at times expressed in mythical or metaphoric ways.\textsuperscript{103} The HB rather comprehends death through all its phases as a challenge to life, and that life and death throughout remain in a dynamic relation.\textsuperscript{104} That is, death might be the inevitable, natural end of all, but one should still try to avoid bringing an early death upon oneself, e.g. by means of foolish conduct. The analysis of the selected texts also indicates that the nature of this dynamic is influenced by the perception of God as creator, and the experience of the creator-creation relation. In the HB, death is understood and accepted as a natural part of the divinely created order, but experiences of death are far more pervasive that mere biological cessation.

\subsection*{1.4.1 Death and the Wisdom Tradition}

In the wisdom tradition death is at times a dubious affair.\textsuperscript{105} In the wisdom of Proverbs death is associated with folly (תִּלַּא, cf. Prov 7:27; 9:18; 14:12; 16:25), and

\begin{verbatim}
no one sees the face [of death,]
nor one [hears] the voice of death:
(yet) savage death is the one that hacks man down.” Cf. George, The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic vol. 1, 697.
\end{verbatim}


\textsuperscript{100} This is a characteristic of modern western culture. Cf. D.J. Davies, A Brief History of Death (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); also P. Ariës, Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present (trans. P.M. Ranum; Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1974).

\textsuperscript{101} E.g. in the Old Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic we read of the futile search for eternal life, due to the fact that gods kept life for themselves and established death for mankind at creation. Cf. George, The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts (vol. 1; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 507. For the standard Babylonian Epic see George, The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, 667-669, Tablet 10, lines 319-322. Cf. note 98.

\textsuperscript{102} Particularly when we consider that the contribution of faith communities situated in the present in determining which biblical response to death is most meaningful in a particular situation.


\textsuperscript{104} Isa 25:8 envisions this tension as being dissolved when הַלַיְתָה swallows death (תְוֹנָ) in victory.

life with wisdom (הֵדְקָק, cf. Prov 3:18; 10:11; 11:30; 13:14; 14:27). The way of wisdom leads to life (Prov 8:35), i.e. life Diesseits, since death remains the inevitable, natural end of the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked. Wise living might bring about a long life, while foolish living could lead to an early, i.e. bad death (Prov 8:36; also Qoh 7:17). Wisdom can prevent a premature death of the righteous (Prov 10:2; 11:4). The spatial metaphor in Prov 15:24 (“The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from Sheol beneath”) emphasises the superiority of life as opposed to death. The negative evaluation of death and Sheol in proverbial wisdom derives from the fact that death deprives life of its positive values in the present. In proverbial wisdom death is a given, and Sheol awaits all. It entertains no notion of an afterlife, and Prov 23:18 and 24:14 which refer to an “after” (תֵּרֶם) and “hope” (חָקִית) apply to this life, not a continued existence after death. Yet the open ended nature of these proverbial statements allowed for it to be entertained at a later time, e.g. in two postexilic wisdom Psalms, 49 and 73. At times, proverbial wisdom also reflects an awareness of its own limits (e.g. Prov 16:9; 19:21; 21:30-31; 26:12) in providing certainties, also pertaining to the theme of death.

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom constitutes life (חיי). For this reason death is not merely a consequence of folly, but an expression of a mode of living apart from life (e.g. Prov 8:35-36). To walk in folly is to live a life of death. In this sense dying is understood as a negative way of living. It is a mode of living in opposition to the way of life (Prov 2:19; 5:6; 6:23). This wise / foolish and life / death dichotomy becomes more complex in the later wisdom of Job and Qohelet. The lines of this dichotomy are less clear. Death is still regarded as the final, inevitable end of all. Yet the borders of death become more porous. Particularly due to the fact that wisdom’s guarantees became questionable. This disturbed the notion that the divinely established creation is well-ordered and beneficial for the wise. As a result, life within creation becomes uncertain. If wisdom can no longer “steer” (הִדְקַק) one’s course through life, life becomes characterised by endemic uncertainty. The intertestamental wisdom of Ben Sira raises the question concerning the vindication of the righteous, but resists any notion of an afterlife and rather affirms death as the lot and end of all (38:21-23; 14:17; 41:9-10). Wisdom of Solomon also raises questions concerning the suffering of the righteous, and in the process touches on the theme of immortality (e.g. 1:15; 3:4; 4:1; 8:17; 15:3, 15), but never raises the topic of resurrection. It is ultimately

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106 Murphy, “Death and Afterlife,” 103-105.
107 Idem, 104.
108 Idem, 104-105.
110 J.L. Crenshaw, “The Shadow of Death in Qohelet,” in: J.G. Gammie et al., Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honour of Samuel Terrien (New York: Scholars Press, 1978), 212-213. Also Murphy, “Death and Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature,” 109-114. The HB text of Ben Sira does not introduce any new ideas on death an afterlife, but the Greek and Old Latin versions often expand on these themes, entertaining the notion of some form of afterlife or judgment after death, e.g. the expansion of Sir 16:22.
the problem of theodicy that gave rise to the notion of bodily resurrection, judgment and an afterlife by the second century BCE (e.g. Dan 12; 2 Macc 7). Questions pertaining to the death of the righteous became acute in view of the threats and persecutions experienced by the early Jewish community under the Hellenistic Seleucids, particularly during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (176-164 BCE), as exemplified in 2 Macc 7:1-42. The HB wisdom literature as well as the intertestamental wisdom literature offers no single universally held answer to the question of death or the life-death relation. Rather a variety of responses are offered and allowed to function simultaneously.

1.5 The Creation-Death Relation as a Theological Problem in the Hebrew Bible

It has rightly been argued that “Beliefs about life and death, whether consciously articulated or not, form part of the make-up of all human beings, and the people of the Old Testament provide no exception in this respect.” In as far as this argument holds true, the creation-death relation in the HB remains problematic. This is particularly pertinent from the diverse responses to the phenomenon of death, which often involve the maintenance of irreconcilable opposites in different and at times the same tradition(s). This is not a result of religions’ unwillingness to face facts, but rather because the facts of experience demand an attitude of both and not an attitude of either or.

Religion, also Israelite religion, allows for complexities in understanding death.

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114 Nickelsburg, Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life, 11. Also Crenshaw, Defending God, 151, 163.
115 H.Graf Reventlow, “Leben und Tod im Alten Testament,” in: G. Binder and B. Effé (eds.), Tod und Jenseits im Alterrundum (BAC 6; Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1991), 9-20 at 19. In this regard we can consider 2 Macc 7:28-29 where the mother employs the rhetoric of creation in addressing her youngest son before his execution, arguing that the creator also has the power to recreate, as a reference to future resurrection (“…that I may receive you again…”). This image of God as creator, whose creative power is not limited by death, contributes to overcoming fear of death. Cf. Groß, Studien zur Priesterschrift und zu alttestamentlichen Gottesbildern, 153-155.
118 Niditch, Ancient Israelite Religion, 50-51 indicates how the fundamental and value laden dimensions of creation (“cosmogony”) and death (“immortality”) intertwine and overlap in some threads of the Israelite tradition. She tries to establish how the notion of world creation and human mortality inform one another. In her view creation accounts (mythology) offer a sense of shared identity to communities by offering a picture of its earliest context. Stories about the beginning offer important information concerning one’s primordial roots in order to understand present realities.
119 This is related to the fact that in the biblical context, death was continually experienced and understood in new and different ways. Cf. Barth, Die Errettung, 154.
120 Bowker, The Meanings of Death, 211. He argues that “The religious exploration of death and of the continuities of consequences through death emerge from very cautious explorations of what belongs to our experience within the boundaries of this body and this life.”
An acceptance of human mortality in the HB implies that life is to be lived within the boundaries and time-limits of divine creation.123 Life in the present is what matters, with the striving toward some goal or reward after death absent in Israelite religion till a late stage.123 This does not mean that the continuation of one’s memory after death was insignificant for the Israelite. But for such remembrance life in the present is what mattered.124 Preferably one needed a good name, a good death, a decent burial and loyal offspring that would commemorate the deceased. Due to the emphasis on present living, the evaluation of divine creation, as well as the perception of the creator-creation relation and one’s place in creation become determinative for the way in which death is perceived.125 In terms of a positive experience of this relation, death commences with biological cessation, and being gathered to one’s people (e.g. Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29; Num 27:13; 31:2) is part of an ideal death. A negative perception of life in creation can lead to an experiencing of death in life, (e.g. Ps 88, as metaphorical expression).126 In as much as life is to be lived within creation, creation is also the realm of divine activity, which includes setting limits to human life (e.g. Gen 3:22-23; 6:3) and even bringing life to an end (Gen 6:13, 17; 7:4).127 Invariably this raises questions concerning the place of death within the boundaries of creation,128 and the relation between death and the creator, e.g. whether death brings an absolute separation from the creator (e.g. Ps 30:9; 88:10),129 and absolute separation between the living and the dead (e.g. Lev 11:31, 32; 19:28; 21:1; Num 5:2; 6:6; 16:48; 19:11 etc.).130 In this way the ambiguous nature of the Divine-dead relation in the HB becomes clearer,131 and is considered in the analysis of the selected texts.

122 Martin-Achard, From Death to Life, 3 argued for the Israelite love of and optimism for life, seeing it as a divine gift. Israelite religion does not reflect a longing to escape from this world, but rather a desire to have length of days in it, and to enjoy the resources offered by the creator in creation.

123 G. Kittel, Befreit aus dem Rachen des Todes: Tod und Todesüberwindung im Alten und Neuen Testaments (BTS 17; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

124 Schmidt, Memory as Immortality, 99-100.

125 Martin-Achard, From Death to Life, 5 observed that “to live” (ḥyj) in the HB is more than “to be,” since to live is also is to be created. Further, “life” (µyyj) for the Israelites was not defined “conceptually,” but rather “functionally,” i.e. knowing it in its manifestations. See also T. Pola, “Was ist Leben im Alten Testament.” ZAW 116 (2004): 251-252. Life is seen as that which is in movement, whereas that which is static e.g. plants, were not considered to be “alive.”

126 Martin-Achard, From Death to Life, 5 viewed life in the HB as primarily a “force” which may increase or decrease, and of which the intensity can vary from moment to moment. Such an understanding of life as “force” led him to regard death (along with sickness, weariness, sleep) within the HB as an “enfeebled form of life.” See also Barth, Die Errettung; Loader, “Emptied Life,” 681.

127 So e.g. death is perceived as part of creation, but could also be perceived as divine punishment for sin. H.P. Schmidt, “Todeserfahrung und Lebenserwartung,” in: Leben angesichts des Todes: Beiträge zum theologischen Problem des Todes (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1968), 205.

128 Indeed, in different religions the phenomenon of death in the midst of life is accounted for either as part of creation or as something which came into the world after creation. Cf. Richardson, “Death: Old Testament,” 108-110. The HB contains no etiology of death proper (also not Gen 2-3).

129 E.g. Ps. 6:6; 88:11-13 and the prayer of Hezekiah in Is 38:9ff. In this regard Feldman, Biblical and post-Biblical Defilement and Mourning, 17-18 points out that God’s absence from death in certain HB texts led Sigmund Mowinckel to remark that it almost conflicts with the idea of the supreme power of YHWH over creation. However, the notion of God’s omnipresence, or the inescapable nature of God’s presence, is reflected in e.g. Ps 33:7; 95:4; 55:15; Job 11:7-8; 12:22; 26:6; Pr 15:11; Deut 32:22. Thus, it is not clear whether this divine-human relation ends at the grave.

130 Johnston, “Death in Egypt and Israel,” 94 argues that death in ancient Israel was considered to bring inactivity, no sanctioned contact with the living, and separation from the one official deity.

131 Feldman, Biblical and Post-biblical Defilement and Mourning, 16.
1.6. Delimitation of the Study: Accounting for the Selected Texts

In the HB the significance of life (µyyj, vpn) in the present, that is biological or physical existence, cannot be denied. But Israelite religion also looked to qualities of relationship with the deity to express the meaning of life (cf. Ps 63:3; also Ps 1:3; 36:9; 67:1; 31:16; 13:3) and hence the relationship of life to death (cf. Isa 9:3). In a variety of ways the wisdom tradition concerns itself with this quality of relationship with the deity and in particular with God as creator, both in individual and communal life. For this reason the selected texts, namely Ps 104, Job 3 and Qohelet 11:7-12:8 will be scrutinised for indications of this creator-creation relation. In these texts the perceived quality of relation with the creator, and the perception of one’s place in creation, is significant for the evaluation of death. The selected texts employ a particular pattern of rhetoric by means of which the creation-death relation is given literary shape. An analysis of these rhetorical aspects requires a focus on both the micro and macro literary context of each text. Likewise the wider socio-cultural and socio-religious contexts of these texts, in as far as they can be determined, are not left out of focus. It has implications for determining the connectedness of diverse concepts of God and creation as well as death in the exilic-postexilic period. It might also be suggestive of the social-structures in which these diverse concepts emerged and functioned. This applies e.g. to the traditions concerning the creation

133 Though she focuses on a different text E.J. van Wolde, “The Text as Eloquent Guide: Rhetorical, Linguistic and Literary Features in Genesis 1,” in: L.J. De Regt et al., Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1996), 134 points out that texts employ literary means and stylistic features as part of their rhetoric in order to guide the reader and to focus the attention on one aspect rather than another. In how far this is applicable to the selected texts will have to be determined.
134 Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis, 114-116 argued for the importance of focusing on the “inner dynamic” of a text in relation to larger biblical units. But in this regard it has rightly been pointed out that references to death in the HB should be investigated “within its own literary-historical framework, with the understanding that each author, within his or her own political and spatial-temporal context, might have a distinct idea” concerning matters relating to death, life after death and the correct relationship between the living and the dead. Cf. Friedman and Overton, “Death and Afterlife: The Biblical Silence,” 56.
135 F. Stolz, Einführung in den biblischen Monotheismus (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 188 raises the important question concerning the possibility to establish the social-location of diverse theological traditions (theologische Strömungen) in the HB. He rightly points out that “religiöse Milieus sind nicht mehr automatisch soziale Milieus, ebenso wenig finden kultische und subkulturelle Milieus vorexilischer Zeit einfach eine Fortsetzung.” In this regard Berlejung, “Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellung der Israeliten,” 465 correctly argues that “Tod und Leben nach den Vorstellung der Israeliten ist kein Thema, das ohne die entsprechenden Vorstellungen der Umwelt sachgerecht erfasst und verstehend beschrieben werden kann.” At the same time the common stock of ancient Near Eastern ideas concerning life and death has in many ways been adapted to fit the theological interests of the Israelite community, or the theological or ideological interests of the biblical writers. Thus, the divergent representations should not merely be understood in the light of the broader ancient Near Eastern context, but also in the light of wider theological context of the HB of which it forms a part.
136 Stolz, Einführung in den biblischen Monotheismus, 188.
137 Nickelsburg, Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life, 10 emphasises the importance of taking serious the contexts within which texts and ideas reflected therein develop. “They are the products of real people, living in concrete historical situations. In no small measure, they are posed as answers to the problems which these people have seen arising from the situation they confront.” See also M.E. Stone, “Ideal Figures and Social Context: Priest and Sage in the Early Second Temple Age,” in: P.D. Miller and P.D. Hanson and S.D (eds.). Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore
of the world and creation of humanity. The exilic-postexilic context created room for the intertwining of aspects related to these two creation traditions. Such an occasional merging of creation traditions coincided with the increased significance of creation theology during the exilic-postexilic period. In the exilic-postexilic period it became increasingly difficult to affirm the saving acts of God in history, leaving a theological void. Creation theology contributed in filling this void and in this way gained greater theological significance.

The analysed texts stem from turbulent contexts of socio-political, cultural and religious change. Confrontation with foreign religious ideas (Babylonian, Persian, Greek), and the eventual development of new religious ideas such as bodily resurrection and judgment after death in the early Jewish community called for a religious response, either by challenging, or reasserting existing religious conceptions of the creator and creation. In part this accounts for the religious perspectives encountered in these texts, since responses to death and perceptions of creation are time conditioned. It is significant however that while some of these responses gain a particular prevalence, others are gradually replaced or adapted in such contexts of transition. This context also entailed a blurring of the lines demarcating official and personal religion.

It is particularly during the exilic-postexilic context that the Israelites, without established kingship, cultic and social structures, became aware of their fragility, both individual and communal, and had to face it head on. But the crisis of the exile also...

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Cross, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 575-586 at 582 who points out that the roles of the sage and priest are deeply influenced by social context in the early Second Temple period.

Westermann, Biblical Reflection, 98-100 argues that the background of so-called origin narratives was an “existential” rather than an “intellectual” problem. One of the reasons lying behind a consideration of origins is that such “knowledge” serves as ground and support of one’s continuation in the present. Particularly in situations of threat, such “knowledge” serves an important function.

Albertz, Israel in Exile, 136. See also Albertz, Persönliche Frömmigkeit, 27-96, 179-190. According to his argument, creation theology retained its importance due to its continuance in the realm of family religion, basing the divine-human relation not on God’s acts in history, but God’s creation of each individual.

In this regard S. Burkes, Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period (SBLDS 170, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999) argues that the circumstances within which the material of the Second Temple period was composed included developments such as increased individualism, the detachment of the individual from the community, a view of God as ever more distant, and the uprising empirical approach, with a consideration for further social and historical developments, all led to a changed attitude toward the phenomenon of death. Also S.E. Burkes, God, Self and Death: The Shape of Religious Transformation in the Second Temple Period (JSOJSup 79; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

Here the tension between the work of the Chronicler and Qohelet is significant, serving as an example of a tension filled co-existence of theological traditions. Cf. Sacchi, The History of the Second Temple Period, 197. The religious response to the challenges presented by the exile led to the contextualisation of theology. Cf. Gerstenberger, Theologies, 207.


Albertz, Menschengeschöpfung und Weltgeschöpfung, 125 locates the HB Weltgeschöpfung tradition in the realm of Israel’s official religion as practised in the larger cultic places of the land, while the older Menschengeschöpfung tradition is located in the realm of personal religion (persönliche Frömmigkeit). Also R. Albertz, Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner Pluralismus in Israel und Babylon (CTM 9; Stuttgart: Calver, 1978), 37-38.

led to a questioning of the breadth of YHWH’s creative power (§5.2). The theologies operative in Ps 104, Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8 do not have to be labelled as crisis theology. Rather, they present different responses to particular challenges posed to existing religious conceptions of creator and creation. This includes the theology associated with covenant and salvation history. Creation theology contributed to this process of facing their fragility, while death began to present a theological problem. The Israelite reinterpretation and re-appropriation of existing theological ideas, and literary motifs from its Umwelt reflects the ability to imagine the world, i.e. present reality, in new and different ways (e.g. Isa 40). The impact of events surrounding the Babylonian exile on Israelite religion should not be underestimated, but the extent of this influence remains open for debate. In part it led to a reformulation of Israelite religious tradition, given the collapse of its major religious institutions. Experiences of these events impacted on the perceptions of God, and during the exilic-postexilic period the God of Israel becomes increasingly “a universal God of the worlds, and therefore the creation of the world is also attributed to him.” In the texts investigated in this study the tradition of world creation is

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Hebrew Bible (SBTS 6; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 97 considers the community described in Ezra-Nehemiah as self-conscious and occupied with self-preservation, in a religious and material sense. W. Groß, Studien zur Priesterschrift und zu alttestamentlichen Gottesbildern (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999), 153. In Ps 104 and Job 38, the difficulty is encountered that YHWH’s provision of sustenance for some implies the suspension of life of others.

Sacchi, The History of the Second Temple Period, 161ff discusses the work of the Chronicler and the books of Job and Qohelet within the context of late Zadokitism (c.a. 400-200 BCE) and points out how these works are reflective of developing social and religious change within the postexilic Judean context.

In this regard it has been pointed out that this period is characterised by a gradual shift in focus from the community to the individual, particularly concerning the principle of retribution. Cf. Sacchi, The History of the Second Temple Period, 186-87. This shift is already seen in Ezek 18, and culminates within the books of Job and Qohelet. Sacchi places the book of Job after Ezekiel and contemporary with the work of the Chronicler.


A focus on creation and death contributes to a reframing of the present, i.e. present life situations. See here W. Brueggemann, Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 49 who argues “We will not get very far in reshaping the present until both past and future are boldly reframed.”

That the importance of the exile is overstated in biblical scholarship or that the tradition of the exile is merely an instance where ideology was read as history, as the work of e.g. H.M. Barstad, The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the “Exilic” Period (SO 28; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996) seems to claim, has been variously criticised. There was certainly continuity, i.e. continued existence in Judah after the exile, but this cannot downplay the impact of the exile, as illustrated by the body of literature that resulted from this event.

See here D.L. Smith, The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile (Bloomington: Meyer-Stone Books, 1989). Also R. Albertz, Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E. (trans. D. Green; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 133-34. Without a king or temple, without political or cultic institutions, it became impossible to maintain the basic tenets of Jerusalemite or Zion theology. As such the theological void resulting from the exile was filled with new theological voices that were critical and at times hopeful. A spin-off of this “deregulation” of official religion is the increase in literary production, as well as the development of new theological schools. In this regard Clements, “Wisdom and Old Testament Theology,” 273-275 argues for the increased importance of wisdom in this context, contributing to a non-sacramental understanding of religion.

R. Albertz, Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century BCE (trans. D. Green; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 134. He postulates a difference in the religious developments within the Babylonian, Egyptian and Judean exilic context.

Gerstenberger, Theologies, 242. In this regard he shares the argument of Albertz, Mensenschöpfung und Weltschöpfung, 171 that the creation of humanity presents the older tradition and the creation of
prominent, and the tradition concerning the creation of humanity less apparent, though not absent. This complicates attempts at positioning these texts within the religious development of ancient Israel. But it is indicative thereof that in situations of crisis, new strategies had to be thought out in order to ascribe meaning to creation, that is personal, communal and universal creation, and in effect also to the phenomenon of death and its relation to these forms of creation.

1.6.1 Psalm 104

Psalm 104 as a doxological hymn (v 1, 35b) of creator and creation constitutes an amalgamation of the theology of wisdom and the cult. This is evidenced by its wisdom orientation (v 24), and theological affinities with Gen 1:1-2:4a. This fusion of diverse theological traditions complicates diachronic and synchronic analysis. In this study the focus rests predominantly on the final form of Ps 104. In this doxological psalm creation and creator take centre stage, and death does not present an independent theological theme. Yet the theme of death is present in this creation psalm, and this is not without significance. An abundance of life does not imply the absence of death. In Ps 104 the creator-creation relation comes into sharp focus. The perception of this relation, which is overtly positive, contributes to the theological evaluation of death. The negative tone in v 35 is indicative of an expectation and hope directed toward the present, and is based on a trust in the goodness of the creator. In this regard we will consider the argument that experiences of death in the HB are always experiences of God. Even in death, created beings do not fall outside the parameters of divine creation and involvement. The individual is part of the greater creation and as such the death of the individual does not present a threat to the continuation of creation (v 30). The positive perception of creator and creation and the continued trust in the creator, provide reasons why death in Ps 104 is not regarded as an emptying of life, or as bringing about a separation from the creator. It does not stand in opposition to the divinely established creation, and is not experienced as a threat to its inherent order.

Given that Ps 104 presents a fusion of theological traditions, we will try to determine to what extent this text presents a different perspective, i.e. whether it deviates from or perpetuates existing theological thought. In as far as death is presented as the end of individual life Ps 104 corresponds with earlier (e.g. Gen 2:4b-3:24) and later (Job and

the world a later development in the religion of ancient Israel. This argument goes back to Westermann, Schöpfung, 100-102 according to whom it initially presented two independant traditions that were brought together at a later stage. Also R. Albertz, Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion (CTM 9; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1978), 37 for the argument that the tradition of the creation of the world belongs to the official religion of ancient Israel as practised at the major sanctuaries and occurs especially in the communal lament, while the tradition of the creation of humanity occurs particulary within the individual lament or “personal religion.”


As e.g. the development of the notion of the divine vindication of the righteous after death, in view of the suffering experienced in the intertestamental period and the challenges it posed to the traditional tenets of the principle of retribution (Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang).
Qohelet) theological traditions. Due to the positive emphasis Ps 104 places on divine omnipotence and the beneficence of creation, as does the P creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a, it stands in stark contrast with Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8, in which the theological affirmations of Ps 104 become problematic. Ps 104 stresses the dependence of all of creation on the creator. This theme of dependence becomes complicated in later theological traditions. Also in Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8. In turn this contributes to the particular perception of death. In Ps 104, death is defined in terms of the experiences of creator and creation, as well as the creator-creation relation.

1.6.2 Job 3

The Promethean-like Job speaks to the imagination of many exegetes. Job’s severe calamity described in the prose prologue of chapters 1-2, is met by an equally calamitous poem that finds literary expression in Job 3. In this text creation and death are two integrally related theological themes. Job is brought to light (i.e. life) by the creator (v 20), but now wishes to be covered by the shadow of death (vv 4-5), in order to escape the oppressing omnipresence of the creator. Having lost just about all reason for hope in the realm of life, he turns his attention and hope to the realm of death (vv 17-19). His perception of death in this chapter is defined in terms of his experience of the creator, creation and the creator-creation relation. In Job 3 the basic nature of death corresponds to that of the wider context of the book, but the way in which death is perceived differs markedly. This embracing of death and the positive envisioning of the realm of the dead constitutes a unique scenario in the HB. This is also the case in the book of Job and brings into focus the theological and rhetorical function of Job 3, particularly in relation with the divine speeches (chs. 38-41), which are often claimed as countering Job’s wish for the undoing of his creation.

The divine speeches do counter Job’s claims, but a direct answer does not seem to be their immediate intent. But in the end Job concedes and claims that he has “seen” the divinity (42:5). This brings the Job of the epilogue in close proximity with the taciturn Job of the prologue (1:22; 2:10). Such an internal movement does not however detract from the sharpness of Job’s outcry in chapter 3. Significant is that Job claims to have seen the deity, his creator, in the context of divine creation as depicted in the divine speeches. This suggests that hope is to be found within the parameters of divine creation, i.e. in the realm of life, rather than the realm of death. In part this accounts for the reversal in Job’s initial appraisal of death and the realm of the dead. For a Joban change of tongue occurs before the actual restoration of his fortunes. The creation theology operative in the broader context of the book of Job is ultimately determinative for rehabilitating Job’s longing for death. In Job, death finds its theological place within the parameters of creation, and for this reason Job’s initial embrace of death presents an attempt to restore his creation, i.e. his life. Ultimately, Job’s experience of suffering leads to a renewed or deeper understanding of God as creator. Ultimately it is his negative experience of creator and creation, and the creator-creation relation that led to his redefinition of death’s traditional qualities in his opening self-speech in chapter 3.

1.6.3 Qohelet 11:7-12:8

Qohelet’s musings concerning the meaning of life, in the broadest sense of the word, have grabbed the attention of numerous HB scholars. Instead of calling for consensus, the book of Qohelet flourishes amidst often contrasting scholarly opinions. It is significant that scholarly interest concerning the theme of death outweighs that devoted to the theme of creation in Qohelet. But both creation and death are central and theologically interrelated themes in the book. This also applies to Qoh 11:7-12:8, which can be read as a hymn to life or a fugue of death, and prompts the question whether Qohelet is essentially a preacher of joy or of doom. For Qohelet life’s positive moments are to be praised and enjoyed within creation (e.g. 2:24; 3:1, 11a, 12-13, 22a; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7), yet it always remains clouded by the knowledge of death’s certainty, and the uncertain nature of the creator-creation relation (e.g. 3:18-21; 11:5). Indeed, the deity presents one of the greatest riddles for Qohelet.

By means of an analysis of Qohelet 11:7-12:8 the relation of creation and death as theological themes is investigated, particularly in view of the perception of the deity. Both the micro and macro literary context of this periscope are taken into account. The rhetoric of Qohelet is ambiguous at times, but it does affirm that death impacts in life and ultimately presents a challenge to life. With Ps 104 and Job 3, Qoh 11:7-12:8 affirms death as the natural and inevitable end of all. Yet it emphasises the absolute and certain nature of death. In Qohelet, life is redefined in view of death’s certainty. This is seen in the resounding theme of the book’s frame, that all is vanity (1:2; 12:8). The catalyst of this is the apparent incapacity of wisdom to provide certainty in life, or to distinguish between the wise and the fool, or the righteous and the wicked. Coinciding with this is wisdom’s inability to provide insight into the purpose and nature of the divine works. It is however also this perception of death’s impact in life that leads to death serving as an impetus for life. Life is to be lived under the sun, for this life is humanity’s share. Once the light of life fades and the dust returns to the ground, it has come to an absolute end. At death the spirit returns to God (12:7), which might suggest (3:21 expresses doubt in this regard) that the creator does not abandon His creation at the moment of death. But this does not detract from the uncertainty Qohelet experiences in the realm of divine creation. In this realm, death remains the only certainty. Therefore, it is in the context of this creation that every moment of life has to be seized optimally.

1.7 Procedure

The analysis of the selected texts comprises a theologically orientated textual interpretation. The texts, within their final form, are interpreted within the framework of a particular theme, and toward a particular theological goal, as indicated

158 M. Schubert, Schöpfungstheologie bei Kohelet (BEATAJ 15; Frankfurt: Lang, 1989) offers an extensive investigation into this topic, particularly creation terminology, but is a rare example.

159 W.G. Jeanrond, Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking (trans. T.J. Wilson; New York: Cross Road, 1988), xvi, I emphasises that theology, as “talking about God,” is continually invited to involve itself with texts. Therefore it has no choice but to engage in the interpretation of texts. Theology is by nature a “textual science,” and existing interpretations must always be re-evaluated in the light scripture and methodological advances.
earlier in this chapter. The analysis of each text is two-fold. In the first instance a literary analysis of the text is conducted, taking into consideration its immediate and wider literary context. This exegetical section will focus on the language and rhetoric employed in relation to the themes of creation and death. This provides the background for the second part of the analysis, which entails a thematic discussion. On the basis of this literary and thematic analysis, we will try to establish how the perceived creation-death relation of each text relates to the broader theological tradition of which it forms a part. In chapter 2 Psalm 104 will be analysed. In chapter 3 the focus will rest on the text of Job 3, and Qohelet 11:7-12:8 forms the centre of discussion in chapter 4. The outcomes of the analysis of these texts will be systematised in chapter 5, bringing the study to a close.

In view of the preceding we here reiterate that the textual analysis in the following chapters is guided by the argument that in the wisdom tradition, death stands in a binary relation to life. It presents the natural end of all life, but can also be considered as emptying life of all meaning, detracting from life and bringing life to an end. The perceptions of creation and creator contribute to these experiences of death. Thus, experiences of God, as creator, and death are intricately connected. God remains the creator and death remains certain. Yet the experience of the one impacts on the perception of the other. The result is not just a fleeting theological moment, e.g. Job 3, ultimately displaced by the voice of theological orthodoxy, e.g. the prose epilogue of Job 42:7-17. Ultimately we want to establish how the respective perceptions of the creation-death relation relate, and too what extent they can be held in a meaningful, tension-filled relation. In this way we also want to illustrate that the theological diversity of the wisdom tradition for which this study argues, entails a moment of tension and equilibrium. It is also postulated that a meaningful discourse between disparate theological voices is possible, without having to systematise them within an all encompassing framework. To allow for a continued theological tension does not have to imply an irresolvable dialectic. We will argue that it is rather in this disparity that the theological potency of the HB is located. For this reason the argument is proposed that the theological nature and authority that we encounter in the HB is dynamic, living and unfolding, rather than static and unchanging.

The analyses of the texts will illustrate various points of contact between them. Yet the argument is presented that we should approach these wisdom texts with a greater appreciation for their theological intricacies. It is not just a matter of allowing theological diversity to exist, but especially of allowing one’s own theological constructs to be informed by it. Such a multi-focal view, i.e. becoming attuned to the

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160 This does not imply that insight from material culture is ignored. F.E. Deist, “The Bible as Literature: Whose Literature?” OTE 7 (1994): 327-342 warned that cultural information should not be neglected in the interpretation of biblical texts and that synchronic approaches often fall into the trap of not taking enough cognisance of cultural information. The work of E. Bloch-Smith, *Judaite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) provides a good example of how material culture can be significant and insightful for the interpretation of textual remains, even if her interpretation of archaeological data is not shared by all.

161 In this sense Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation*, 3-4 rightly argues for the need to return to textual origins in order to further theological thinking and that interpreters of scripture should be open to the fact that biblical texts “challenge their readers to a new reflection on their thought and practice…”

polyphone character of the wisdom tradition, presents an alternative route for theological argumentation that might otherwise become stale. Theological discourse gains new momentum when it is dialogical, i.e. discoursing with and hearing the other. The wisdom tradition offers a valuable example of such theology in dialogue, and to this we will now try to tap in.

L.J.M. Claassens, *The God who Feeds: A Feminist-Theological Analysis of Key Pentateuchal and Intertestamental Texts* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton, 2001), 14-43. In her argument for biblical theology as dialogue, she draws from the dialogical model of Michael Bakhtin and points out how our reading of texts is shaped by the dialogical encounter with texts. Hearing texts in dialogue, and focusing on where they intersect impacts on our reading of texts.
CHAPTER 2

PSALM 104: FIGURING DEATH AMIDST AN ABUNDANCE OF LIFE

Psalm 104 is a hymn celebrating YHWH’s works of creation. In its final form elements from various literary and theological traditions are fused together, resulting in its complex character.\(^{164}\) Israelite creation theologies encountered in Genesis 1:1-2:4a (P), Genesis 2:4b-3:24 (J), the wisdom texts of Proverbs 8 and Job 38-40 and Deutero-Isaiah are echoed in Ps 104.\(^{165}\) For this reason it has been suggested that the composition of Ps 104 should be ascribed to a sage from the postexilic period that created his theological wisdom from the most important aspects of ancient Israel’s religious heritage, while also incorporating, transforming and reapplying elements from the literature of its *Umwelt*. While much disputed, its purpose of composition and historical setting remain elusive.\(^{166}\) The focus of this chapter will rest on the doxological tone of the creation theology and theological construct of God as creator in Ps 104, and to what extent this doxology of creation and creator allows room for the phenomenon of death. Can death figure within a context of abundance of life?

Divine creation and providence are central themes in Ps 104, while the theme of death has a seemingly peripheral place.\(^{167}\) But it is significant that the theme of death is present within the framework of this doxology of creation and life. This raises the question concerning the theological *topos* of death within the framework of the creation theology of Ps 104. This question becomes more pertinent when taken into consideration that death in Ps 104 is directly related to YHWH, the creator (vv 29-30), which stresses the psalm’s acute awareness of creation’s dependence on the creator.\(^{168}\)

Does Ps 104 present death as an inherent, natural part of the created order, or does it

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\(^{166}\) Some argue for a cultic setting, but it could also have accompanied a *Festgottesdienst* at which time it was recited. Cf. Deissler, *Die Psalmen*, 407-8.


\(^{168}\) Pss 139:8-10; 31:16, 6; 84:3 provide further examples of an acute awareness of life’s dependency on the creator.
present a theological problem within the context of the psalm? Or does the presence of the theme of death within such an overtly doxological context offer a piece of theological realism, i.e. that the psalmist did not turn a blind eye to the dark edges of well-ordered and beneficial divine creation (v 35)?

In this chapter we will firstly consider the demarcation of the text (§2.1), followed by a consideration of the style, structure and thematic division of Ps 104 (§2.2), and a translation of the text (§2.3). An analysis of Ps 104 (§2.4) will provide the background for the thematic discussion (§2.5), while the chapter will be drawn to a close by some conclusions (§2.6).

2.1 Delimitation of the Text

Ps 104 shares some stylistic features and theological tones with its neighbouring psalms. But despite the editorial process that gave shape to the fourth book of the HB Psalter, Ps 104 managed to maintain a distinct theme and theological voice. In its present form Ps 104 opens and closes with a summons to praise (hwhyAta yvpn ykrb) in vv 1a and 35b, constituting a literary unit that may be studied independently. Yet, the literary relation of Ps 104 in its final form with Ps 103 and 105 is complex. For this reason the literary setting of Ps 104, as part of the fourth book (Pss 90-106) of the HB Psalter, cannot be ignored.

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169 M.D. Goulder, “The Fourth book of the Psalter.” JTS 26 (1975): 269-89 discusses the arrangement of the psalms in Book IV and views it as a unified collection. Also J. Schnocks, Vergänglichkeit und Gotteserschaffung: Studien zu Psalm 90 und dem vierten Psalmenbuch (BBB 140; Berlin; Philo, 2002), 242 who argues that Ps 104 has been placed in its present literary context, which is indicated by redactional attempts to make it fit.

170 E.S. Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations (FOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 221.

171 T. Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie: zwischen Mythos und Erfahrung: Psalm 104 im Horizont altorientalischer und alttestamentlicher Schöpfungs-Konzepte.” in: T. Krüger, Kritische Weisheit: Studien zur weisheitlichen Traditionskritik im Alten Testament (Zürich: Pano Verlag, 1997), 91-120 (114) places the emphasis on the final form of the text, while H. Spieckermann Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 21-49 attempts to trace the traces of a particular Vorlage of the Psalm. Both analyse Ps 104 as a literary unit. The suggestion of Spieckermann, Heilsgegenwart, 32, 46, 48 concerning the developmental stages of Ps 104 is noteworthy. He distinguishes between a shorter pre-exilic version, and an expanded post-exilic version, arguing that the basic design of Ps 104 consists of three parts (I: 1a–4; II: 10f, 14-19, 20-23; III: 24 a–b. 27-29a, 30, 33), that praises God’s presence in the world, as well as his loving care for the cosmos and creature alike. Thus Ps 104 became a creation psalm by means of extensive redactional labour (v 5-7, (8), 9, 12f, 19, 24ab, 25f, 29b, 31f, 34, 35a), laying the claim on divine creation, rather than providence. See also M. Köckert, “Literargeschichtliche und religionssgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zu Ps 104,” in: R.G. Kratz et al., Schriftauslegung in der Schrift: Festschrift für Odil Hannes Steck zu seinem 65. Geburtstag (BZAW 300; Berlin; NY: de Gruyter, 2000), 259-279. He regards vv 1a-2a, 11, 13b, 20-24a, 27-29a, 30, 31, 33-34 as a first expansion after 700 BCE, while 5-9, 16-18, 19, 24b, 25-26 presents further postexilic expansions.

172 D.M. Howard, “Editorial Activity in the Psalter,” in: J.C. McCann (ed.), The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 68. He argues that “the reading of individual psalms can only be enhanced when these are considered in light of their neighboring psalms, and the reading of the Psalter as a whole is likewise enhanced when its larger themes are highlighted.”

173 The Psalter is mostly divided into five books, namely 1-41 (I); 42-72 (II); 73-89 (III); 90-106 (IV); 107-150 (V), which is the result of editorial activity in the Psalter. Howard, “Editorial Activity in the Psalter,” 68 points out that “most studies on the editorial activity in the Psalter approach it either at the
In Ps 103 (1a, 22c) and 104 (1a; 35b) the phrase ḫwyAta yvpn ykrb forms an inclusio and provides a formal relation between these two psalms, provoking the thought of common authorship. But formal linkages do not have to be equated with common authorship. Ps 103 is a Davidic psalm (dwl) and some scholars suggest that Ps 104 presents a continuation of Ps 103. In particular that it presents an elaboration of the cosmic reign of YHWH proclaimed in Ps 103:19-22. This implies that Ps 104 should be read in light of Ps 103, in which the theme of death is also present (vv 14-16). But these formal aspects are not sufficient reason to regard psalms 103 and 104 as "twin psalms." The formal relations are best ascribed to editorial labour, while the difference in theme and content suggests an independent literary hand. In Ps 103 it is specifically the steadfast love (dsj) of YHWH that is celebrated, while His work (hc[m] of creation is the focus of praise in Ps 104. The first person praise with which Ps 103:2 commences is continued in the remainder of the psalm, but in Ps 104 the focus of the praise quickly shifts to the creator.

Some formal relations also exist between Ps 104 and 105. The phrase ḫyAwllh in Ps 104:35b provides a formal link to Ps 105a, which reads ḥwhyl wdwh, i.e. "give praise to YHWH." The use of vocabulary such as yj yc (noun, "musing") in Ps 104:34, and higher level of collections and large, organizing principles, or at the lower level of links between adjacent psalms, and some do so on both levels."

174 G.H. Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms," in J.C. McCann (ed.), The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 75 points to a noticeable shift as one moves from the first three books of the Psalter into the forth. While most of these psalms are untitled, they do reflect a sustained, thematic unity that focuses on the kingship of YHWH.

175 Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 287-289 points to the value and difficulty in comparing Ps 103 (later) and 104 (earlier), since the two psalms apparently stems from two different historical periods. If both texts are located in the exilic-postexilic context, formal linkages do not have to indicate a common authorship. See also L.C. Allen, Psalms 101-150 (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1983), 26.

176 For Ps 104 the LXX and Vulgate add chāl, thus establishing a link between Ps 103 and 104.


179 This is argued by P.D. Miller, “Poetry of Creation Psalm 104,” in: W.P. Brown and S.D. McBride (eds.), God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W Sibley Towner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 101-102, stating that “The poetic praise of God as creator and sustainer of the world...must be read and heard with the preceding thanksgiving to God for compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.” Similarly the thematic links with Ps 145:4, 10 and Ps 33:4-7 should not be overlooked.

180 Other formal relations include the use of yd in 103:5 and 104:30; the characterisation of humankind as dust (rāḇ) in 103:14 and 104:29; the reference to YHWH’s heavenly residence in 103:19 and 104:2; the reference to the angels as the servants of YHWH in 103:20-21 and 104:4.

181 J.L. Mays, "The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation," in: J.C. McCann (ed.), The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 19. He regards the “sinners” as the objects of YHWH’s dsj in Ps 103. In contrast, Ps 104 has a general focus. Cf. Krüger, Psalm 90 und die Vergänglichkeit des Menschen, 88. He does however regard the “God fearing” as the focus of Ps 103.

182 Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 221.

183 Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 101. For Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter,” 79 the so-called wisdom frame of Book IV provides a unifying element, drawing Book IV and V together. As such Ps 90 (11-12)
ψρυ (verb, “sing”) in Ps 105:2 provides another link. The verbs in Ps 104:33-34 that indicate the psalmist’s intention of joy (“sing” – ρρυ; “sing praise” - ρρα “meditate” - ρυ; “praise” - ḥρ; and “rejoice” - ḥρ) follows a similar sequence in Ps 105:2-3 (ρρυ; ρρα ṣο; ḥρ ṣο), with the verb ḥ腹泻 inserted before the last verb (ḥר). Despite these formal linkages, the difference between Ps 104 and 105 concerning theme and content is even greater than between Ps 103 and 104. Ps 104 is a creation psalm, celebrating the works of YHWH. Ps 105 and 106 constitute twin historical psalms, and are thematically of a different nature. In the larger context of Ps 101-106 the theme of repentance is prominent, but this theme lacks in Ps 104. In view of this repentance theme, Ps 104 in its present location can be regarded as an affirmation of the universal sovereignty of YHWH. Thus, the present setting of Ps 104 is of theological significance. Yet the framework of Ps 104, which connects it with Ps 103 and 105, also suggests that Ps 104 forms a literary unit. This, coupled with the fact that it is thematically distinguishable from its neighbouring psalms, allows for a consideration of Ps 104 as literary and theological unit.

2.2 The Style, Structure and Thematic Division of Ps 104

Psalm 104 is best described as an individual hymn of doxology, which is indicated by the opening and closing self-exhortation in vv 1 and 35 (לטפ יתא ותיה), as well as the personal references in vv 33-34. It is further characteristic of Ps 104 that it combines a hymnic participial style with direct address to YHWH. This hymnic style and doxological character is further indicated by the structure and build-up of the text. Elaborate investigations into the structure of the Ps 104 are scant, despite the incoherence in terms of thematic structure. In this study Fokkelman’s division of Ps 104 into seven stanzas (1-4; 5-9; 10-13; 14-18; 19-23; 24-30; 31-35) is regarded as providing a good framework for the interpretation of the text. The structural divisions of most commentaries are comparable with that of Fokkelman.

reflects in part the concern of the wisdom tradition, contrasting the sovereignty of God with the transience of humanity. For Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 102 Ps 104 leads into the “national” hymns of Psalms 105 and 106. Idem, 102. It is the only occurrence of this combination in the HB. For the relation of these two psalms in later traditions, see G.J. Brooke, “Psalms 105 and 106 at Qumran.” RevQ 14 (1989): 267-292. Miller, Poetry of Creation, 101-102.


Allen, Psalms 101-150, 28. The idea of a personal hymn is shared by various scholars, yet Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 226 regards Ps 104 as a personal and communal hymn. The cluster of participles in vv 2-5 (ḥח “covers”; ḥח “stretches”; ḥח “lays beams”; ḥח “makes”; ḥח “walks”; ḥח “flaming”) serve to initiate different themes, while direct address is used for the development of these themes (vv 7, 9, 13b, 20), with exceptions in vv 1ab-b and 24-34. Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 28.

Allen, Psalms 101-150, 31.

The opening stanza (vv 1-4) with its hymnic character is clearly “God directed” and “heaven centered”, addressing God directly (yhla hwhy), speaking of God (second person), heaven (µymv) and light (rwa). Stanza 2 (vv 5-9) by contrast is “earth centered”, with the triple use of the negative lb (vv 5x1; 9x2) forming a ring round the stanza as a whole, ending with a reference to the earth (Ârah). Likewise stanza 3 (vv 10-13) ends with a focus on the earth, Ârah (v13, an epiphora, i.e. the repetition of words at the end of sentences etc.), while the mountains (µyrh) are mentioned twice (vv 10, 13). The linear repetition of jqv (Hi, “give to drink”) in vv 11 and 13 serve to indicate the central importance of the provision of water. Stanza 4 (vv 14-18) has as subject food and safe dwelling, stressing the theme of divine providence.

Likewise stanza 5 (vv 19-23) opens in doxological fashion with hc[ (here “to appoint”) and deals with so-called “experiential time” for all created beings, with the time for man (day) and beast (night) reversed. The reference to the sun rising and setting (vv 22-23) is reminiscent of the merism moon / sun of v 19. In stanza 6 (vv 24-30) and stanza 7, the divine name YHWH occurs quite frequently, in contrast to its absence within the preceding verses. Stanza 6 and 7 commences with a reference to the works (hc[m+ second singular suffix) of God. The hymnic tone of Ps 104 increases in these verses, with the use of hwhy at the opening of stanza 6 being vocative in the acclamation of praise. However, stanza 7 and 6 are distinguished by the use of grammatical persons for God (second person in stanza 6; third and first person in stanza 7). The praise of YHWH for his work (hc[m] is also the theme of stanza 7 (vv 31-35), but here in the third person “he”, in contrast with the second person “you” of stanza 6. In this way stanza 7 commences with a reference to the glory of YHWH (hwhy chalak), and closes with a double praise of YHWH in v 35. In the following analysis of the text this proposed structural and thematic division is employed.

Psalms 93-100 (PhD dissertation; University of Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1986) identifies two important editorial techniques in these psalms, namely the “overlap/interlock” technique for binding groups together, and the “frame” that provides an interpretative context. Cf. Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter.” 76. C.A. Briggs, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1906), 331-337 identified seven strophes, 1-4; 5-9; 10-13; 14-18; 19-23; 24-28; 29-35; K. Seybold, Psalmen, (HAT; Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 2003), 409-410 also identifies seven strophes, 1ab-4; 5-9; 10-18; 19-23; 24-26; 27-30; 31-35, regarding v lââ as self-introduction and vv 30-35 as concluding addition. Kraus, Psalmen II, 879 identifies 8 strophes, 1-4; 5-9; 10-12; 13-18; 19-24; 25-26; 27-30; 31-35. J.P.M. van der Ploeg, Psalmen Deel II (Roermond: JJ Romen & Zonen Uitgevers, 1974), 186-187 divides the psalm into 10 strophes, 1-4; 5-9; 10-11; 12; 13-16; 17-18; 19-23; 24-26; 27-30; 31-35. McCann, Psalms, 1097 divides the psalm into five strophes 1-4; 5-13; 14-23; 24-30; 31-35. So also Mitchell, The Message of the Psalter, 293 and Allen, Psalms 101-150, 32. Allen adds a further division, arguing that the psalm forms a concentric composition, with the first and last of its five strophes being half the size of the central strophe, i.e. 1-4; 5-13 (5-9 + 10-13); 14-23 (14-18 + 19-23); 24-30 (24-26 + 27-30); 31-35. The division of the BHS, namely 1-9; 10-12; 13-18; 19-23; 24-26; 27-32; 33-35 is almost never employed.

Fokkelman, Major Poems II, 265.

Idem, 265.

Idem, 266.

Idem, 267.

Idem, 266.
2.3 Translation of Ps 104

1a Bless YHWH my soul;  
1a b YHWH, my God, you are very great;  
1b you are clothed with majesty and honour  
2a Who covers himself with light as with a garment –  
2b who stretches out the heavens like a curtain  
3a Who lays the beams of his chambers in the waters –  
3b who makes the clouds his chariot –  
4a Who makes His angels spirits;  
4b his ministers a flaming fire  

5a Who laid the foundations of the earth;  
5b that it should not be removed for ever  
6a You cover it with the deep as with a garment;  
6b the waters stood above the mountains  
7a At your rebuke they fled;  
7b at the sound of your thunder they hasted away  
8a They go up mountains and they go down valleys  
8b to the place that you have founded for them  
9a You have set a bound that they may not pass over;  

200 The LXX and 11QPsa reads dwdl “for David,” making the psalm part of the corpus of Davidic psalms, and brings it in closer proximity with Ps 103, which also commences with dwdl. For a comparison of Ps 104 with the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls, see P.W. Flint, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book of Psalms (STDJ 17; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 58-59, 62, 65-66, 96-98.
201 Here 11QPsa reads wnyhwla “our God.” Cf. Seybold, Die Psalmen, 408; Gerstenberger, Psalms 2, 222.
202 Within Ps 104 YHWH is mostly addressed in the second person form of the verbs and suffixes (vv 1bc, 6-9, 13b, 20a, 24, 26b, 27-30), but also within the third person (4b, 5a, 11b, 19a). In the style of the hymn, a number of participles are also used of YHWH (vv 2-4, 10, 13a, 14). Within the Egyptian Hymn to Aton the sun god is similarly addressed by with the second person, while the description of the creation is in the third person, as is the case within Ps 104. Cf. Van der Ploeg, Psalmen, 187.
203 The word pair dwj and rdj also occurs in Job 40:11.
204 The critical apparatus proposes hf[ for hf[, the absent t suggesting haplography. The use of hf[ “covers” and hfwn “stretches” is indicative of rhythm and assonance typical of poetry. Thus hfwn does not have to be emended to hfwnh as the critical apparatus suggests (the absent h presenting a case of haplography).
205 M. Dahood, Psalms III, 100-150 (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1970), 34 points to the Ugaritic qryt “granary” and the Akkadian qaritu, suggesting that the opening word of v 3 is identical to the Hebrew hrq “plank, boarding.” In Job 37:9 a form of hrq occurs with the meaning “storeroom,” while Ps 33:7 recounts that YHWH puts the deep into storehouses.
206 Cf. Ps 18:11 for the phrase j wApnk[.  
207 The LXX and Peshitta read a conjunction before the reference to “his ministers.”
208 See Ps 57:7 for the only other occurrence of the rare form of fnl (Qal). Spieckermann, Heilsgegenwart, 21 follows Dahood and translates “Feuer (und) Lohe.” The LXX reads pu`r flevgon while the critical apparatus suggests fj wSeybold, Psalmen, 408 points to 11QPsa that reads tfhw.
209 Here and twice in v 9 the poetic l b is used instead of al .
210 The LXX reads t:j periboviaon auffou, i.e. wosk instead of wysk. Seybold, Psalmen, 408 suggests the reading tswk, i.e. “sein Überwurf.”
211 Some manuscripts suggest a reading with the feminine suffix htsk i.e. “you cover her,” as in v 9.
212 Briggs, Psalms, 338 described the change from the plural form wosk within this verse as a gloss.
213 Seybold, Psalmen, 408 points to 2QPs that reads l jmd w, i.e. “to every (place).”
214 Some manuscripts omit the demonstrative pronoun fr
9b that they turn not again and cover the earth

10a He sends the springs into the valleys
10b which run among the hills\(^{215}\)
11a They provide drink to every beast\(^{216}\) of the field;
11b the wild asses quench\(^{217}\) their thirst\(^{218}\)
12a By them the fowls of the heaven shall have their habitation,
12b which give a voice\(^{219}\) among the branches\(^{220}\)
13a He waters the hills from His chambers;
13b the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works\(^{221}\)

14a\(^{222}\) He causes the grass to grow for the cattle;
14b and the herb for the service\(^{223}\) of man;
14b that they may bring forth food\(^{224}\) out of the earth
15a\(^{225}\) And wine that makes glad the heart of man;
15b oil\(^{226}\) that makes his face shine\(^{227}\)
16a\(^{228}\) The trees of YHWH are satisfied,
16b Cedars of Lebanon that he planted
17a Where\(^{229}\) the birds make their nests;
17b the stork - the fir trees are her house
18a The hills\(^{231}\) are a refuge\(^{232}\) for the wild goats;

\(^{215}\) LXX adds ἥρματα, i.e. ἰἡμερες, ὅτι ὄτι δὲ ποταμός ἐλάλειν.

\(^{216}\) See also Gen 1:24 and Ps 104:20. Seybold, Psalmen, 408 points out that 4QPsd reads the plural τῶν.

\(^{217}\) Literally “break.” The Peshitta reads ἔβατια, implying a reading “satisfies their thirst.”


\(^{219}\) Some manuscripts read ἤλιος.

\(^{220}\) It is unclear what the exact rendering of the hapax χρή should be. Some manuscripts suggests χρήθη or the Aramaic χρήθη, while the LXX reads τῆς πέτρας ὑπὲρ ἑαυτὸς ἑαυτῆς “from stones, rocks.”

\(^{221}\) Seybold, Psalmen, 408 favours the reading ὑπάρχει στὸν πόρον του ὑπὸ ἐμαυτοῦ τοῦ ποτήριου, which fits the context and also occurs in Ps 8:8. Briggs, Psalms, 338 suggested an original reading ἐξ. But χρή is also also fitting and is read here.

\(^{222}\) The critical apparatus suggests the transposition of ἡμέρας to the end of the verse. Depending on whether ἡμέρας is interpreted as a subject or objective genitive, one could read “for the service of man” or “for man to cultivate.”

\(^{223}\) The critical apparatus suggests ἀναφορά τοῦ ἡμέρας, i.e. “service” is used in an agricultural sense.

\(^{224}\) Briggs, Psalms, 338 argued that ᾿ αὐτοῦ ἐντέλεια ἐν τῇ σεμενέρᾳ ἡμέρᾳ represents a gloss from a different construction than its present context.

\(^{225}\) The LXX reads ἐν ἀναφορά τοῦ ἡμέρας ἐν ἁμέρᾳ ἡμέρας τῆς ἡμέρας, i.e. τῆς ἡμέρας. Reading the preposition ἧμερας tenable, indicating the use of oil for making one’s face shine.

\(^{226}\) It has been suggested that the hapax ἰημέρας is a variant (Hi) of ἕρξις “shine.” Cf. Briggs, Psalms, 338; Allen, Psalms 101-150, 27.

\(^{227}\) In the LXX it is not clear whether ἵερξις should be read as δύτῃ ἔδωκεν ὑμῖν or κυρίῳ. The first option suggests a reading ἰημέρας, which does fit the context and also occurs in Ps 8:8. Briggs, Psalms, 338 suggested an original reading ἰημέρας. But ἰημέρας is also also fitting and is read here.

\(^{228}\) The MT reads ἴδρυα but the LXX and Peshitta omit τῆς. Seybold, Psalmen, 408 regards ἴδρυα as superfluous, while Briggs, Psalms, 338 regards it as a gloss.

\(^{229}\) For ἴδρυα the LXX reads ἰδρύεται ἐν ἀναφορά τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς ἡμέρας, i.e. as a reference to cypress or fir trees, as in Isa 14:8; 37:24 and Ezek 31:8 as an accusative of place. The Peshitta reads the preposition β without further locating the habitation of the stork.

\(^{230}\) The critical apparatus suggest reading ἰδρύα without the ἲ which is suggestive of haplography.
18b the rocks a refuge for the rock badger234  

19a You have made235 the moon for seasons;  
19b the sun knows236 his going down  
20a You make237 darkness, and it is238 night,  
20b wherein all the animals of the forest creep  
21a The young lions roar after their prey;  
21b and seek their meat from God  
22a The sun rises, 239 they gather240 themselves together,  
22b and lie down in their dens241  
23a Man goes to his work  
23b and to his labour, until evening  

24a How manifold242 are your works, YHWH;  
24b you have made them all243 in wisdom,  
24b the earth is full of your riches  
25a So is this244 great and wide sea,  
25b wherein are things creeping245 innumerable,  
25b both small and great beasts  
26a There246 go the ships –  
26b the Leviathan whom you have formed, to play in it247  
27a They all wait upon you –  
27b that you may give248 their meat in due time  
28a When you give them, they gather249 it up;  
28b you open your hand and they are filled with good250  
29a You hide your face, they are troubled251 –  

232 Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 114 argues that the expressions hcg “high, exalted” and hes refuge” are reminiscent of the expression sometimes used “…für die von Jahwe gewährte ‘Zuflucht’ – etwa im Tempel (vgl Ps 61:4f) – oder Jahwe selbst als ‘Zuflucht’ steht.”  
233 See also Job 39:1 and 2 Sam 24:2 for l[y. The LXX reads ej sfoi” i.e. “stag, deer”  
234 The LXX reads toiforgrlui”, i.e. “coney,” belonging to the “unclean” animals.  
235 The critical apparatus suggest the participle hci, thus providing a clearer indication of the perpetual nature of the creative activity of YHWH.  
236 The versions of Aquila and Symmachus read ejnswi e, which points to the Pi [D] suggesting that YHWH makes the sun know its proper time to set.  
237 The Peshitta reads a third person singular, “he makes.”  
238 The LXX reads kai; ejgevet o, i.e. yhkw  
239 The rising of the sun is indicated by jrz “to rise, come forth,” as well as axyin v 23a.  
240 Following the LXX and I one could read a conjunction wbefore 1 sa i.e., “and they gather.”  
241 I reads jhyvalm  
242 Briggs, Psalms, 338 saw ur Arnus a gloss. But the noun hc[m] works,” qualified by bbr “manifold,” contributes to the portrayal of YHWH as majestic creator.  
243 The reading of the LXX suggests KoFor Fokkelman, Major Poems II, 266-7 µk in v 24b returns as a marker in v 27a, arguing that “the echo of ‘them all’ is not coincidentally µk ka “their food” of v 27b.”  
244 The hv is omitted in .  
245 The I adds bbrh  
246 Here lv can be read as chiastic counterpart to lv at the end of v 26.  
247 A translation “to play with” is possible if Leviathan is understood as YHWHs “plaything.”  
248 I reads µl “for them.”  
249 I reads wbefore fj i.e. “and gather.” For fj, see also Gen 31:46 and Exod 16:4, 5, 26.  
250 The Peshitta omits bwl, but the LXX supports the MT.  
251 This line is omitted in . The usual rendering of wjy is “they are dismayed,” but in this context can also be rendered “they expire.”
you take away their breath, they die
d and return to their dust
You send forth your Spirit, they are created – and you renew the face of the earth
The glory of YHWH will be forever, YHWH shall rejoice in His works
He looks on the earth and it trembles;
he touches the hills and they smoke
I will sing unto YHWH as long as I live,
I will sing praise to my God while I have my being
My meditation of Him will be sweet;
I will rejoice in YHWH
Let the sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more;
Bless YHWH my soul; praise YHWH

2.4 An Analysis of Psalm 104

In this analysis of the text of Ps104 the focus will rest on those elements that contribute to the doxological tone of the psalm’s creation theology, as well as those elements that contribute in giving shape to the particular relation of creation and death in this psalm.

Verses 1-4: Focus on the Heavens

The opening and closing phrase in verse 1 and 35 forms an inclusio to the psalm as a whole, but also stands apart from the body of the Psalm, and as such has been interpreted as a liturgical addition to the original form of the psalm. Such a “liturgical addition” implies a corresponding liturgical use and cultic context for Ps 104, but the uncertainty of its setting renders such an argument tentative.

252 reads Hj w instead of j w.
253 Ps 90:3 reads the hapax αλδ instead of τgif. For Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 89 it has a local meaning, i.e. “You make man return to dust and say, Return, o mortals.”
254 The LXX, І and Peshitta read a conjunction before arb.
255 Ps 51:12 reads a Pi of vdj “renew.”
256 reads a before hyh.
257 І reads Årah la instead of Åral.
258 Briggs, Psalms, 339 translated ybj as “during my life” which also fits the context well.
259 The LXX reads hyAlh has part of Ps 105, but the Peshitta omits it. Some manuscripts read hyv.
261 Dahood, Psalms III, 33.
262 Briggs, Psalms, 337.
263 Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 222-227.
264 Goulder, The Fourth Book, 269 builds on the insights of Gunkel and Mowinc kel and argues that the material of Book IV was collected for liturgical purposes and that the liturgical setting is the Autumn Festival, with the uneven psalms within Book IV recited in the morning and the even-numbered psalms in the evening. In this regard G.H. Wilson, “Understanding the Purposeful Arrangement of Psalms in
The combination of themes in v 1 establishes the doxological nature of Ps 104. This includes the “greatness” (דָּםְתַלָּדְג) of YHWH (יהוה) in this way “glory and honour” (רְדֵּחַ) could have a royal connotation, as in Ps 96:6 and Job 40:10. This would befit the description of YHWH’s exalted status, while it does not imply that Ps 104 is a royal psalm proper. The metaphors used to describe YHWH “clothing” (וֹד) and “covering” (הַפִּית) in vv 1-2 reflects an affinity with Ps 93:1 (וֹד x2). In tandem with Ps 103, Ps 104 affirms God’s cosmic sovereignty, and presents a response to the theological crisis articulated in Psalms 101-102.

In verse 2 the first participle phrase (הַפִּית, “covering”) of the psalm continues the metaphorical doxology of YHWH as initiated in v 1. These images contribute to the argument that the opening verses of Ps 104 describe a divine theophany, conveying a sense of the divine power. The image of YHWH stretching out (הַפִּית) the

the Psalter: Pitfalls and Promise,” in: J.C. McCann (ed.), The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 46 rightly questions this practice of using a hypothetical festival serving as the “interpretive filter” through which the arrangement of the psalms is to be investigated. He demonstrates that only four of these psalms (90, 97, 101, 102) can be construed to support the alternating scheme proposed by Goulder. Despite the problems in identifying a context, it should be kept in mind that prayer within the HB could also be a carefully prescribed cultic event. Cf. G.A. Anderson, “The Praise of God as Cultic Event,” in: G.A. Anderson and S.M. Olyan (eds.), Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel (JSOTSup 125; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 15, 33. C. Westermann, Praise and Lament in the Psalms (trans. K.R. Crim and R.N. Soulen; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 30 refers to this as the ‘forensic aspect’ of praise within the Psalms. It highlights the themes of divine presence and ascent. Cf. Anderson, “The Praise of God as Cultic Event,” 32. Psalms of lament highlight the themes of divine absence and descent.

Allen, Psalms 101-150, 26.

B. Janowski, Konfliktgespräche mit Gott: Eine Anthropologie der Psalmen (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 18 refers to the “Majestätspredikation” of Ps 104:1ab, and views it as a good example of “anschauungsgebundenes räumliches Denken” in creation psalms.

E.g. J.H. Eaton, Kingship and the Psalms (SBT; London: SCM, 1976). He does not regard Ps 104 as a royal psalm, but suggests it regarding Ps 91, 92, 94 and perhaps 102. For T.E. Mullen, The Divine Counsel in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature (HSM 24; California: Scholars Press, 1980), 201 Ps 104:1-13 is indicative of YHWH’s victory over the Flood-dragon, and through this victory he is enthroned as king over the gods, the members of the divine counsel. See also Ps 29:1-2, 3-9; Ps 24:2; 74:12-17; 89:8-12; Isa 51:9. Yet Ps 104:1-3 has no reference to a divine counsel. Wilson, “Shaping the Psalter,” 76, regards Ps 104, with Ps 101 and 103 as part of the Davidic Psalms, distinguished from the

In the Psalter הַפִּית “to cover” has a low frequency, occurring in 71:13; 109:19, 29 (Qal); 84:7; 89:46 (Hi). In Ps 104 it does not directly point to the creative activity of YHWH, but contributes in presenting YHWH as an active deity in the realm of creation.

T. Podella, Das Lichtkleid JHWHs: Untersuchungen zur Gestalthaftigkeit Gottes im Alten Testament und seiner altorientalischen Umwelt (FAT 15; Tübingen: JCB Mohr), 232 argues that Ps 93 and 104 “gehören mindestens in der gemeinsamen Rede vom Kleid Gottes eng zusammen.” But whereas Ps 93 has a “tempelkultische Orientierung,” Ps 104 has a “weisheitliche Orientierung.” Ps 104:1-9 is also comparable with Ps 89:5-18, but the latter has a different focus. Cf. Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 116.

P. Ballhorn, Zum Telos des Psalters, 125; McCann, “Psalms,” 1096.

In view of the different verbal forms the first line of v 2 does not have to be read with the last line of v 1 (ptic. הַפִּית in parallelism with the perfect תִּבְלָה), and further, the majesty and honour in the last line of v 1 qualifies the greatness (דָּםְתַלָּדְג) of YHWH described in the same verse.

373 In Ps 19:5-7 the sun is pictured as coming out of a tent.

In this regard Allen, Psalms 101-150, 33 argues that the psalmist “…paints a picture with colours borrowed from the palette of Canaanite lore, to the greater joy of the true God.” Within this painted picture, YHWH appears “royally clad in radiant light, traveling on cloud and wind, and attended by an impressive retinue.”
heavens like a curtain (הַיָּהֹן) is in line with the ancient Israelite cosmology, depicting the heavens as consisting of windowed vaults held up by columns that reach to the earth (cf. Job 26:11), or that it is like a veil or tent which God has stretched out over the earth (cf. Isa 40:22). 276 YHWH’s “covering” Himself with “light” (רָוָא) is a disputed phrase, 278 and some scholars here identify “light” (רָא) with “sun” (בָּרָא). But such a connection is difficult to substantiate on the basis of the text, which does not provide a clear reason for an identification of YHWH with the sun. 279 Rather, the reference to light emphasises the glory of YHWH and is not immediately reflective of a solarisation of the Deity. 280 The absence of any reference to the creation of light (רָא, compare Gen 1:3, רָא יָהֹן) is significant. This might bring Ps 104:2 into closer proximity with the Egyptian Hymn to Aton than with Genesis 1. Then again, the reference to YHWH stretching out the heavens in v 3 reflects a closer affinity with Genesis 1 (see §2.5.1 & 2.5.2). In Ps 104 the “heavens” (לָמְךָ) is YHWH’s creation and His abode. 281 Despite His elevated and celestial status, YHWH’s providential care for and control over the whole of His creation is made unambiguously clear in Ps 104, since here divine transcendence does not imply divine apathy.

The exact translation of the opening line of verse 3, which describes YHWH’s “laying the beams of His roof-chamber in the waters” (וֹעַתּ לֶא רֶמֶנָה רֶמֶנָה), 283 is problematic due to the unclear nature of the imagery employed (see also Amos 9:6). 284 Whatever the exact nature, this imagery continues the doxological tone of vv

275 The verb הָרַנְנַ to stretch out” occurs numerously in the Psalter. In the Qal Ps 17:11; 18:10; 21:12; 40:2; 44:19; 62:4; 73:2; 102:12; 109:23; 119:51, 112, 157; 136:12; Hi 17:6; 27:9; 31:3; 45:11; 49:5; 71:2; 78:1; 86:1; 88:3; 102:3; 116:2; 119:36; 125:5; 141:4; 144:5. The verb could of course also be used in the sense of pitching a tent (Gen 12:8; 26:25; 2 Sam 16:22; Isa 54:2). Houtman, Der Himmel, 211 regards “heaven” in 104:2b as comparable with a tent flap.


277 Other occurrences of רָא in the Psalter include 27:1; 36:10; 37:6; 56:14; 78:14; 89:16; 119:105; 136:7; 139:11; 148:3; 38:11; 44:4; 97:11; 112:4 (subject); 4:7; 36:10; 43:3; 49:20 (object).

278 For L. Boström, The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs (CBOTS 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 152 the majesty of the creator in Ps 104 is manifested in the sun, and the power of life brought to all creatures.

279 Dahood, Psalms III, 33-34.

280 J.G. Taylor, Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel (JSOTSup 111; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 230 states that psalmist distanced himself from the concept within Atenism that God was the same as the sun as a physical object. It is also not clear to what extent the poetic imagery reflects a solar understanding of YHWH or whether this imagery reflects a notion of God as solar within the cult. Whether Ps 104 should be interpreted as a polemic against sun worship also remains unclear. What is clear for Taylor is that there was a need to react against a simplistic equation of God and physical sun and that this is arguable on the basis of Genesis 1. Podella, Das Lichtkleid JHWHs, 233 addresses the question whether or not a so-called process of “Solarisierung” is noticeable within Ps 104 (in this regard it could be compared with the so-called “Morgenmotief” in Priestly theology, which is connected with the theme of כָּלָק). Miller, “The Poetry of Creation,” 89 sees the equation of “light” and “glory” as appropriate, since the כָּלָק, which in the priestly tradition and elsewhere is a symbol of God’s presence, is itself the image of light and radiance. Here one can also compare the work of Keel concerning the solarisation in later YHWH religion.

281 Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 89. As merism “heaven and earth” do not present opposites, but are rather part of the created order of YHWH who comes down from His heavenly abode to establish (כָּלָק) the foundations of the earth (v 5), imposing His benevolent order.

282 Here the reference to the “waters” (לָמְךָ) is related to the heavenly sphere, and is a recurring theme within the psalm, as symbol of chaos but also of divine providence.

283 Podella, Das Lichtkleid JHWHs, 236. Here as in Jer 10, reference is made to the atmospheric qualities of YHWH. Cf. H. Weippert, Schöpfer des Himmels und der Erde: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie
1-2, emphasising the exalted state of YHWH, whose rule reaches from His “heavenly abode” (הֵיכָן, “roof-chamber”) to the “foundations” (הֵיכֹן) of the earth (v 5). Interpreting the imagery employed in v 3 requires sensitivity for the wider ancient Near Eastern and biblical context, while recognising that these literary and religious motifs have been recycled by the psalmist, putting them to his own theological use in describing the exalted status of the omnipotent creator in creation. This is particularly reflected in the depiction of YHWH as “rider of the clouds,” He “makes” (לְבָנָת) the “clouds” (לָבָנָת) His “chariot” (בלָע), and “walks” (וֹלֵכַת) upon the “wings” (ברך) of the “wind” (וֹרְךָ). By means of employing familiar ancient Near Eastern mythological motifs, the psalmist presents YHWH as driving His chariot across the clouds, with the wings of the chariot being those of the cherubim (v 4). The purpose of this imagery is to establish the exalted status of YHWH in the heavens and as such within creation. For this purpose the use of יָרְךָ is significant, since it may present a vehicle for divine movement (in Ezek 10:17 יָרְךָ is such a vehicle for movement). Yet, in v 4 the pural (כָּלֶךָ) is used, pointing to messengers of YHWH

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des Jeremiabuches (SBB 102; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 30. Heaven and the accompanying meteorological phenomena could be seen as constituting the heavenly abode and palace of the “Königsgottes.” Cf. Dahood, Psalms III, 34, interpreting הֵיכָן in v 3 and 13 as a reference to the palace of YHWH. Also F. Hartenstein, “Wolkendunkel und Himmelsfeste: Zur Genese und theologische use in describing the exalted status of the omnipotent creator in creation. This is particularly reflected in the depiction of YHWH as “rider of the clouds,” He “makes” (לְבָנָת) the “clouds” (לָבָנָת) His “chariot” (בלָע), and “walks” (וֹלֵכַת) upon the “wings” (ברך) of the “wind” (וֹרְךָ). By means of employing familiar ancient Near Eastern mythological motifs, the psalmist presents YHWH as driving His chariot across the clouds, with the wings of the chariot being those of the cherubim (v 4). The purpose of this imagery is to establish the exalted status of YHWH in the heavens and as such within creation. For this purpose the use of יָרְךָ is significant, since it may present a vehicle for divine movement (in Ezek 10:17 יָרְךָ is such a vehicle for movement). Yet, in v 4 the pural (כָּלֶךָ) is used, pointing to messengers of YHWH.

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285 Here we can note the similar entitlement of Baal as “rider of the clouds” (רָקִיבּ הָאַרֵאַס) in Ugaritic material. Cf. Mullen, The Divine Counsel, 148; J. Day, Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan (JSOTSup 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 91, 93. But Day does not share the opinion that the Ugaritic רָקִיבּ הָאַרֵאַס (“rider of the clouds”) has its exact equivalent in the expression תְּלָרָת (לָרָת) (“rider of the steppes”) as used of YHWH in Ps 68:5. He considers the possibility that it is a deliberate distortion of the epithet רָקִיבּ הָאַרֵאַס for Baal. Here the argument of M.S. Smith, The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 168 is suggestive, namely that this entitlement reflects a political conflict language in Ugaritic material, which passed into the literature of ancient Israel. For such instances in the HB he cites Deut 33:26, Ps 104:3 and Ps 68:5. Such “political use” is also found in Ps 89, paralleling YHWH (divine king) and David (human king).

286 Here we can compare 2 Sam 22:11, “And He rode upon a cherub and did fly: and He was seen upon the wings of the wind”; Ps 18:11, “He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: He did fly upon the wings of the wind”; Hab 3:8, “You rode upon your horses” and “chariots of salvation.” Cf. Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 93-94. Also Briggs, Psalms, 337-38, who reads בּעָק (“cherub”) for בּעָר (“his chariot”) as in Ps 18:11 (HB), on account of the parallelism with הֵיכָן in both passages.

287 Houtman, Der Himmel, 219 considers the clouds as portraying YHWH’s chariot.

288 While תְּלָרָת “to set” occurs numerously in the Psalter, its use in Book IV is rather limited, cf. 91:9; 104:9; 105:21; 27. In Ps 104 it contributes to create an image of the creator as having control over creation, and creation as a place to be trusted.

289 In the HB Psalter יָרְךָ occurs in the Pi in 38:7; 55:15; 81:14; 85:14; 86:11; 89:16; 104:10; 26; 115:7; 131:1; 142:4. Here YHWH is said to walk upon the wings of the wind, while in Ps 18:11 He is said to “fly” (בָּדָא) on the wings of the wind.

290 Dahood, Psalms III, 35. Yet O. Keel and C. Uehlihnger, Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole: Neue Erkenntnisse zur Religionsgeschichte Kanaans und Israels aufgrund bislang unerschlossener ikonographischer Quellen (QD 134; Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 352 regards the clouds as YHWH’s chariot. Also Isa 19:1, where YHWH rides on clouds toward Egypt.

291 For this reason the argument that YHWH’s “cloud chariot” is being drawn by “winged horses” is less tenable.

who are at His disposal and are set in motion for the divine purpose.\textsuperscript{293} This theme extends into v 4.

The translation of \textit{verse 4} is problematic. A plausible translation is “He makes the wind his messengers; Flames of fire his ministers.”\textsuperscript{294} In such a translation j\textsuperscript{w} is as a designation for the messengers of YHWH,\textsuperscript{295} but the question remains whether t\textsuperscript{yw} here refers to “spirits” or “angels”, and cannot be neutrally interpreted in meteorological terms.\textsuperscript{296} The description of YHWH’s messengers (see also Ps 103:20; 148:2; Isa 44:26; Job 4:18; 33:23) being accompanied by fire could have a “warlike” function, but also a function of praising the deity within the divine assembly.\textsuperscript{297} While the imagery is intended to depict the glory of YHWH within the heavens, any clear reference to a divine council is lacking. The description of YHWH’s ministers (\textit{tr\textsuperscript{v}}) as \texttt{va f\textsuperscript{H} “a flaming fire” requires clarification. In the Canaanite pantheon “fire” (\texttt{va}) and “flame” (f\textsuperscript{H}, ptc.) functioned as two minor deities, but became serviceable to YHWH (c.f. Ps 97:3; Joel 2:3) in Israelite religion.\textsuperscript{298} In this verse we encounter a mythological allusion that is cast in a new theological mould. Of central importance is the description of YHWH as creator, as the one that “makes” (\texttt{hc\textsuperscript{[}}, also vv 13, 19, 24 x 2, 31).\textsuperscript{299}

\textbf{Verses 5-9: Focus on the Earth}

In \textit{verse 5} the emphasis shifts from YHWH’s heavenly abode to the earthly realm, with \texttt{\textit{Åra}} in vv 5 and 9 forming an inclusio. At issue in vv 5-9 are past events, as indicated by the use of the perfects \texttt{dsy “laid” and of \texttt{\textit{µyc “set” in v 9}.\textsuperscript{300} In v 5 YHWH

\textsuperscript{293} Schüngel-Straumann, \textit{Rua\textsuperscript{h} bewegt die Welt}, 72. In vv 27-30 j\textsuperscript{w} has a very different function, serving as an indication of YHWH’s “life force.”


\textsuperscript{295} Mullen, \textit{Divine Council}, 197.

\textsuperscript{296} Wiggins, “Tempestuous Wind,” 14.

\textsuperscript{297} Mullen, \textit{Divine Council}, 199. The imagery within Ps 104:4 is comparable to the image of Yam’s messengers as flames of fire. Within the religion of the ANE fire imagery played an important role and its influence within this verse is undeniable.

\textsuperscript{298} Dahood, \textit{Psalms III}, 35. Also Mullen, \textit{Divine Council}, 197 who argues that although the Israelite cult could recognise the worship of YHWH alone, it was possible to place personified members of the heavens alongside this only God, as the warriors and allies of YHWH. So e.g. Ps 57:5 stresses the exaltation of God “above the heavens.”

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\textsuperscript{300} Allen, \textit{Psalms 101-150}, 32 this distribution of \texttt{hc\textsuperscript{[} points to a concentric structure within the psalm. In the Psalter \texttt{hc\textsuperscript{[}} has a wide distribution, but not so in the fourth book (90-106) of the Psalter, where the verb occurs predominantly in the Qal (95:5, 6; 96:5; 98:1; 99:4; 100:3; 101:3, 7; 103:6, 10, 18, 20, 21; 104:19, 24; 105:5; 106:3, 19, 21), with one occurrence in the Ni (33:6) and Pu (139:15). The noun \texttt{hc\textsuperscript{[}} “creator” does not occur within the fourth book of the Psalter and has an otherwise slim distribution (Ps 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 136:4; 5, 7, 149:2 and as subject in 115:8; 135:18).

is depicted as divine architect who established (דָּשַׁי pf.) the earth (ארא) on its foundations (שָׁק). That creation has been secured, and that it will remain secure is indicated by the use of the negative וּבָּא and the imperfect מִשָּׂא (“be removed”), which is complimented by the use of יִשָּׂא (“forever”). Verse 5 depicts creation as divinely established and secure (also Amos 9:6), and while YHWH “rebukes” the waters in v 7, no real Chaoskampf motif as in Ps 74 is present in vv 5-9. But here “the waters,” indicative of the primeval waters, i.e. life-threatening chaos, are set in its place rather than eliminated (also Job 38:8-11), making possible the conditions for life. In this context the stability of creation is stressed, which will not be removed (מִשָּׂא) by the forces of chaos (cf. 93:1; 96:10).

Verse 6 shifts from the masculine singular participles in vv 2-5 (“who covers,” “lays,” “makes”), to the second person also used in v 1. Verse 7 continues with the use of second person suffixes. The foundations (הַשָּׁק) of the earth, implied by the third person suffix, is said to be covered (שָׁק) with the “deep” (ףֶּתָּה), which serves as a “garment” (נַדָּל). In Ps 104 פֶּתָּה is stripped of its mythological garb and turned into

“Wolkendunkel und Himmelsfeste,” 165 regards דָּשַׁי in v 5 as the Leitwort in vv 5-9, pointing to the “Eindämmung des Meeres (und damit des ‘Chaos’) und die Ausgestaltung des Festlands (mit den Bergen) in vom Himmel her vorgezeichneten architektonischen Grenzen. Die Welt erscheint als ein wohl geplantes ‘Gebäude’ und JHWH als ihr königlicher Baumeister.”

For דָּשַׁי “lay the foundations” in the Psalter, cf. Ps 42:2; 78:69; 89:12; 102:26; 104:8; 119:152; 8:3 (Pi). Also Job 38:4 and Prov 3:19.

Unlike Job 38:4 where דָּשַׁי is also used, Ps 104 does not dispute YHWH as establisher of the foundations of the earth. A similar phrase also occurs in Ugaritic literature (מסת 아ָרָ) as pointed out by Dahood, Psalms III, 35-36 who wishers to see a Canaanite-Phoenician influence in Ps 104.

For Barr, The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality, 77 Ps 104 (5-9) exhibits a closer affinity with the recovery of creation after the flood than it does with the creation account of Genesis 1.

R.S. Watson, Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of “Chaos” in the Hebrew Bible (BZAW 341; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 158.

In the HB “waters,” as representative of primeval chaos, is never said to be eliminated from the realm of creation. This is unlike Rev 21:1 where “the sea” (כָּבָּד) is not part of the new heaven and earth.

S. Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship (vol. 1; trans. D.R. Ap. Thomas; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 144. Echoes of this struggle are heard in the enthronement hymn of Ps 93:1b-4. Also Hermisson, Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom, 51 arguing that chaos is mostly located temporally at a great distance, either before the beginning of the world or spatially, outside the boundaries of the world.

That the powers of chaos were “domesticated” instead of “demolished” does not imply a continued threat to creation, as J.D. Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) argues. Chaos remains present in creation, but as part of creation and under divine rule. That it can reassert itself in new and threatening ways is countered by God’s past and perpetual acts of creation. Creation is sustained through the continuing process of creation (see also Ps 65:6-8; Hab 3:8-11; Nah 1:4). Cf. P.D. Miller, “‘Enthroned on the Praises of Israel’: the Praise of God in Old Testament Theology,” Interpretation 39 (1985), 14-15. At every moment YHWH provides “the matrix and conditions for existence.”


For Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 92 the verb מִשָּׂא(Ni) is use in v 5 in a “cosmic sense,” i.e. referring to creation being threatened by chaotic forces.

In Ps 106:11, 17; Exod 15:5, 10 הָשָּׂא is used in reference to the adversaries. Cf. Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 39. It is not sure that הָשָּׂא belongs to the semantic field of death and the underworld.

In Ps 104:19-23 “darkness” is positively transformed. Cf. Clifford, Creation Accounts, 190. For the use of הָשָּׂא “to cover” in the HB Psalter, see 32:1 (Qal); 32:5; 40:11; 44:16; 20; 55:6; 69:8; 78:53; 85:3; 104:9; 106:11; 17; 140:10; 143:9; 147:8 (Pi) and 80:11 (Pu).

In Ps 95:4 the “depths of the earth” (ארא qm) are in the hand of YHWH and of Him are the “highest mountains” (הָשָּׁא וּשָּׂא). I.e. no part of creation falls outside the divine reach.
a piece of cosmic clothing (םֵמִים). This immediate context points away from a primordial struggle, but as already mentioned, this motif is not altogether absent. Indeed, in vv 6-18 the waters are “chased” to its designated place, benefiting divine creation. While various suggestions have been made concerning the use of מַטָּה in this context (as in Gen 1:2), it is best interpreted within the parameters of the central concern for order in Ps 104 (as in Gen 1), i.e. that everything in creation has its designated place. Boundaries are set and kept in tact by the providential creator. The use of the participles is suggestive of the notion of a continuous creation and the continued involvement of the creator in creation, rather than creation as a once-of divine act. The description of the waters standing (דרַיִם) on the mountains (ךְָרָה) could imply that the earthly mountains are here at issue, and the heavenly mountains in v 8. But the context of v 8 does not suggest such an interpretation of heavenly mountains. See below.

The waters (ךְָרָה) remain the focus of attention in verse 7, and are here described as fleeing (םָּמִים) at YHWH’s rebuke (רִג). In parallel the waters hurry away (ךָיִים) at the voice (ךְָא) of YHWH’s thunder (ךָר). Here the Chaoskampf motif is present, but lacks any real notion of an interactive struggle. For this reason the exact sense of רִג is uncertain. If we identify here a scene of cosmic strife, it can serve as a divine “war cry”, but it can also point to divine authority being imposed as in Gen 1:9, where God “says” (רְמַה) and the waters responds accordingly. Considering the absence of various elements of the Chaoskampf motif, v 7 points to the authority of YHWH’s voice in creation which is supported by the use of סָמִים (“fled”), rather

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313 Miller, The Poetry of Creation, 90. For Dahood מַטָּה equals the Ugaritic thm. If מטָה here is a reference to primordial waters, it can be read in parallel with the reference to the “waters.”

314 R.E. Murphy, The Tree of Life: an Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature (3d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 118 pointed out that the motif of the divine battle with chaos is a celebrated feature in many psalms and he cites Ps 104:6-9, 24-26 as such an instance. The battle terminology used “at the pleasure of the writer.”

315 In both cases Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 101 argues for a Canaanite rather than Mesopotamian (Tiamat) prototype for מטָה.

316 Here Miller, “The Poetry of Creation,” 96, rightly argues that “Perhaps more that any other formulation, Psalm 104 conveys the centrality of order and purpose in creation.”

317 In the HB Psalter, סָמִים presents the primary word for “escape,” and has the connotation of “faintheartedness” and “anxiety.” Cf. J.F.D. Creach, Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter (JSOTSup 217; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 30.

318 Also Ps 76:7. S.I.L. Norin, Er spaltete das Meer: Die Auszugsüberlieferung in Psalmen und Kult des Alten Israel (Lund: Gleerup, 1977), 165 regards Pss 18, 29, 77, 81, 97, 104, 135, 144 as instances of a “Gewitter-Theophanie.” In discussing the strict monism of Yahwism, Gerstenberger, Theologies, 299 argues that the HB faith rests on the acceptance of a strict monism, i.e. the one world is only conceivable as the world of one deity, as the one and only source of life. No form of chaos can remain in opposition to YHWH, and in this sense it has to be destroyed first before creation can commence. But the divine dealing with chaos is part of the process of creation in Ps 104.

319 C. Kloos, YHWH’s Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 50 compares רִג with the Ugaritic g’r “to roar.” So also Dahood, Psalms III, 36 for whom רִג denotes the roar of YHWH’s thunder. In Ps 104 the depiction of YHWH is reminiscent to a storm- or weather-god. Cf. Podella, Das Lichtkleid JHWHs, 240.

320 J. Day, Psalms (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 99 regards Ps 104:6-9 as indicative of the Chaoskampf theme and regards it as a pre-exilic.

321 That the imperfect form of the verb is used could point out that this rebuke of YHWH is not a singular event, but ongoing within creation. For Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship 1, 84 Ps 104:6ff; 135:4; 89:11ff; 33:9 presents instances of YHWH’s victory over primeval monsters. This is part of creation, but for Israel also belonged to the realm of history.
than a struggle with chaos. Likewise the use of “thunder” (µr) in Ps 104 is significant, further stressing the divine authority in creation. Thus, the waters which once presented a threat to the good order of creation now tremble at the sound of YHWH’s thunder and flee when rebuked. The waters flee to their designated place as seen in v 8, instead of being removed from creation.

Attempts at making sense of verse 8 are wide-ranging. The “waters” are still at issue as indicated by the third person plural suffix. The once threatening waters are part and parcel of divine creation and are ascribed a beneficial quality and function in v 10. In view of vv 7 and 9 the “waters” present the subject of the verbs ह[ and थ with the mountains and valleys (त्वष्ट) as accusatives of place after the verbs of motion. The “mountains” in v 8 are best related to the mountains in v 6, since this context gives no clear indication of “celestial mountains.” Of immediate concern is the reference to the “place” (µwq YHWH founded (द्वय) for the waters. As a result of the divine works it is incorporated into the fabric of creation. This theme is continued in v 9.

In vv 7-8 the “hasting away” of the waters is described. In verse 9 the focus is still on the waters and as such is connected to vv 7-8. YHWH has set (µy) a boundary (ल्वघ) that the waters may not transgress (compare Job 38:10-11 where a boundary is set for the sea). The implication is that it may not return divine creation to a state of chaos by means of covering (हस्क) the earth. It is not eliminated, but limited, and in

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322 In terms of Mowinckel’s theory Pss 47, 93 and 95-100 depict the enthronement of YHWH as king of the gods (95:3; 96:4; 97:7), while YHWH is also presented as “lord of the sea” (93:3-4; 98:7-8). The floods, great waters and sea thus present the powers of chaos that YHWH subdues, similar to Baal’s battle with ūn in the Ugaritic Baal-cycle. Cf. Smith, The Ugaritic Baal Cycle, 11-12; A.R. Petersen, The Royal God: Enthronement Festivals in ancient Israel and Ugarit? (JSOTSup 259; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 16. Also Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 100. Day, Psalms, 67-87 favours Mowinckel’s thesis that the kingship of YHWH has a cultic setting in Israel, the feast of Tabernacles.

323 This echoes Ps 93:4 “YHWH on high is mightier than the noise of many waters (µ्ष) than the mighty waves of the sea (µ्ष).” Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 100; Day, Psalms, 67-87 is in favour of continuing the thesis of Mowinckel that the theme of YHWH’s kingship, with which the divine victory over the dragon and the sea was closely associated, had its cultic setting in ancient Israel in the feast of Tabernacles.

324 E.F. Sutcliffe, “Note on Psalm 104:8.” VT 2 (1952): 177-179 pointed out that explanations usually fall in one of two categories, either those taking regarding the mountains as subject of the verb, or those that take the mountains as object and the waters as subject. The Vulgate, LXX and Peshitta render the text with the mountains as subject. The author of Ps 104 probably had in mind the Palestinian landscape with its natural phenomena, implying that the description in v 8 should be read in its natural sense.

325 In vv 8b, 9 the waters can refer to the ocean, as in Gen 1:9.

326 The phrase तुष्क थ्रिय (they go down to the depths”) in Ps 107:26. For Dahood, Psalms III, 37 for whom the use of न य थ्रिय and न य थ्रिय describes the action set forth in e.g. Gen 7:11, 8:2; Prov 3:20, 8:28.

327 Contra Dahood, Psalms III, 36.

328 Briggs, Psalms, 333, 338 argued for the dependence of v 9 on v 7 as final clause.

329 Cf. Kraus, Psalmen, 882, who argues that “Den chaotischen Wassern ist eine Grenze gesetzt, die nicht mehr überschritten werden kann.” This view is not entirely shared by F. Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” in: A. Laato and J.C. de Moor (eds.), Theodicy in the World of the Bible (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 287 for whom the imagery employed within these verses point out that the chaotic waters are not passive before YHWH, but offer resistance and as such are rebuked, eventually taking flight. This view is not shared.
this sense excluded from creation as beneficial place (cf. the use of fwrn v 5). The divine established boundaries are secure. This imagery is comparable to that of Job 38:8-11 and Prov 8:29. Ps 104:9 reiterates that YHWH does not eradicate the chaotic waters. The boundaries set by YHWH constitute the conditions for ordered life as is described in v 10f. The perfect forms in vv 5 and 9 of dys and µc are used as reference to past events of divine creation, and imply that chaos remains outside the boundaries of the good ordered world. In Ps 104 however it is within the framework of creation that chaos is designated to its proper place, with limits set for it. As a result creation continues despite the presence of chaos in its bounds. This is significant for the discussion of vv 29 and 35.

**Verses 10-13: The Focus on the Earth Continues**

It has been proposed that in verse 10 the original text of Ps 104 resumes, which was interrupted after v 4 by so-called redactional insertions. Verse 10 does have a new focus, but the reference to springs (fy in the valleys (jn) that go (ûh) among the mountains indicates that one cannot speak of a complete break in theme, since it recalls the theme of v 8. With v 10a the psalm moves from a description of theophany, to the praise of the order of nature. The latter is comparable to Ps 19, where creation declares the glory of YHWH. The threatening waters of the preceding verses is transformed in v 10 into beneficial springs, which go (ûh) among the valleys and between the mountains. YHWH is responsible for sending (jlv, ptc.) these springs, just as he rebuked the waters in v 7. In v 10 waters in the form of springs serve as a source of sustenance, as seen in v 11.

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**Footnotes:**

330 For Hermisson, “Observations,” 49-50 this is a creation concept typical of wisdom. He observes that in this instance Ps 104 must not be compared with Gen 1, but rather with texts like Ps 89:10-14/9-13, Ps 93, starting from the confrontation of creation and chaos. In his view Ps 93 serve as an example where creation is not primarily perceived as something belonging to the distant past, but as an event which is presently repeating itself - being experienced at the festival.

331 This imagery recalls the words used by God to establish a covenant with Noah and every living creature, namely that the waters will no longer become a flood, destroying all flesh (Gen 9:11, 15). Gen 9 refers only to the waters in heaven, with YHWH setting His bow in the clouds to prevent it (9:13).

332 Dahood, Psalms III, 37 postulates a common literary source for all three texts. Ps 104:9 is also similar in theme to Gen 1:6-7, where the ordering of the world from chaos commences with God’s placing a firmament (yq) between the earth and the waters above it, and by assigning a fixed place to the waters below the firmament, thus fixing a boundary for the deep that it may not pass.

333 Comparable is the Priestly creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a, where creation by means of divine speaking (rma) and separation (lydbh) makes possible the conditions for life. Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology, 173 observed that P puts the theological question in much more fundamental terms than J, raising the question concerning the potential impact of corrupted humanity in bringing about a revision or annihilation of the created world described in Gen 1.


335 C. Westermann, The Praise of God in the Psalms (trans. KR Crim; Richmond; John Knox, 1965), 129-130 regards Ps 104:10-30 as a descriptive psalm of praise of the creator that upholds and preserves, alongside the creator who saves.

336 Spieckermann, Heilsgegenwart, 32.

337 In the HB Psalter jlv “to send” occurs in the Ni in 44:3; 74:7; 78:45, 49; 89:12; 81:13; 104:30; 106:15.

338 Kraus, Psalmen, 882, “Das tödliche Wasserchaos wird zum Lebensquell, der die Tiere des Feldes und die Vögel des Himmels erquickt.” Here it is difficult to determine the exact sense of the use of jlv, but it can have the meaning “to pour out” as in Ps 105:10. Cf. Dhorme, Job, 452.
By means of providing drink ((jqv, Hi)339 to every beast of the field (ydc wny Ak), the beneficial nature of the springs (ydkm) is made clear in verse 11. The psalmist elaborates on this theme by referring to the wild asses (arp) that quench (rbv) their thirst (anx). The reference to different animals is here not so much representative of the ancient Near Eastern Listenwissenschaft, as it is in making clear YHWH’s providence for the most diverse assemblage of creatures.340

In terms of translation and interpretation, verse 12 is not easy. In its immediate context “by them” (µhyl[) points to the springs of v 11, making the verse rather clumsy. It could also serve to indicate that the springs serve as source of nourishment even for the fowls (¹ψ) of heaven, since they habituate (κνv) near the waters, giving (τν)341 voice from among the foliage (ύ[). If however ψ is interpreted as “branches,” v 12 should be read in tandem with v 16 which mentions the trees of YHWH, in which the birds are said to nest in v 17. In v 12 the emphasis is not on the habitat of the birds of heaven, but rather on the joyful nature of the springs, i.e. as a place for quenching their thirst and for looking for food. As such the waters have a double nurturing function.

The imagery employed in verse 13 is reminiscent of v 3 and v 10. In v 13 YHWH irrigates (jqv, Hi ptc.) the mountains from His chambers (hya[),342 being portrayed as divine horticulturalist, acting from above.343 But also as divine caretaker within creation, since the earth is satisfied ([bc, impf.)344 by the fruit (yrp) of “His” works ([bc[m second person suffix, pointing to YHWH).345 The focus has shifted from the birds of the heaven to the earth. In this regard vv 13-15 constitute a chain of consecutive purposes in creation.346 They contribute to the depiction of YHWH in Ps 104 as acting “from above,” but also “within” creation.

**Verse 14-18: Focus on Divine Providence (Food and Safe Dwelling)**

The basic theme of v 13 continues in verse 14, but the specific focus of vv 14-18 is YHWH’s provision of food and safe dwelling. YHWH is responsible for the growing (jmx, Hi ptc) of the grass (ryj) and the herb (bc[)347 which are beneficial for cattle

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339 In the HB Psalter jqv “cause to drink” occurs in the Hi in 36:9; 60:5; 69:22; 78:15, 45; 80:6; 104:13.
340 Such descriptions of nature are often found in liturgical or sapiential praise, as argued by L. Alonso Schökel, A Manual of Hebrew Poetics (StBibl 11; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1988), 14-15. Ps 104 and Sir 43 provide two examples of such descriptions of nature. In Ps 104:12, 20, 23 the realistic description of nature contrasts with the “total imaginative transformation of vv 2-3. As such, nature serves as source of inspiration for poetical praise of God. See also Ps 18, 29, 77; Job 38-39 and Hab 3. Within such nature based descriptive poetry, “The immense God, the synthesis of polarities, is experienced by man positively and negatively, by opposing contrasting qualities.”
341 For ττυ“to give”, in the Psalter cf. 99:7; 104: 27, 28; 105:11, 32, 44; 106:15; 41, 46.
342 The psalmist shares the ancient Near Eastern tripartite worldview, locating the dwelling place of the deity in the heavens.
343 Here YHWH “irrigating” contrasts with instances where He withholds the gift of rain, e.g. Jer 14:1-15; Joel 1:4-20; 2:15-20.
344 For [bc “to satisfy” in the Qal, see also 17:14, 15; 22:27; 37:19; 59:16; 63:6; 65:5; 78:29; 88:4; 104: 16, 28; 123:3, 4.
345 See also T. Booij, “Psalm 104:13b: 'the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.’” Biblicala 70 (1989): 409-412.
347 In Gen 3:17 the “herb” (bc[) is mentioned with thorns and thistles in the context of a divine curse.
(hmhb) and humanity (µda) respectively. YHWH is responsible for the growing of the herb, but also gives it to humanity to cultivate, so that it can bring out (axy Hi) food (µĮ1) from the earth. This indicates YHWH’s immediate involvement in creation. YHWH acts within creation, in the same way that He acts in history. In vv 14-23 the psalmist marvels at the order discernable in the natural world. Verse 14 portrays a rather close affinity with Gen 1:29-30. If the suggestion of the critical apparatus is to be followed, regarding humanity as having the task of cultivating the earth, then it also stands in close proximity with Gen 1:28. But Ps 104 is far removed from the anthropocentricity of Gen 1:28 (or Ps 8), and lacks any notion of human domination over the earth or animals. This difference presents an example of the theological diversity of the HB creation theology. In v 14 the emphasis is on divine providence rather than human responsibility. This theme of divine care continues in v 15.

In verse 15 human cultures come into sight. Wine makes glad (j m, Pi) the heart of man; oil makes his face shine (l hnx, Hi); and bread sustains (d s) man’s heart. In this way the advantageous character of human culture and labour (wine, oil, bread) is brought into focus (cf. Deut 7:13 for staple products of Palestine). Nevertheless YHWH remains the subject in vv 14b-15. Given the interest of these verses, it might be fair to argue that within the context of Ps 104, the Psalmist’s vision of humanity is clearly reflected, namely that they are mortal, that they have to labour, but at the same time that God has provided that they are satiated through labour (‘wine gladdens the heart’; ‘oil makes the face shine’; ‘bread strengthens the heart’).

The theme of divine providence lingers on in verse 16, but the specific focus now rests on the trees of YHWH (hmby x̱), namely the cedars of Lebanon (ábl zṟa). YHWH planted ( fn) them, and their nourishment is indicated by the fact that they are satisfied (bc), i.e. full of sap. This provides a link with the previous theme of water as nourishment, but also with the following theme in v 17 where the trees provide suitable habitation. This is indicative of YHWH’s works of creation being both functional and beneficial.

Verse 17 continues the basic idea of v 16, indicating that within the greater scope of creation everything has its particular place and function. The trees of YHWH are still in focus, but here the earlier theme of the birds (v 12) reappears. In v 17 the birds (rwpx) nest (mn, Pi) in the trees of YHWH. A specification occurs since the stork (hdysj) has the Cyprus tree (vwrb) as habitat (hxb). This contributes to the idea that all created beings are assigned to their proper and particular temporal and local spaces.

The theme of beneficial habitation continues in verse 18, but here the earlier theme of the “mountains” (µIr) reappears. The high mountains (µpgh µIr) are described as a place of “refuge” (hby for the “mountain goats” (l y, while the “cliffs” (µĮ1 s) offer a place of “refuge” (hs j m for the “rock badger” (pc). It is here made clear that

348 Kraus, Psalmen, 883 comments, “Bis in das Innerstse des Menschen reicht die erfreuende und erfrischende Gabe des Schöpfers…”.
349 Allen, Psalms 101-150, 27.
350 Contra Gen 3:19, “in the sweat of your face will you eat your bread.”
351 In 1 Kgs 4:33 Solomon exhibits his wisdom and speaks of the cedar tree in Lebanon, of beast and fowl, creeping things, and fishes.
even those animals in creation which are mostly out of site due to their dwelling in remote places are properly cared for by YHWH (cf. Job 39).  

**Verses 19-23: Focus on Experiential Time**

As indicated divine providence concerning food and habitation is the main theme vv 14-18. In vv 19-23 the focus shifts to the notion of time. In verse 19 two great lights, namely the moon (יָם) and the sun (רֵאָם) are at issue (cf. Gen 1:16). The moon is said to have been made (הכ) by YHWH for seasons (בי נם) while the sun also knows (דית) its proper time. As in Priestly creation account the sun and moon and darkness and light are not merely part of a sequence of creative acts, but are created for a purpose. It now serves as a “Zeitbestimmung.” In this way the luminaries in Ps 104, as in Gen 1, have been stripped of their mythological garb, loosing their divine status. They no longer represent divinities, but divine acts of creation. In §2.5.1.1 and 2.5.1.2 the affinities between Ps 104 and the Akhenaton hymn and Genesis 1:1-2:4a respectively are considered. The perception of the luminaries in v 19 agrees with that of Gen 1, while the theme of the greater context of v 19 is nearer to that of the Egyptian hymn to Aton. That the luminaries in Ps 104 have no divine qualities does not have to imply that Ps 104 is polemical in nature. Particularly as a polemic against solar worship. The question is not whether YHWH is assimilated with the sun (Aton / Shamash), but whether qualities of the luminaries, in particular the sun, are ascribed to YHWH. In Ps 104 the latter seems to be the case and is considered later in this chapter. Still, the general tone of Ps 104 is doxological and not polemical. The sun and moon are connected with designated times, and as such related to the theme of the good order of creation.

The theme of time continues in verse 20, where the “darkness” (עָנִי) is stripped of its usual negative connotations, gaining a beneficial quality. In Gen 1:4 God divides (לָכֵח) light (רֶאָם) from darkness (עָנִי), and in Ps 104:20 YHWH appoints (תַּיָּר, impf.) darkness (עָנִי) to its proper place. As such darkness is part of the divine works of creation and falls within the range of divine omnipotence. Further, YHWH seems to appoint darkness for a purpose. Darkness and night (הָנִּים) are here closely related. At night the beasts (הַיְּתִים) of the forest (רֹאָמ) move about (כָּרֶב), with the intention to

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354 Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 92. The moon is created for seasons (לִיָּרָם), and the sun knows its time (so v 22), or put differently, its coming (אלים).
355 Kraus, *Psalmen*, 884-5. In Ps 104 the sun is not, as in the Hymn to Aton, a life-carrying and radiating divinity.
357 Here Kraus, *Psalmen*, 883 argues for the distinction of vv 19-24 from Gen 1, since Ps 104 deviates in its basic thinking from Gen 1 in these verses. Here YHWH’s power and wisdom is reflected by the good-ordered nature of creation in its entirety. Cf. Job 12:7ff. Also Isa 6:3, “the whole earth is full of His glory” Further Von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 204.
359 Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 190.
360 Neither here nor in Gen 1 is עָנִי said to be created. In Gen 1:3 “light” (רֶאָם) is created by means of divine fiat (רֵאָם יִהְיֶה), yet such a depiction is lacking in Ps 104.
It is a time of abundant activity. The emphasis is not on the nature of darkness, but rather its beneficial qualities. Here again the purposefulness of divine creation becomes clear, since “night time” here implies “feeding time” (cf. v 21). Animals associated with the night profit from divine order in creation. This transformation of an otherwise negative concept (ûvj) is similar to the transformation of the threatening waters earlier in vv 10-13. But different form the waters ûvj retains a dark edge as seen in v 21.

In verse 21 the psalmist describes the eerie, but impressive sound of a pack of lions roaring in the dark of night, roaming for food. But here it is particularly the young lions (rypk) that roar (gav, ptc.) for prey (¹rf), seeking (vqâb) from God their food (lka). Thus, at night death enters the description of the divinely ordered creation. The imagery used expands the theme of creation’s dependence on the creator and this applies even to the noble lion. God (lâ) is here also depicted as the one that nourishes. The creator God becomes the God that feeds. In this way the darkness of the night remains somewhat ambiguous. The young lions look to God for food, but God is not directly said to “kill” or to hunt their prey for them, even if this idea is not absent from v 20 (cf. vv 27-28). Nevertheless the intent in v 20 is to describe God’s nurture of creation, attributed here an almost parental role, seeing that the young lions look to God rather than their parents for food. While God is also established as the lord and ruler over nature and animals, it does not carry the connotation of subjugation. In this way it departs from the more common ancient Near Eastern motif of the deity’s suppression of the animal world. Rather, the mountain goat and lion alike depend on the outstretched, caring hand of YHWH.

The sun (vmv) reappears in verse 22. Here it rises (jrz, contra v 19 where it sets) and the lions gather (³sa) and retreat to lie down (Åbr) in their lairs (hn[m], satisfied by divine providence. Within the framework of the creation theology of Ps 104, the rising of the sun marks a fixed time. The time of the lions’ activity has passed, while the time for humankind’s (µda) labour is just commencing (v 23). In this context the “rising of the sun” has been deprived of mythological allusions, serving to introduce a time period that stretches until the evening (v 23). In terms of the psalmist’s theology, YHWH is not to be associated with the sun.

The fixed time introduced by the rising of the sun in v 22 continues in verse 23. Here however the focus shifts to “humankind” (µda), with the reference to humanity finding its place within the framework of the description of nature, and not as a distinct category of creation. With the rising of the sun mankind goes out (axy) to his work (l[p]), and to his labour (hdwb[ ]) until evening (br[ ]). The lions’ rest is contrasted with human activity. While the time of day is described as the time for human labour, a limit has also been set for this period of labour, namely the evening, as indicated by the preposition d (“until”). Exactly what this human labour entails is not recounted in the psalm, but man is said to go “to” (l) his labour. As such the description of human labour here does not carry the negative connotation of Gen 3:19. It is not the result

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361 Cf. Gen 1:21, 24-26 for a reference to “creeping” (cmn) animals.

362 This is indicated by the specific use of rypk (“young lion”) instead of yra (“lion”).

363 See also Job 37:8 “Then the beasts go into dens (br[a], and remain in their places.”

364 The reality of “thorns and thistles” that becomes part of creation in Gen 3:18 seem distant within the context of Ps 104, but the psalmist does not turn a blind eye for creation’s dark edges.
of sin, but part of the natural flow of divinely established time. It fits within the framework of creation.\textsuperscript{365}

**Verses 24-30: Focus on the Works of YHWH**

With **verse 24** a shift in focus occurs.\textsuperscript{366} YHWH is still the object of praise, but a new subject is introduced into the psalm.\textsuperscript{367} This comprises the wisdom (םיהוב) by means of which the “manifold” (أخبار) “works” (בכ[מ] of YHWH are said to have been “made” (כ[]).\textsuperscript{368} This new theme is not entirely detached from the preceding verses, seeing the reference to the earth being full (אלמ of the riches ( rdr) of YHWH. What is entirely new is the qualification of YHWH’s works by means of the reference to wisdom.\textsuperscript{369} While the reference to the works of YHWH is in line with the general doxological character of the psalm, it also presents a contrast with human labour mentioned in v 23, which is set within the parameters of divine labour,\textsuperscript{370} if for no other reason than stressing the theme of the magnificence of the creator. YHWH’s works are described as manifold and not limited to a fixed time. The new idea here introduced into the psalm, concerning the divine חֵן, is comparable to the declarations of Prov 3:19 and Job 28:13-23, where the question of revelation through wisdom comes to the fore. This declaration of YHWH’s creation through (ב) wisdom latches on to a central theme in the psalm, namely the “purposefulness” of the divine acts of creation.\textsuperscript{371} The affinity of Ps 104 with the HB wisdom tradition will be considered in §2.5.3.\textsuperscript{372} The divine works of creation bear witness to the wisdom of

\textsuperscript{365} As in the J creation account which describes humankind (ראה) being placed in the garden of Eden to “work” ( difficulté) and to “keep” ( рем) it (Gen 2:15), i.e. to their benefit, and not in the sense of “enslavement.”

\textsuperscript{366} The theme of divine creation and providence is here interrupted by a “burst of praise and a summary affirmation.” Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 92. In a sense the main argument of Ps 104 is expressed within the first colon of v 24, stressing the marvellous nature of YHWH’s work of creation (cf. Job 38:4-6). See B.S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 45.

\textsuperscript{367} In a sense the phrase תֵּכנ יִהוּד בְּלִק is premature within the context of the psalm, since the description of divine creation has not yet been completed.


\textsuperscript{369} The connection between YHWH and wisdom is particularly clear in Prov 8:22 “YHWH created me (literally “possessed me”) in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.” Also Job 28:23 “God understands the way to it, and he knows its place.”

\textsuperscript{370} Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 197. In Ps 104 nature exhibits a “providential harmony” of which mankind is an integral part, though not central to it (so also in the divine speeches of Job 38-41).

\textsuperscript{371} This theme also occurs in wisdom texts such as Prov 16:4 stating that “YHWH has made everything for its purpose…” So also Qoh 3:1-8, stating in poetic fashion that everything has its appropriate time.

\textsuperscript{372} Whether Ps 104 presents a comprehensive presentation of a wisdom conception of creation is not certain. Hermisson, “Observations,” 48. Ps 104 could also be seen as an example of a creation hymn, composed in the style of the wisdom tradition, though not a wisdom psalm as such. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 47. It does provide an instance where the theme of wisdom was incorporated into Israel’s worship.
YHWH. The creator’s wisdom is an occasion for rejoicing. The reference in v 24 to divine \textit{hmkj} is not incidental, but reflective of the main theme of the psalm.

The riches of divine creation praised in v 24 are further elaborated in \textit{verse 25}, with the psalmist pondering on the greatness (\textit{wdg}) and measureless (\textit{ḥb} \textit{rw}) nature of the sea (\textit{ḥy}) and the variety of life (\textit{ḥy}) it hosts (cf. Sir 43:24-25). The innumerable (“moving things”) (\textit{cmr}), both small (\textit{ḥq}) and great (\textit{wdg}) find a suitable habitat in the sea. While often associated with chaos, or a threat to the order of creation, the sea in v 25 gains a positive quality. It fits within the framework of divine creation, and draws praise from the psalmist. While the description of the sea points to the limited nature of human comprehension, the magnificence of divine wisdom is stressed. As a result of this mysterious element of divine creation, a moment of “fear” is retained in the rhetoric of the psalmist. The predominant stress however is on YHWH’s providential care, which does not discriminate. Taking into consideration the context of this reference to the sea, as well as the lack of any clear \textit{Chaoskampf} motif in Ps 104, does not have to be mythologised (contra Gunkel). YHWH’s “rebuke” (\textit{hr[ŋ} of the waters in v 7, which is reminiscent of a battle motif, is now merely part of the actual process of creation. The theme of the sea as part of the works of YHWH is continued in v 26.

The subject matter of \textit{verse 26} has led to much scholarly debate, yet its tone and theme are rather clear. The mysterious grandeur of the sea is further indicated by the maritime traffic that it hosts. It presents a way for the “ships” (\textit{ḥy}a) to go (\textit{ḥ} l).
further offers a habitat for Leviathan (תְּיַוַּל), whom YHWH formed (רָשֵׁי) to “play” (כֹּל, Pi inf.) in it. This description is significant, since here Leviathan, like the sea, is not presented in a negative way. Rather, the already emphasised divine care for creation also applies to Leviathan, the icon of chaos, whom YHWH formed, indeed, to play with. YHWH rejoices in His works of creation (cf. v 31). This description of an intimate relation between YHWH and Leviathan points away from any tension. Yet, the mysterious nature of Leviathan allows for a moment of awe, if not fear. Leviathan becomes bearable because it is designated its proper place among the waters, whose limits have been set by YHWH (v 9).

The theme of divine providence is resumed in verse 27, where all the creatures (םֵלֶק) of the sea wait (רְבִּכְךָ, Pi impf.) on the creator, who gives (אִתָּן, infinitive) them food (לֵכָא) in His time (תַּא), i.e. at the right moment (so Qoh 3:11 “He has made everything beautiful in its time”; Prov 16:4 “YHWH made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil”). The description of creatures waiting on YHWH for food stresses the theme of creation’s dependence on the creator, but also points out that YHWH responds to their waiting, at a time determined by Him. In this regard v 27 is reminiscent of v 21b, where the young lions seek their meat from God (לָא).

Verse 27 is closely related to v 28 (in part by the double use of אִתָּן), and together they continue the theme of divine providence, in close proximity to the works of YHWH. The desire for food expressed in v 27 is satisfied in v 28 as a result of

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383 This reference to Leviathan prompts Dahood, Psalms III, 45 to identify here a Canaanite-Phoenician background for the Psalm.
384 For רָשֵׁי “to form” in the Psalter, cf. Ps 33:15; 74:17; 94:9; 20; 95:5 and 139:16 (Pu).
385 For Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos, 58 Ps 104 states “…das Gott wirklich mit Leviathan spiele…”, reflecting a tendency of Israelite literature to mythologise. Here Norin, Er spaltete das Meer, 67 also characterises Leviathan as “ein rein mythologisches Wesen.” He sites Ps 74:14; Job 3:8 and 42:25 as further examples of this usage.
386 With בְּרִ and אֶל, H. Niehr, “The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion: Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects,” in: D.V. Edelman (ed.), The Triumph of Elohim: from Yahwism to Judaism (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 66-67 argues that there are three groups of texts that illustrate the relation of YHWH to personalised shapes of chaos, namely 1) those texts reporting that YHWH annihilates the powers of chaos, personalised as sea monsters (Is 27:1; 51:9; Job 26:12-13; Ps 74:13-14; Ps 89:11); 2) those texts indicating that YHWH keeps the sea monsters and the sea in check (Ps 104:6-9; 33:7; Prov 8:29; Job 7:11; 38:8-11; Jer 5:22; Gen 1:9-10), and 3) those texts establishing a positive relationship between YHWH and the sea monsters, also giving praise to YHWH (Ps 104:26, 148:7, Amos 9:3).
388 Contra Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence, who regards YHWH’s authority over the forces of chaos as ambiguous.
389 Kraus, Psalmen, 878, viewing the transformation of תְּיַוַּל as part of creation, which with all the content of the sea, is witness to the wisdom of the creator.
390 For the view of Leviathan as demythologised figure, see Allen, Psalms 101-150, 27. Also O. Eissfeldt, Gott und das Meer, 81. Anderson, “Mythopoeic and Theological Dimensions,” 13. Boström, The God of the Sages, 74. Room should be allowed for a greater ambiguity concerning Leviathan in this verse.
391 In Gen 1:29-30 God gives vegetation as “food” to the whole of His creation, but in Gen 9:3 “every moving thing that lives” is given as “food” (לֵכָא), in addition to the “green herb” (כֹּל) of Gen 1:29-30.
392 Fokkelman, Major Poems II, 267.
393 Ps 145:15 has a comparable image, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.”
YHWH opening His hand. All that is dependant on the sustenance of the creator is at the mercy of His outstretched hand, or averted face. Somewhat indirectly YHWH's power over life and death is here brought into focus.

In verse 28 YHWH’s role as cosmic benefactor is still at issue. In response to the waiting of the creatures in v 27, YHWH gives (ךֵּ֛ל) them and in response they gather up (כּל). This divine giving is further described by means of drawing from an ancient Near Eastern motif, with YHWH opening (יִתְפֹּן) His hand (די). As a result the waiting creatures are satisfied (בָּכָּם) with good. This brings v 28 in close proximity with v 13b, where the earth is filled (בָּכָם) with the fruit of YHWH’s work. The divine sustenance is indeed sufficient, with YHWH being solely responsible for it. The affinity with the Egyptian hymn to Aton should not be regarded as evidence for the solarisation of YHWH. It is rather an instance of familiar imagery being employed by the psalmist to affirm the exalted position of YHWH in creation, ruling over His creation as caring and sustaining lord.

Up to this point the leading themes in Ps 104 are divine providence, creaturely dependence, and the celebration of YHWH’s works. As such it has a positive tone. In verse 29 the theme of creaturely dependence continues, but now it gains a negative tone. In terms of its placement in the psalm, v 29 applies in the first instance to the creatures described in the previous verses due to the use of the third person suffix. It is they that are “troubled” (יחב, Ni) when YHWH hides (התִּיש, Hi) His face (התִפְּנ). In vv 14, 15, 23 humankind is also mentioned, but in the singular and without a suffix. Yet humankind is included in the works of YHWH and as such the events described

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394 The rather patriarchal description of divine sustenance in vv 27-30, namely YHWH’s creation at the mercy of his outstretched hand or averted face, is balanced by divine care for all of creation. Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 34.
395 Janowski, Konfliktgespräche mit Gott, 62 identifies a “Todesschreckens” motif in Ps 104:27-30 (as in Ps 30:7-8) in which the life-death dichotomy becomes clear. The result of God turning away his face is “terror” (יחב), and can lead to an experience of death in this life (e.g. Ps 88:14).
396 Taylor, Yahweh and the Sun, 228.
397 For יתפ to “open” in the Psalter, see 5:10; 37:14; 39:10; 49:5; 51:17; 78:2, 23; 105:41; 106:17; 109:2; 118:19; 145:16.
399 In the psalms divine absence is often described as an encounter with death. Anderson, The Praise of God, 33. Also Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 440. Death claims the individual when YHWH removes his presence.
400 J. Reindl, Das Angesicht Gottes im Sprachgebrauch des Alten Testaments (ETS 25; Leipzig: St Benno Verlag, 1970). For התיש “to hide” in the Psalter, cf. 55:13; 89:47 (Ni); 19:7, 13; 38:10 (Qal); 10:11; 13:2; 17:8; 22:25; 27:5, 9; 30:8; 31:21; 44:24; 51:11; 64:3; 69:18; 88:15; 102:3; 119:19; 143:7 (Hi). For occurrences of God hiding His face in the Psalter, see Ps 10:11; 13:1; 22:24; 27:9; 30:7; 34:16 (the face of YHWH against the wicked); 44:24; 51:9; 69:17; 88:14; 102:2; 132:10; 143:7. These references are mostly set within the context of affliction. In Ps 11:7 and 17:15 בת (“to see”) is used with יתפ as object. That the just will see God’s face points to a lasting relationship, not broken by the event of death. Since the “seeing of God” within these two contexts takes place after the awakening of the psalmist, the phrase may, according to H.F. van Rooy, “בת,” NIDOTE Vol. 3 (1997) 637-640, at 839, refer to awakening after death.
401 Cf. Ps 103:14 “For He knows how we were made (רכף cf. Gen 2:7); He remembers that we are dust.” Also Job 12:10, “That from His hand is the soul of every living being, and the spirit in all flesh is his gift.”
in v 29 also applies to humankind. The whole of creation is dependent on the life giving presence of YHWH. The same time all created beings are dependent on YHWH for their breath (j w), which is also in the divine hand. In this sense j w here functions synonymously with hmr in the sense of God’s “breath” (cf. Gen 2:7). If YHWH takes it away (j sa), they are certain to “die” (j v). With the event of death comes the return (b w) to their dust (r f), i.e. to that which characterises their constitution. Here death, as a return to dust, is closely related to YHWH and equal to “un-creation.” This return to dust points to a leading motif in Book IV of the HB Psalter, namely human ephemerality. In v 29 this is the primary function for the term, stressing the ephemerality, fragility and dependence of all created beings. It also affirms the relative insignificance of individual created beings within the larger frame of creation. In some instances r f is associated with the realm of the dead, but this notion is not immediately present within the context of Ps 104. Here dust concerns the constitution of created beings, rather than their fate, i.e. the place that they will go to, after the event of death. The return to dust further creates a contrast and link with the divine renewal of creation in v 30. This theme of dependence, and the connection between YHWH and life, is further explicated in v 30.

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402 Job 34:14f-15 echoes the idea that without j w everything returns to dust.
404 Schüngel-Straumann, Ruah bewegt die Welt, 73. Also Kraus, Psalmen, 886 who argues that “In Ps 104 ist die Lebensmacht die von Jahwe ausgesandte j w, die eine schöpferische Potenz ist.” A similar use of j w is encountered in the Job 33:4. Keel and Uehlinger, Göttinnen, 156 points out that the light of the sun is indicative of majesty, but also responsible for giving breath. Here life is associated with YHWH.
405 The use of j v “to expire, to die” instead of t wmar corresponds with the image of the return to dust. Ps 88:16 has the only other occurrence of j v in the psalms, and here the lamenters is “ready to die (j v) from youth”. It also occurs in Job 3:11, and can have the sense of “breathing one’s last breath,” e.g. Gen 25:8, 17 or “to die,” e.g. Gen 6:17; 7:21.
406 The “return to dust” here includes humans. Their being created from dust, or that “dust” is their basic substance is a well-known motif in the HB, e.g. Ps 139:15; Job 30:23; Qoh 3:20; 12:7.
407 D. Rudman, “The Use of Water Imagery in the Descriptions of Sheol,” ZAW 113 (2001): 240-4. Vv 29-30 implies that being alive is to be part of the created world, while to be dead is to be “uncreated,” i.e. returning to the substance from which one was created.
409 Ballhorn, Zum Telos des Psalter, 126.
410 According to Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 88-89 r f should not be restricted to its local meaning “dust, grave” but here “denotes origin and end of living beings...” He regards v 29 as a “confession of universal transience.” Ps 144:3-4 offers a description of human fragility and dependence on YHWH. Also Ps 139:13-16 for the notion of individual creation by YHWH, but in a very different context of divine omnipresence and involvement. In Ps 104 creation’s fragility is closely tied up with divine care.
411 Ps 119:25 connects dust and death “My soul cleaves to the dust; O give me life according to your word.” Ps 22:15, 29 has two references to dust, “…you have brought me into the dust of death” and “…before Him shall bow down all who went down to the dust.” Ps 30:10 contains the familiar Sheol motive, “…will the dust praise you?” Much later, in Dan 12:2, the connection between dust and death also occurs, “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake...” Miller, Poetry of Creation, 93-94 finds the key to vv 29-30 in the particular order, namely death and then life and renewal. In this way “…the breath of life is part of the providence of God, the provision of continuity, so that each new birth is an act of creation, renewing the earth. Death is on the way to renewal.” Here the question remains why YHWH withdraws His j w from creation. Cf. Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 440.
412 Fokkelman, Major Poems II, 267. Here YHWH is emphasised as the one deciding on the matter of life and death. Also Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 435 who argues that humanity is given the
Verse 30 provides a positive reaffirmation of creaturely dependence so vividly described in v 29. Verse 30 could have been expected to precede v 29, i.e., death following on life. Yet the arrangement in Ps 104 stresses YHWH as sole creator, and connects the j w of created beings (v 29) with the j w of YHWH. Further, the taking of their j w in v 29 is contrasted with YHWH sending (j l v, Pi) His j w.415 As such the notion of the return to dust in v 29 is contrasted here with the theme of the divine renewal (vd], Pi) of the face (hnp) of the “earth” (hnd, other than Åra in v 24). Significant here is the use of the verb arb (Pi) in connection with the divine j w.416 In a real sense arb is contrasted with [w and the use of the imperfect of arb indicates that this creation is not merely a singular or past event, but indeed continuing.417 It is the divine j w in motion that gives shape to chaos and brings forth new life.418 Here Gen 1:2 is called to mind, where the j w of God hovers (r jr) upon the face of the deep, i.e., having creative potential.419 Verse 30 constitutes a climax to the works of YHWH introduced in v 24, where it is connected with the divine wisdom. The process of creation and renewal fits within the scheme of the creation theology of Ps 104.420 Within the framework of this creation theology death is described as a natural part of this process,421 and does not stand in “opposition” to divine creation.422 In this sense it

foundational gifts of existence “without merit” and that YHWH is free to do with His possessions as He pleases.

414 Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, 452 rightly remarked that the psalmist does not end his meditation with a reflection on death, but within the consideration that from death follows new life.

415 For the theme of the “face of God” in the HB J. Reindl, *Das Angesicht Gottes im Sprachgebrauch des Alten Testaments* (ETS 25; Leipzig: St Benno Verlag, 1970) provides a thorough discussion. For occurrences of God hiding His face in the Psalter cf. Ps 10:11; 13:1; 22:24; 27:930:7; 34:16 (face of YHWH against the wicked); 44:24; 51:9; 69:17; 88:14; 102:2; 132:10; 143:7. These references are mostly set within the context of affliction.

416 This is the only instance in the HB psalms where arb is used to refer to YHWH’s works of creation. Other verbs used for this purpose include w (8:3; 24:1; 93:1), hc[ (33:6; 95:5), dSy(24:1; 89:11) and rxy (95:5). For arb in the psalms, see 51:12; 89:13; 89:48 (Qal), and 102:19; 148:5 (Ni). Its scant distribution might attest to a later theological use. For S. Lee, “Power and novelty: The Connotations of ...” in: A.G. Auld (ed.), *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 210-211 the 48 occurrences of arb in the HB indicate that YHWH, as supreme creator, not only manifests His mastery over the physical universe, but over friend and foe equally. Thus, arb is not merely a synonym for hc[, but emphasises God as sovereign creator, and His sovereignty over creation.


418 Compare Gen 1:2 where the spirit (j w) of God moves “upon the face of the waters” (µyµh yρ l[), giving shape to primordial chaos. Fokkelman, *Major Poems II*, 267 sees the chiasm with “face” and “spirit / life” further sharpens the opposition of life and death.”

419 Cf. Wiggins, “Tempestuous Wind,” 14. The spirit of God hovering upon the face of the deep (µµyµh) have been interpreted as indicative of the Chaoskampf motif, particularly if µµyµh is seen as reminiscent of Tiamat in ANE cosmology.


421 Since YHWH’s j w or presence makes possible the conditions for ordered existence, a withdrawal of His presence could imply a resurgence of chaos. Cf. Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 63.

422 The rhythm of becoming and passing away belongs to the order of the created world in Ps 104. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 51.
cannot be said that death reaches into the realm of life, since it is an inherent part of creation, indeed directly related to the creator. In Ps 104 the psalmist views creation from a position of trust, i.e. trusting in YHWH’s secure works of creation, His providential care thereof, and His perpetual presence therein. This theme of the presence of YHWH in creation continues in the final stanza.

Verses 31-35: YHWH is Praised for His Works

While verses 31-35 have been considered to be later additions to the main corpus of Ps 104, it forms an inherent part of the psalm in its present shape. Within these verses various themes introduced at an earlier stage in Ps 104 reoccur. In this way it does not stand apart from the body of the psalm. The glory of YHWH (i.e. being clothed with majesty and honour; wrapped in light) so vividly described in vv 1-2 reappears in verse 31, by means of employing the fixed expression הַיְלַיָּדךְ. This divine glory will be (יהיה, impf.) forever (וֹלֶדֶת), i.e. it will continue within creation and is complemented by the continuing joy (יְרוּשָׁה) of YHWH in His works (הָדוּמְרָכִּים, c.f. v 24). Here YHWH is said to rejoice in His works, while the psalmist rejoices in the works of YHWH in v 24. In both cases the greatness of YHWH is at issue. Not even the presence of “sinners” and “the wicked” recounted in v 35 can bring YHWH to regret His works of creation. The possible discrepancy between so-called cosmic and mundane order does not lead to divine withdrawal from creation.

In verse 32 the psalmist offers another description of the relation between YHWH and His creation, but in effect also an elaboration on the הַיְלַיָּדךְ in creation (v 31). YHWH is described in clear anthropomorphic terms. He looks (בָּאַר, Pi) and touches ([גְּר], to which creation responds in various ways. The earth trembles (דר) and

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423 Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 256 relates these experiences to Israel’s praise.
424 S.L. Terrien, Elusive Presence: toward a new Biblical theology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 326, 333 postulates the idea of a “new theology of presence” developing in the Psalter which gains an “eternal dimension.” As such, moments of experiencing YHWH’s absence do not overshadow the light of YHWH’s presence. Ps 73 reflects the psalmist’s realisation that nothing, not even death – if the Babylonian Exile was in some sense experienced as death – can separate the people of God from the divine presence. See also Ps 33:7; 95:4; 55:15; Job 11:7-8; 12:22; 26:6; Pr 15:11; Deut 32:22 for the notion of divine omnipotence and presence in creation.
425 Seybold, Psalmen, 411.
426 In the HB Psalter the phrase הַיְלַיָּדךְ occurs only here and in 138:5.
427 Compare Ps 92:5 where the psalmist finds joy in the works of YHWH, and Ps 149:2 where Israel rejoices in its Maker. YHWH’s joy in His creation in Ps 104 is reminiscent of Gen 1:31, where God perceives His created works as “very good” ( דבר טוב). Cf. also Ps 111, with the focus on the goodness of the creator toward His chosen people.
428 Van der Ploeg, Psalmen, 195. In Ps 19:2 (לָדַע, 29:2 (וֹרַדְעָה), 66:2 (וֹרַדְעָה), 79:9 (וֹרַדְעָה), 96:8 (וֹרַדְעָה) similar expressions are encountered, but no use of the phrase הַיְלַיָּדךְ.
429 Contra Gen 6:6, where YHWH rejects His acts of creation, where it brought Him to grieve in His heart, causing Him to declare that He will destroy all life (man, beast, creeping and flying creatures) from the face of the earth (Gen 6:7).
430 Anderson, From Creation to New Creation, 86.
431 Spiekermann, Heilsgegenwart, 42 ascribes the theophany motif in v 32 to a redactor.
433 For [גְּר] “to touch” cf. 73:14; 105:15; 144:5 (Qal); 73:5 (Pi); 32:6; 88:4; 107:18 (Hi).
the mountains smoke (\(\nu\alpha\)).\(^{435}\) In this way the initial motif of the power and glory of YHWH in vv 1-4 reappears. YHWH’s power and glory receive a positive evaluation in Ps 104.\(^{436}\) In a metaphorical way the earth is brought into motion (“trembling” and “smoking”) in response to YHWH’s approach.\(^{437}\) These anthropomorphic images reflect both YHWH’s transcendence (i.e. “looking on”, \(\mathfrak{b}\mathfrak{n}\)) and immanence (i.e. “touching,” \(\mathfrak{g}\)). This display of divine power is not experienced by the psalmist as overwhelming.\(^{438}\) It rather moves the psalmist to exaltation, as described in v 33.

The theophany described in v 32 serves as motivation for the psalmist’s declaration of praise in verse 33.\(^{439}\) In v 31 YHWH rejoices in His works, while in v 33 it is the psalmist, as part of the works of YHWH, who finds joy in creation, prompting Him to praise.\(^{440}\) In this way the joy of the psalmist in creation parallels the joy of YHWH in his works of creation (v 31).\(^{441}\) The psalmist will sing (\(\tau\nu\nu\)) to YHWH in (\(\beta\)) his life (\(\mu\gamma\eta\)). For this purpose he will make music (\(\tau\tau\alpha\Pi\)) for God (\(\mu\gamma\eta\alpha + \) first person singular suffix), during (\(\beta\)) his continued existence (\(\delta\kappa\)).\(^{442}\) But this positive note also has an inherent dark tone. It reflects awareness that the potential for praise is limited to this life. When his being expires, the possibility of praise also ceases.\(^{443}\) While death is related to YHWH in Ps 104, death is also presented as bringing about separation from the creator, as it does in the somber Ps 88 (v 5, 10b, 12-13).\(^{444}\) But this is of secondary importance in the context of Ps 104, and the positive tone continues in v 34.

To his singing and songwriting of v 33 the psalmist adds his meditation (\(\jmath\cyrillic \varepsilon\)) of YHWH in verse 34. This meditation shall be pleasing (\(\beta\varepsilon\)), and in his meditation and as a result thereof, the psalmist will rejoice (\(\jmath\alpha\)) in YHWH.\(^{445}\) Here indeed it is

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\(^{434}\) These references to earthquake and fire might very well be allusions to the Sinai theophany of Exod 20:18, particularly if it is considered that the idea of the annihilation of the wicked originates in the cult. Cf. Weiser, *The Psalms*, 670.

\(^{435}\) Ps 144:5b employs similar image, “...touch the mountains and they shall smoke.”

\(^{436}\) Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 34. This is different in Job and Qohelet.

\(^{437}\) The mythological language employed in v 32 fits the context, since the psalmist is utilising the language proper to the religious views concerning nature and deity. Cf. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 102.

\(^{438}\) Ps 77:18 has a similar description, “The voice of your thunder was in the heaven: the lightning lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook.”

\(^{439}\) This is contrary to the picture of YHWH’s dealings with his people in Ps 44:19-26, slaying them instead of dragons, covering them with the shadow of death, sleeping in their hour of need, hiding his face and forgetting their suffering.

\(^{440}\) In vv 33-34 the use of the first person suffix points to an individual concern, while the interest of the remainder of the psalm is of a more “communal” nature. This raises the question whether the psalmist’s “vow to praise” and “meditation” is indicative of its origins among the temple singers. Cf. Gerstenberger, *Psalms 2 and Lamentations*, 224.

\(^{441}\) Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 94.

\(^{442}\) Whether one choose to translate \(\mu\gamma\beta\) “among the living” or “throughout my life” as Dahood, *Psalms III*, 47 does, makes little difference for understanding the general thrust of v 33. It is in the realm of life that the possibility of praise lies.

\(^{443}\) The presence of death implies the absence of praise, while the presence of life implies the possibility of praise. C. Westermann, *Lob und Klage in den Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 121.

\(^{444}\) This is not unlike the call in Qoh 12:1 to “remember your creator in the days of your youth.” Ps 139:13-14 refers to the inability to escape God’s presence, but is situated in a different context of the psalms.

\(^{445}\) This “meditation” (\(\jmath\cyrillic \varepsilon\)) of the psalmist is not unlike the wisdom tradition, in which meditation on experiential reality has an important function.
personal praise (ybk) that is at issue, rather than communal praise. In view of the use of the verbs jyc and jn it has been suggested that the psalmist is here referring to psalm itself, i.e. the praise of YHWH sung in the psalm. In this way the “meditation” and “praise” of the psalmist presents the proper response. Despite the psalmist’s observations concerning the ephemeral nature of created beings, including humans, despair is not a proper response, but rather continued praise. In Ps 104 the primary focus concerns the God of creation, and as such divine creation is pictured as trustworthy.

In verse 35 the tone of the psalmist shifts from praise to petition. Sinners (µjr) should be “consumed” (µmt) from the earth, and the wicked (µyvr) should not be allowed to continue to be (dw). This is reminiscent of the wisdom psalms 1 and 37. Indirectly this petition is addressed to YHWH, who is again the subject of praise in 35b (hwhyAta yvpn ykrb as Pi impv.) and reaffirmed in 35b (hyl as Qal impv.). The perceived beneficence of creation and omnipotence of the creator serves as motivation for this closing exaltation. This petition does not merely have a rhetorical function, but is uttered with the assurance that it will indeed come about. The praise recounted in v 35a and 35b forms an inclusio with v 1a (hwhyAta yvpn ykrb), v 35a and 35b seem rather out of place at first in terms of the structure and theme of the psalm. For this reason the reference to the sinners and the wicked might be ascribed to a redactional hand, but within the present form of the psalm it does acquire an important function, namely that in the psalmist’s perception of creation does not ignore its dark edges. The psalmist is celebrating the beauty of

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447 Allen, Psalms 101-150, 34 regards praise in this context equal to the offering of a sacrifice. G.A. Anderson, A Time to Dance, A Time to Mourn: The Expression of Joy and Grief in Israelite Religion (University Park: Penn State Press, 1991), 25 argues that within Hebrew, as in other Semitic languages, the term “joy” (jmc) is not so much a general term of emotional happiness, but rather a term connoting particular pleasures associated with the observation of specific rituals.

448 This is rather surprising, seeing the general idea in the Psalter that creation cannot continue without the presence of the creator. Cf. Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 259.

449 In Job 38:13 the wicked are “shaken” out of the earth.


451 Some scholars regard hyl as falling outside the structure of the psalm proper, functioning as a liturgical phrase or liturgical direction. Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 28. Also Briggs, Psalms, 339. So also Seybold, Psalmen, 411 who regards hy as a call to praise.

452 The use of the shorter form of the divine name hy occurs especially in late psalms.

453 Ps 49 describes a tension between the fate of the wicked and the righteous, and declares that the wicked shall perish, and that death shall feed on them (49:14), while God will redeem the soul of the upright from the power of the grave (49:15). Ps 104 concerns creation and humanity in general, and lacks any notion of resurrection. Further, in Ps 104 death is seen as a fixed “event” and not as an entity, as in Ps 49 (death as a shepherd).

454 Spieckermann, Heilsgegenwart, 43. He regards vv 20-22 as part of the original form of the psalm and as such contrast with v 35, for in vv 20-22 even the “wicked” in the form of the animals of prey have a place in creation, implying that the notion of “annihilation” was absent in the original form of the psalm.

455 Verse 35 is more than just a redactional insertion or liturgical gloss. Here the psalmist is appealing to what is already reported in Ps 1:4-6, namely the disappearance of sinners and the wicked. Cf. Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 94. For similar instances of such a “wish”, see Ps 31:18; 37:20, 34, 38; 68:3. Also Prov 2:22.

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creation, without neglecting the apparent imperfections thereof.\textsuperscript{456} This does not detract from the beauty that the psalmist perceives in creation, but rather presents a wish that it may become “complete”, i.e. pointing to the continued involvement of YHWH in creation. For this reason the notion of a continuous creation is very much present in Ps 104. This annihilation of the wicked and the sinners is to take place, i.e. become a reality within creation, and not at some eschatological point in the future or in a new creation. The psalmist perceives creation as trustworthy, and this trust is motivated by the perception of the creator. It is YHWH that holds the fabric of creation together.\textsuperscript{457} This petition of the psalmist does indirectly present a call for divine justice in creation,\textsuperscript{458} but primarily presents a declaration of trust in YHWH.\textsuperscript{459}

\section*{2.5 Thematic Discussion}

Various Psalms deal with the topic of creation, but often as part of a larger whole encompassing other concerns. In Ps 104 creation is the central theological theme and motif.\textsuperscript{460} What is also apparent from the preceding analysis of Ps 104 is the rather peripheral place of death as a theological theme within the framework of its creation theology. In this section we will consider the context of Ps 104, its affinity with material from its \textit{Umwelt} and within the HB and its affinity with the HB wisdom tradition. This will lead us back to creation and death as theological themes in Ps 104 and the relation between these two themes.

\subsection*{2.5.1 Considering the Context of Psalm 104}

Individual psalms and the HB Psalter as a whole are difficult to date and Ps 104 offers no exception.\textsuperscript{461} Ps 104 in its present form stems from the exilic-postexilic period,\textsuperscript{462} but it probably has an earlier \textit{Vorlage}.\textsuperscript{463} Some scholars argue for a pre-exilic date for

\textsuperscript{456} For Kraus, \textit{Psalmen}, 886 this petition for the annihilation of sinners and the wicked from creation is indicative of a belief in a “new creation.” So also Allen, \textit{Psalms 101-150}, 34 who argues, “Those who by flouting his moral order deliberately spoil the harmony of creation forfeit their God given privilege of sharing in it.” Also S.L. Cook, “Apocalypticism in the Psalter.” ZAW 104 (1992): 82-99 who considers apocalyptic moments in Pss 68, 97, 104, 108 and 144. In Ps 104 the concern is with the present.

\textsuperscript{457} For Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 287 the return of the chaotic waters in Ps 104 is nothing but an impossible possibility, and suggests that only human evil (v 35) is capable of posing a challenge to the creator. As such “sin” and “wickedness” are references to chaos, which is never far away.

\textsuperscript{458} Clifford, \textit{Creation Accounts}, 187 regards Ps 104:35 (with Job 9:16-24) as an instance where the general ancient Near Eastern and biblical notion of justice, as a constituent part of creation, is challenged. Yet the question of theodicy is present only at the very edge of the psalm. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 52.

\textsuperscript{459} For Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 287 the return of the chaotic waters in Ps 104 is nothing but an impossible possibility, and suggests that only human evil (v 35) is capable of posing a challenge to the creator. As such “sin” and “wickedness” are references to chaos, which is never far away.

\textsuperscript{460} In Ps 94:3, 5-7 and 10:13-14 YHWH will bring the flourishing wicked to account.

\textsuperscript{461} For Meyers, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” 84. Also Miller, “The Poetry of Creation,” 87.

\textsuperscript{462} Seybold, \textit{Psalmen}, 408-409 the precise dating of Ps 104 is basically impossible, but should probably, with Genesis 1, be located in the postexilic period.

\textsuperscript{463} For Seybold, \textit{Psalmen}, 408-409 the precise dating of Ps 104 is basically impossible, but should probably, with Genesis 1, be located in the postexilic period.
the psalm. Earlier scholarship often considered Ps 104 as postexilic, given the postulated dependence of Ps 104 on Gen 1. Arguments for the dating of Ps 104 include the style, language and motifs operative in the text. In this regard a late, postexilic dating is still preferred by various scholars, and very few attempt to ascribe a specific Sitz im Leben for the text. Here we will consider the relation between Ps 104 and the material from its Umwelt, to see if it can contribute in providing a context for Ps 104.

2.5.1.1 Psalm 104 and the Material from its Umwelt

Affinities between Ps 104 and material from its Umwelt cannot be denied. In its vivid description of creation and creator, Ps 104 incorporates both sun-god and storm-god imagery. The question is how such imagery found its way into Ps 104. The sun-god imagery is usually ascribed to a familiarity of the author with the Egyptian hymn to Aton, while the storm-god imagery is ascribed to the fact that the Hymn to Aton became known to Israel via a Canaanite-Phoenician route. The storm-god imagery, often depicting the deity as a “chariot rider,” is incorporated in the description of YHWH’s cosmic rule (vv 1-9, 32. Also Ps 68:18; Hab 3:18, 15). Yet it is the ascription of solar qualities to YHWH and the affinity with the theme of the hymn to Aton that interests us here.

Since the discovery of the Egyptian Hymn to Aton on the west wall of the tomb of Ay at Tell el-Amarna at the turn of the previous century, scholarly opinion concerning

464 Kraus, Psalmen, 881; Dahood, Psalms III, 33.
465 Crüsemann, Studien zur Formgeschichte von Hymnus und Danklied in Israel, 301-302 employs the mixed form of the psalm as criteria for suggesting a late, non-cultic, corporate setting for Ps 104, as Ps 103.
466 Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 227. It is this exilic-postexilic community that would have drawn freely from diverse traditions, producing such a mixture of texts.
468 Dion, “YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god,” 43-71 tries to trace the tracks of how sun- and storm-god imagery came to be combined within Ps 104. Also Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 289 who argues that in Ps 104 and 103 Canaanite material with Egyptian elements have been used.
469 Von Rad, “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation,” 142 suggested that Ps 104 and 8 reflect an Egyptian outlook, “passed on to Israel by travelling teachers of wisdom.”
470 M. Noth, Die Welt des Alten Testaments: Einführung in die Grenzgebiete der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft (Berlin: Verlag A. Töpelmann, 1940), 198.
471 J. Day, God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17-18 identifies Ps 104:1-19 as an instance of the Chaoskampf motif within the HB, and argues for a possible Canaanite or Babylonian influences in the text. According to his argument the HB draws on portraits of both El and Baal for its portrayal of YHWH – interpreting the victories of YHWH as cosmogonic.
472 With the Amarna revolution Pharaoh Amen-hotep IV moved the capital from Thebes to Tell el-Amarna, and changed his name to Akhenaton (Akh-en-Aton), i.e. “He who is serviceable to Aton.” He broke ties with established religion in Egypt, instituting the worship of Aton, the sun disc, as source of life. Cf. J.A. Wilson, “Egyptian Hymns and Prayers,” in: ANET (2d ed.; 1955), 369-70. Also D.B. Redford, “The Monotheism of the Heretic Pharaoh: Precursor of Mosaic Monotheism or Egyptian Anomaly.” BAR 13/3 (1987): 16-32 who provides a discussion of the religious content of the Amarna
the extent of its influence on, and literary and thematic affinities with Ps 104 have been wide ranging, including theories of direct dependence or mere allusions. The literary affinity between Ps 104 and the Hymn to Aton is illustrated by the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hymn to Aton (ANET, 3d edition)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ps 104</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lines 70-73: The Nile in the sky descending and making waves on the mountains to water the fields</td>
<td>10, 13, 6: The waters gain a beneficial quality due to divine activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 31-34: Beasts satisfied with their pasture, trees, plants, and birds which fly from their nests</td>
<td>11, 12, 14aa: Beast, birds, trees are satisfied by divine providence, while the birds finds habitation in the trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 11-12: when thou set the earth in darkness, 17: every lion has come forth from his den</td>
<td>20-21: YHWH sets darkness, while the beasts and lions become active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 21-24: the rising of the sun</td>
<td>22: the sun rises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 30: the whole land performs its labour</td>
<td>23: human labour commences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 52: how manifold is that which thou has made; 54: Thou did create the earth according to thy will, being alone</td>
<td>24: the works of YHWH are manifold; in wisdom He made it all; the earth is full of His riches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 37, 39: ships on the Nile; fish; leap on the river before thee</td>
<td>25, 26: ships on the sea; Beasts in the ocean; YHWH playing with Leviathan in the sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line 60: each man has his food</td>
<td>27: YHWH provides food to all at the right time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 99-100: when though has risen, they live; when though set, they die</td>
<td>29-30: When YHWH hides His face they are troubled; when he takes away their breath they die When he sends His spirit they are created</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Structural, thematic and grammatical affinities between these two texts do not necessarily imply a direct literary dependence or influence. A reason is the rather short-lived nature and limited impact of Atonism in ancient Egypt and the ancient Near Eastern context. In all probability the hymn to Aton was mediated to Israel via a different route. Various scholars have suggested a Canaanite-Phoenician route, i.e. that the hymn became known in Israel by means of a Canaanite-Phoenician translation. A reason for this argument is that the geographical space reflected in Ps 104 is more representative of a Palestinian than an Egyptian context. As such Ps 104 can be regarded as a hymn in the Egyptian tradition, mediated to Israel by means of Canaanite-Phoenician culture and religion. This implies a process of revolution. Further E. Nordheim, “Der grosse Hymnus des Echnaton und Psalm 104: Gott und Mensch im Ägypten der Amarnazeit und in Israel.” in: G. Dautzenberg (ed.), Theologie und Menschenbild: Ewald Link zum 65. Geburtstag gewidmet (TW 7; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1978), 51-74.

**References:**

473 R. Kessler, Die Ägyptenbilder der Hebräischen Bibel (SBS 197; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2002), 12, 130 identifies an Egyptian influence in Ps 104, as in Prov 22:17-24:22 which parallels the wisdom of Amenemope.

474 R.K. Gnuse, No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel (JSOTSup 241; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 172-73 argues that the impact of Atonism on Yahwism was minimal, which is surprising, considering the close proximity of Egypt to Canaan.

475 Kraus, Psalmen, 88; Dahood, Psalms III, 33. Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World, 209 states that it is “inconceivable” that the Aton hymn was directly taken up by the Israelites.

476 Gerstenberger, Psalms 2 and Lamentations, 223. Such a geographical space is reflected in Ps 104:16-18, where the necessity of rainfall is stressed, while Egypt depended on the Nile River rather than rainfall.

transmission and reception, which could explain the intertwining of sun-god and storm-god imagery in Ps 104.\(^{478}\) This transmission to and reception of the Aton hymn in Israel led to a transformation and reapplication of motifs and formulations encountered in the Aton Hymn. Such motifs were reapplied for a different purpose,\(^{479}\) and brought into conformity with Israel’s distinctive theological outlook.\(^{480}\) Ps 104 reflects the merging of divergent theological perspectives, cast in a new theological mode.\(^{481}\) The combination of storm-god and sun-god imagery also suggests that the divine nature of YHWH is beyond identification with a single natural phenomenon (see also Ps 50:1-3).\(^{482}\)

Ps 104 does not present a polemical text. Rather, the sun-god and storm-god imagery employed in the text have a doxological purpose. In this way the status of YHWH as omnipotent and beneficent creator, creating without opposition, not equitable with any aspect of creation, is rhetorically affirmed.\(^{483}\) The doxological nature and intent of Ps 104 is suggestive of a cultic setting,\(^{484}\) but the exact occasion for its use cannot be determined with certainty.\(^{485}\) In such a cultic setting, Ps 104 is incorporated into Israel’s worship and for this reason the solar qualities ascribed to YHWH are significant. The ascription of solar qualities to YHWH does not imply a solarisation of YHWH within official Yahwism.\(^{486}\) YHWH is not assimilated with or depicted as sun-disk.\(^{487}\) Yet, solar qualities are ascribed to YHWH. This is comparable to Mal 4:2, where YHWH is described, for those that fear His name, as “sun of righteousness” (ḥqdkt nml) with “healing in its wings” (hpqrk ḥprmn).\(^{488}\) Solar imagery in Ps 104 is

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\(^{478}\) Dahloud, *Psalms III*, 33; Kraus, *Psalmen*, 880; Gnuse, *No Other Gods*, 172-73 suggests that Israel may have been the recipient of some teachings concerning Aton due to its connection with Phoenician scribal tradition. Also J.C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 67. Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun*, 225-230 likewise argues for a Canaanite-Phoenician influence in bringing the Akhenaton hymn to Israel, which also contains storm-god imagery.

\(^{479}\) Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 57, 57-65; Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 115.

\(^{480}\) Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun*, 225-6.

\(^{481}\) Stadelman, *The Hebrew Conception of the World*, 31 rightly observes that whatever influence the Hymn to Aton might have had on Ps 104, any borrowed material has been thoroughly assimilated to the faith in Yahweh and transformed to express the “creation mythology and Hebrew cosmology.”


\(^{483}\) Compare here Ps 29, which probably presents a transformation of a hymn to Baal, transformed by the psalmist into a doxology of YHWH, and ascribed to David.

\(^{484}\) Crüsemann, *Studien zur Formgeschichte*, 301-2 assigns Ps 104 (with 103) to a non-cultic setting.

\(^{485}\) The collective “we” is absent in Ps 104, but the “I” speaking in the psalm could function as a liturgist. Gerstenberger, *Psalms 2 and Lamentations*, 227.

\(^{486}\) S.A. Wiggins, “Yahweh: the God of Sun?” *JSOT* 71 (1996): 89-106, at 104. He argues with Dion, YHWH as Storm-god and Sun-god, 65 that the author of Ps 104 used the Aton hymn to elaborate on the storm-god attributes of YHWH, but the author avoided any suggestion of a privileged relation between YHWH and the sun. However, texts such as Ezek 8:16 or 2 Kgs 23:5, 11 might reflect a criticism against cultic practices associated with solar worship in the Jerusalem Temple in the final stages of the Judean monarchy. Smith, “The Near Eastern Background,” 31.

\(^{487}\) W. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (trans. D.E. Green; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 38-39, rightly argued that despite the close similarities, “….it is characteristic that it is not the sun with its life giving power that is extolled, but Yahweh, who wraps himself in a robe of light and spreads out the heavens like a tent (v 2) and ordains the course of the moon and the sun (v 19).”

\(^{488}\) Also Ps 84:12 (HB), “For YHWH Elohim is a sun and shield…” By means of such figurative language YHWH can be described in solar terms. Cf. Smith, “The Near Eastern Background,” 30. In Ps 17, 27, 63 and Ezek 8:16, the sun evokes the luminescent dimension of the divine presence.
seen particularly in vv 1-2, but reoccurs in the description of YHWH’s works of creation and providence. The Aton hymn illustrates the universality and beneficence of the creating and re-creating sun disk. In Ps 104 this is ascribed to YHWH, who is described by means of qualities of the sun, but also rules over the sun (vv 19, 22). The “dying and rising” associated with the creating and re-creating sun-disk (Aton) is also absent in Ps 104.489 On this point the difference between the hymn to Aton and Ps 104 is clear.490

2.5.1.2 Psalm 104 and the Priestly Creation Account of Genesis 1:1-2:4a

The dependence of Ps 104 on Gen 1 remains a moot point.491 In terms of structure, theme and theological viewpoint Ps 104 and the Priestly creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a stand in close proximity.492 But the degree of (inter-)dependence and direction of influence remain disputed.493 The basic structural relation between Ps 104 and Gen 1:1-2:4a is illustrated by the following table:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ps 104</th>
<th>Gen 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Creation of heaven and earth</td>
<td>1-4</td>
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<td>Waters pushed back</td>
<td>5-9</td>
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<td>Waters put to beneficial use</td>
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<td>Creation of vegetation</td>
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<td>Creation of sea creatures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creation of living creatures</td>
<td>27-30</td>
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489 In Deut 33:2, Isa 60:1 and Hos 6:3 the root יָרָע “to rise” is used to describe YHWH. Yet the focus is on the divine presence and glory, and not on the divine “rising.”
490 Other differences include that cult of Aton lacked rituals and offers, while Yahwism has both - even an elaborate system. Aton was pictured solely as a solar deity, while YHWH is predominantly characterised as a storm God with occasional solar attributes. Aton is a timeless, distant and impersonal deity, while YHWH is a warrior God closely involved with his creation. YHWH, as God of creation and history, stands in a relationship with many people, while Aton stood only in relation to Akhenaton. Cf. Gnuse, No Other Gods, 173. Also W.H. Schmid, The Faith of the Old Testament: A History (trans. J. Sturdy, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 69; D.B. Redford, Akhenaten: The Heretic King (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 32.
492 What should not be overlooked is the particular affinities that have been identified between Gen 1:1-2:4a and the process of creation encountered in the Egyptian Memphite Theology – in which creation takes place through the word of a single deity (Ptah), while God “speaks” creation into being in Gen 1. Cf. Clifford, Creation Accounts, 114; also K. Koch, “Wort und Einheit des Schöpfergottes in Memphis und Jerusalem.” ZTK 62 (1965): 251-93 who offers an investigation into such Phoenician models and their possible influence.
493 E.g. P. Humbert, “La réalation de Génesis 1 et du Psaume 104 avec la liturgie du Nouvel-An israëlite,” in; Opuscles d’un hébraïsant (Neuchâtel: Université de Neuchâtel, 1958), 60-83 who follows Gunkel, Die Psalmen, 453 and argues for the direct influence of Gen 1 by the author of Ps 104, pointing to linguistic parallels and a similar sequence of creation. To the contrary A. van der Voort, “Genèse 1:1 a 2:4a et le Psaume 104.” RB 58 (1951): 341-42, 346 argues that Gen 1 reflects a later stage of theological development and rather reflects a use of Ps 104. This argument is supported by Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 100-102.
Such a schematic comparison indicates the similarity concerning the basic order of events of creation, but also that the basic structure of creation within these two texts is essentially the same. An overlap in vocabulary is also noticeable, e.g. $\mu\delta\nu\mu\nu\nu$ (v 19 // Gen 1:14); $\nu\gamma\nu\nu$ (vv 11, 20 // Gen 1:24); $\lambda\nu\nu\nu\nu\nu\nu$ (v 12 // Gen 1:26, 28, 30); $\beta\gamma$ (v 14 // Gen 1:11-12); $\mu\epsilon\mu\nu\nu$ (v 8 // Gen 1:9). But stylistic differences also persist. So e.g. Gen 1 is logical and schematic in its approach, while Ps 104 is exuberant and free, employing rich and varied vocabulary. In this sense the use of anthropomorphisms and mythic elements in Ps 104 should be noted (the description of the divine self-revelation in vv 1-2, 3-4, 32), which lacks in Gen 1. The question of literary dependence is complicated by the fact that both Ps 104 and Gen 1 drew from diverse material of its Umwelt and incorporated it into their own theologies. The earlier origin (not final form) of Ps 104 would suggest use of Ps 104 by the author of Gen 1, without implying a direct dependence. Differences between Ps 104 and Gen 1 are suggestive of a diversified background, literary and theological. But in their final form both texts represent an independent expression of basically the same part of Israelite theology.

The argumentative tone of both texts has led to the suggestion that Gen 1 is partly polemical (vv 14-18), while Ps 104 is doxological. Yet both stress the completeness of the divine works of creation. The absence of a clear struggle motif in Ps 104 and

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495 For Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 119 Ps 104 “…konfrontiert traditional vorgegebene, mythische Konzepte und, alltägliche Erfahrungen so miteinander, daß sie sich wechselseitig erschließen, interpretieren und korrigieren.”
496 For this view Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 101 aptly argues that 1) Ps 104 is more mythological, with vv 6-9 referring to the battle with the waters and v 26 to Leviathan. The references in Genesis 1:6-10, 26 is regarded as instances where Ps 104 was demythologised, since for Day this is a more natural assumption than to suppose that Ps 104 re-mythologised Genesis 1. He is also in favour of viewing the Hymn to Aton as the source of Ps 104 instead of Genesis 1. 2) The form of the word for ‘beasts’ in Genesis 1:24 ($\nu\gamma\nu$) occurs elsewhere only in poetic texts, among them Ps 104:11, 20, which suggests for Day that a poetic text, Ps 104, underlies Gen 1.
497 In this regard it has been suggested that Ps 104 should not be compared to the creation model of Gen 1, but rather with texts that start from the confrontation of creation and chaos, such as Ps 89:10-14. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 125.
498 Boström, The God of the Sages, 73. For arguments postulating a common cultic origin for both texts, cf. A.A. Anderson, The Book of Psalms (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972), 717. Humbert also argued that both Gen 1 and Ps 104 originally served as “librettos” for a festival in the Jerusalem Temple. Also Anderson, From Creation to New Creation, 86.
500 A.S. Kapelrud, “Die Theologie der Schöpfung im Alten Testament.” ZAW 91 (1979): 159-170, at 164 views the Priestly creation account of Gen 1 as a response to the ideological competition in the form of creation accounts like Enuma Elish. As a result “Ordnung” and “Trennung”, two main features in Enuma Elish, are also prominent in Gen 1, but absent in the earlier creation account of Genesis 2.
501 Contrary to this interpretation Anderson, “Mythopoeic and Theological Dimensions,” 13 reads Ps 104 as a “true cosmogenic myth” (vv 6-9) and that creation’s harmonious beneficial order results from YHWH’s battle with chaos. He further highlights the relation of Ps 104 with Gen 1, with Ps 104 having an Egyptian origin, entering Israelite religion via the wisdom tradition. L.G. Perdue, The Collapse of History: Reconstructing Old Testament Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 117-119 discusses this perspective under the rubric of “Myth in American Old Testament Circles.”
Gen 1 highlights the emphasis placed on the omnipotence of the creator and the beneficence of creation. Both texts view creation from a position of trust, with the creator responsible for maintaining the life supporting order in creation. As symbol of chaos, “water” (µy) is an important theme in both texts, with God “separating” (ld) it in Gen 1:6, and YHWH “rebuking” (hr[g) it in Ps 104:7. In both texts water is designated its proper place, and gains a beneficial quality. The “waters” respond to the divine voice without resistance or a struggle.

Both texts argue for the omnipotence of the creator and the beneficence of creation, but there are also differences between these two texts. Divine providence is a theme in both creation theologies, but it is further developed in Ps 104, leading some to regard it as the theological crux of the text. An important difference is the connection between divine creation and wisdom in Ps 104:24, which lacks completely in Gen 1. In the creation account of Gen 1 a reference to death is absent, while Ps 104 connects the phenomenon of death with YHWH. The use of the divine names presents another difference. Ps 104 predominantly employs hwhy (cf. §2.5.4.1), and Gen 1 µyh a. In Gen 1 creation is categorically described as good (bw), particularly in the formulation bwâk µyh a aryw (vv 10, 12, 18, 21, 25; 31). Ps 104 also ascribes this quality to creation (v 28), but not by means of a fixed expression, and it remains aware of the dark side of creation, calling on YHWH to bring His creation to completion by removing injustices from it (v 35). Another significant difference between these two creation theologies concerns the place of humanity within creation. In Ps 104 humanity has no special designation and is mentioned within the broader description of creation, having its place and function as all created beings (see also Ps 29; 42:1; 44:11; 49:12 for humanity’s devalued place in creation and in relation with the Deity. Cf. Ps 49:21 for a different view). In Gen 1:26 humanity is said to be made (hc[v, v 26; arb, v 27) according to the image (µ$x) of Elohim, and is given the task of stewardship over the earth (cf. Gen 2:15, 19), but also to subdue (vbk) it (Gen 1:28). As such the devaluated status of humanity in Ps 104 opposes the elevated status of humanity in Gen 1 (also Ps 8). In Ps 104 humans have their designated place in

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502 The description of Elohim’s j w “moving” (¹j r, Pi) upon the face of the “waters” in Gen 1:2 is suggestive of such a mythological remnant, corresponding with the earth’s description as “empty and void” (ldwt), with darkness (ûj) on the face of the deep (šl).503 Weiser, The Psalms, 666 suggested the same origin in a common cultic tradition for both texts, in terms of which God created by means of his power and wisdom and in terms of which He created for His own sake, revealing His glory, which is also to be seen in nature.504 In her consideration of “chaos” in Ps 104, Watson, Chaos Uncreated, 233-242, at 242 argues against an identification of Chaoskampf in Ps 104. She suggests that images associated with the creation of water reserves did not enter Israel’s Temple hymnology before the postexilic period.505 Van der Ploeg, Psalmen, 187 regards Ps 104 as a doxological hymn of divine providence.506 Ps 104 strips humanity of any claim to unique status with YHWH. Cf. D. Grossberg, “The Literary Treatment of Nature in the Psalms,” in: M. Lubetck et al., Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus Gordon (JSOTSup 273; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 79.507 The anthropocentrism of Gen 1 is softened by the Priestly covenant in Gen 9:15a, describing God’s covenant with “every living creature of all flesh” (9:15a). While Gen 9:2-3 continues the line of reasoning of Gen 1:28, the privileged place of humans within creation is relativised by the new covenant of God with every living creature.508 Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 118-119. L. Alonso Schökel, “Technology, Ecology, Contemplation: Psalm 104,” in: L. Alonso Schökel, The Literary Language of the Bible: the Collected Essays of Luis Alonso Schökel (trans. H. Spencer; Texas: BIBAL Press, 2000), 121 suggests that “The boldness and originality of the poet consist of blending homo faber into nature, as a harmonious part of it, and he does it on order to extol God.” As such it points away from Ps 8 or Gen 1. So also C. Maier and S.
Despite this important difference, theocentrism rather than anthropocentrism governs the worldview of both creation theologies.

2.5.1.3 Psalm 104 and the Wisdom Tradition

The notion of YHWH as sole and omnipotent creator is expanded in Ps 104 by identifying all His works with wisdom (הָский) in v 24. This connection of the divine works with wisdom inevitably led some scholars to characterise Ps 104 as a wisdom psalm. This view is supported by the reference to the “meditation” (יָכ) of the psalmist in v 34. Further, the middle section of Ps 104 offers an example of nature wisdom, as described in 1 Kgs 4:33 (5:13, HB).

As such Ps 104 is certainly reflective of a wisdom influence, and can be considered as a psalm with a wisdom orientation. Whether this is sufficient reason to label Ps 104 as a wisdom psalm in terms of genre is not as clear. This is due to the disputed nature of the genre wisdom psalm in HB scholarship. A primary reason for this dispute is the disagreement concerning the criteria to be employed for establishing whether a psalm qualifies as a wisdom psalm. The need for more nuanced criteria has long been pointed out.

This does not imply a dualism between humanity and nature Ps 104. Anderson, From Creation to New Creation, 87.

A mix of stylistic features as encountered in Ps 104 is not surprising, considering the “reciprocal influence” among the traditions of the HB. Cf. Murphy, Tree of Life, 108. The HB contains a “living mix of literary activity.”

On this point one should not lose sight of the hybrid character of the psalm. For the majestic Hymn or “psalm of praise” does indeed here include dimensions characteristic of wisdom. Cf. e.g. S.J.L. Croft, The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 171. Also Whybray, The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament, 96. In his investigation into the nature of the wisdom psalms, Whybray is in favour of applying form-criticism, due to the varied nature of these poems. Also Westermann, Das Loben Gottes in den Psalmen, 1961.


J.K. Kuntz, “Reclaiming Biblical Wisdom Psalms: A Response to Crenshaw,” CBR 1 (2003): 145-154 argues in favour of the genre “wisdom psalm.” R.E. Murphy, “A Consideration of the Classification ‘Wisdom Psalms.’” VTSup 9 (1962): 167 identifies Pss 1, 32, 34, 37, (39), 49, (73), 112, 128 as wisdom psalms, but also warns that the employment of wisdom elements does not necessarily ascribe a psalm to this genre. Also J.L. Crenshaw, “Wisdom,” in: J.H. Hayes (ed.), Old Testament Form Criticism (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1974), 247-253 calls for a distinction between psalms that were written by the wise and those that portray a wisdom influence in form and theme. He remains sceptical about the existence of wisdom psalms proper, but nevertheless regards Pss 1, 19, 33, 39, 49 and 104 as belonging to this genre, while Ps 94 portrays a strong wisdom influence.

H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels (GHAT 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 386-97 were among the first to employ such criteria, particularly “sapiential forms” and “themes” for identifying wisdom psalms. For von Rad, Weisheit in Israel, 70f Pss 1, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128 and 133 meet these criteria, presenting Lehrgebete. S. Mowinckel, “Psalms and Wisdom.” VT Sup 3 (1955): 205-24 identified Psalms 1, 34, 37, 49, 78, 105, 106, 111, 112, 127 as having a non-cultic origin and purpose, and labelled it “learned psalmography.” Gunkel and Mowinckel’s emphasis on the study of the psalms by focusing on particular literary forms (characteristic vocabulary, life setting, motifs) and the liturgical background into which psalms fit, meant that little room was left a category as wisdom psalms. Cf. Murphy, The Tree of Life, 103. Also J.K. Kuntz, “The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel,” in: J.J. Jackson and M. Kessler (eds.), Rhetorical Criticism (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1974), 186-222 who regards
but the identification of wisdom psalms remains tenuous. Such uncertainty is further fueled by the fact that very little is known about the actual origin and setting of wisdom psalms. As is the case with various psalms it might have originated in a temple setting, or in the context of a wisdom school. The problem with postulating a temple setting is that the relation between wisdom and the cult, i.e. the participation of the sages in the Israelite religious life, is not certain at all. But despite this uncertainty there is no reason not to assume some form of participation of the sages in the Israelite religious life. In the case of wisdom schools, little is known about the actual existence of wisdom schools or houses of learning (cf. Sir 51:23, ḥáw pайдéiα”) at an early time in Israelite society. Therefore this setting would point in the direction of a later dating for the wisdom psalms. Wisdom psalms most probably found its way into the HB Psalter as a result of the sages’ participation in the Israelite religious and cultic life. Such an infiltration of sapiential thought into the Israelite cultic and religious life would have occurred at a relatively late stage, since the Israelite sages did not seem to show a lively interest in matters pertaining to the cult before the time of Ben Sira in the second century BCE.

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language and themes as criteria for identifying wisdom psalms. A. Hurvitz, “Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter: A Contribution to the Study of “Wisdom Psalms.” VT 38 (1988): 41-51 argues for the drawing up of strict parameters within which the discussion should take place and that a focus on linguistic, literary and conceptual elements is required. Perdue, Wisdom and Cult, 261ff. offers a critical discussion of various approaches to the problem of establishing such criteria.

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Ps 104 could provide an instance where the concerns of Israel’s sages met those of her priests. In this regard A.R. Ceresko, “The Sage in the Psalms,” in: A.R. Ceresko, The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 219 observes that “If the wisdom movement involved itself in the handing down of the knowledge and values of the community (“the world” in which that community lived) to the next generation, the cult, with its sacred songs ( psalms) functioned to maintain, reshape, and celebrate that world.” See also K.J. Dell, ““I will solve my riddle to the music of the lyre’ (Psalm xlix4[5]): a Cultic Setting for Wisdom Psalms?” VT 54 (2004): 445-458. She suggests that the wisdom influence in the psalms is not just the result of scribal activity in the postexilic period, but part of Israel’s earliest self-identification through worship.

The difference between cult and wisdom has aptly been explained as a difference between times of festivity and those of everyday life. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 54. After the exile of 587 BCE, wisdom gained a greater share in the religious market place of ancient Israel, resulting in greater interaction of sage and priest. Also M.E. Stone, “Ideal Figures and Social Context: Priest and Sage in the Early Second Temple Age,” in: P. Miller et al., Ancient Israelite Religion. Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 576 who discusses the priest and sage within some literature from the late Second Temple period. Their roles are socially and religiously fixed, which assists in analysing the value systems and world views expressed in the presentation of these figures as ideal or exemplary types, providing “paradigms of conduct.”

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J.L. Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction (Westminster: John Knox, 1998), 175. In Jer 18:18 priest, sage and prophet are mentioned together as devising plans against Jeremiah. But not too much should be read into this text concerning the sages’ interest in the cult.
Thematically Ps 104 clearly has a wisdom orientation.\textsuperscript{521} It contemplates creation and the place of all created beings therein; it connects creation with divine wisdom (\textit{hmkj}, v 24; cf. Prov 3:19),\textsuperscript{522} and it calls for the banishment of the wicked (v 35; cf. Ps 1 and 37). Ps 104:24 presents a unique instance in the HB, and here the infrequent use of \textit{hmkj} in the HB Psalter should also be noted.\textsuperscript{523} The infrequent use of terms relating to wisdom in the Psalter does not have to be interpreted as an indication of general disinterest in wisdom in the Psalter.\textsuperscript{524} The overall tone of Ps 104 does allow for identification with the wisdom tradition, even if its does not meet all the form critical criteria to be labelled as a wisdom psalm. The complex character and mixed style of Ps 104 further complicates attempts at assigning it to a specific genre. But as stated, the present form of Ps 104 does reflect an affinity with the Israelite wisdom tradition.\textsuperscript{525} This does not necessarily imply that it originated within a wisdom context such as a wisdom school, but was influenced by the broader Israelite wisdom tradition. The wisdom orientation of Ps 104 has implications for considering creation and death as theological themes in this text.\textsuperscript{526}

2.5.2 Creation as a Theological Theme in Ps 104

Psalm 104, with its wisdom orientation, is a prime example of a creation psalm.\textsuperscript{527} Creation is not one of several theological themes,\textsuperscript{528} but the central theological theme in Ps 104.\textsuperscript{529} The theme of divine providence fits within the framework of the


\textsuperscript{522} See Jer 10:12, 51:15 for a similar use of wisdom and creation. In view of v 24, Ps 104 presents a “descriptive psalm of praise”, with that being described presupposing the creator as wise. Cf. Whybray, The Intellectual Tradition, 96. Also Van der Ploeg, Psalmen, 186. In this instance Ps 104 shows some affinities with the speeches of God in Job 38-39, recounting the greatness and wisdom of the creator. Cf. Miller, “Poetry of Creation,” 97: Whybray, The Intellectual Tradition, 97.

\textsuperscript{523} For the occurrence of \textit{hmkj} cf. psalms 90:12; 104:24; 111:10; 37:30 and 51:8 (as object); 107:27 (subject) for the occurrence of. The noun \textit{µkj} “wise” occurs in Ps 107:43 and 49:11 (subject). Here it has been rightly pointed out by Hurvitz, Wisdom Vocabulary in the Hebrew Psalter, 44 that infrequent occurrences of isolated words or expressions are not decisive in determining the linguistic nature of a given text.

\textsuperscript{524} So e.g. Ps 104 has been described as “…one of the grandest works of international Old Wisdom with its dominant focus on nature-creation.” Cf. Geller, Wisdom, Nature and Piety in Some Biblical Psalms, 105.

\textsuperscript{525} Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 287 regards the final form of Ps 104 as deeply influenced by the wisdom tradition, and that creation becomes a sign of victory and an act of liberation (cf. Ps 18:15-20; 65:8; 89:14), with the created order testifying to the divine wisdom (104:24). He regards the psalm as an anti-mythical treatment of the chaotic waters, which is congruous with the description of Leviathan. Cf. also Terrien, Elusive Presence, 315-16 pointing out that despite the lack of clear literary criteria for the genre, affinities in some parts of Psalter with wisdom circles is readily admitted.


\textsuperscript{528} Pss 8, 24, 33, 65, 74, 74, 89, 95, 96, 100, 102, 115, 119, 121, 124, 134, 135, 136, 146, 147 and 148. According to L. Vosberg, Studien zum Reden vom Schöpfer in den Psalmen (BEVTH 69; München: Kaiser Verlag, 1975), 11, 15 none of these 22 psalms should be dated to a period before 587/6 BCE.

\textsuperscript{529} Von Rad, “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation,” 140-142 regarded creation psalms to offer a starting-point from which to consider divine providence and the purpose of divine salvation. Despite this view, he considered Pss 104 and 19 as containing an “unadulterated” doctrine of creation. To the contrary Mays, “Maker of Heaven and Earth,” 75 sees YHWH’s
description of divine works of creation.\textsuperscript{530} This sets Ps 104 apart from Ps 103 in which divine providence is the central theme,\textsuperscript{531} as in the twin historical psalms 105 and 106. Amid the rhetorical fusion of literary and theological motifs in Ps 104,\textsuperscript{532} the distinct voice of the psalmist in depicting creator, creation and the relation between creator and death remains clear.\textsuperscript{533}

### 2.5.2.1 The Rhetoric of God in Ps 104

Central to the creation theology of Ps 104 is the description of the Deity. Primarily, the Deity in Ps 104 is characterised as magnificent\textsuperscript{534} and omnipotent creator.\textsuperscript{535} The majesty (\textit{dwh}) and honour (\textit{rdh}) ascribed to YHWH in v 1 are royal predicates (cf. Ps 96:4, 6), presenting YHWH as cosmic ruler.\textsuperscript{536} The creation theology operative in Ps 104 stresses that everything, even that which is representative of chaos, such as the waters (vv 6-9) and Leviathan (v 26), is subjugated to divine supremacy.\textsuperscript{537} This is achieved by means of describing YHWH’s exalted position in creation as well as His works of creation, and not by means of describing YHWH’s struggle with or victory over the forces of chaos.\textsuperscript{538} The imagery employed in Ps 104, describing divine supremacy, has an ancient Near Eastern background, but it has been remodelled according to the theological purpose of the psalmist.\textsuperscript{539} This is evident in vv 1-2, and particularly the description of YHWH “stretching out the heavens” (\textit{µymv hfwn} in v 2).\textsuperscript{540} YHWH’s cosmic location is indicative of the heights of the horizon, i.e. the
cosmic north, presenting the mythological abode of the gods and the place of celestial appearance within the religions of ancient Palestine. In Ps 104 it presents the realm from which YHWH rules, coming in power to demonstrate His cosmic dominion, covering Himself with light (\textit{rwa}, v 1). As such vv 1-2 contribute in amplifying the divine revelatory dimension of vv 1-4. YHWH’s self-manifestation is not preceded by a \textit{Chaoskampf} as in the \textit{Baal Epic} or the \textit{Enuma Elish}, where victorious gods such as Baal and Marduk and kings build temples following their victories. In Ps 104 the heavens announce YHWH’s presence and revelation as He proceeds to create.

In Ps 104 the Deity is predominantly designated by the name \textit{hwhy} (v 1 x 2; 16; 24; 31 x 2; 33; 34; 35), and once with \textit{pli a} (v 1), \textit{l}a (v 21), and \textit{hy} (v 35) which, as shorter form of \textit{hwhy} frequently occurs in later psalms in the formulation \textit{hyA\textit{dh}}. The deity is addressed in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} person, and also with the 1\textsuperscript{st} person singular suffix, “my God” (v 1). YHWH is the psalmist’s God (\textit{pli a hwhy} v1), and as such all subsequent descriptions of the Deity’s works of creation applies to YHWH, who is very great (\textit{dam tldg}, v 1). In this way YHWH is depicted as heavenly king, even if Ps 104 is not a royal psalm.

In addition to being great and majestic, YHWH is also characterised as “wise”, making everything in wisdom (\textit{hnj}, v 24), securing a beneficial order in creation.

This description witnesses to the nature of the creator and creation alike. Creation is governed and kept in tact by divine wisdom. This implies that the creator is not depicted as distant, but closely involved in the realm of creation. YHWH is not an impersonal life force as the solar deity in the hymn to Aton. Rather, YHWH responds (v 28) to His creation (v 27), providing in the needs of living creatures, being in charge of meteorological phenomena (v 13), and even finds pleasure in the playful Leviathan (v 26). When YHWH opens His hand (v 28), creation is filled with goodness.

In this respect the providential quality of the creator is clearly depicted. Birds, trees, humans, creatures of the sea, all depend on the timely provision (v 27) of YHWH. YHWH rules with an open hand, nurturing and

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542 Habel, “He who Stretches out the Heavens,” 423. In this regard the description of the heavens serves primarily as the cosmic location of the creator, rather than a structural component of creation, in the sense of holding back the waters. Compare Ps 29:9-10 where YHWH is described as enthroned above the cosmic flood.

543 In Ps 104:1 \textit{\textit{d}j} “splendour” (cf. Hab 3:3) and \textit{\textit{rd}h} “honour” belong to the language of divine theophany and cultic epiphany (cf. Ps 29:2; 96:6; Job 40:10). Cf. Habel, “He who Stretches out the Heavens,” 422.

544 Habel, “He who Stretches out the Heavens,” 429.

545 Here contra Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 284, 288 who considers Ps 104 as fitting within the frame of the YHWH-kingship psalms. For Weiser, \textit{The Psalms}, 667 the imagery describing YHWH is drawn from a nature myth, preserved in the language of the cult. Cf. 18:10, “And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.”

546 Ps 136:5 states that YHWH made the heavens in “understanding” (\textit{nht}).

547 This reference to divine wisdom is not unlike the “wisdom of the gods” recounted in the \textit{Enuma Elish} and \textit{Attrahasis}. Cf. Whybray, \textit{The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament}, 104-108.

548 Perdue, \textit{Wisdom and Creation}, 467 considers the connection between divine wisdom in the HB and \textit{ma’at}, and argues that “God is the creator of heaven and earth and the one who continues to sustain the order of reality, making life in its various manifestations not only possible, but indeed vital and blessed as well.”

549 This motif also occurs in Ps 33, 147, 148, but here in the context of salvation rather than creation.
restraining, rather than hunting down like the Egyptian and Mesopotamian gods in order to demonstrate their authority.\textsuperscript{550}

While YHWH responds to creation by means of caring and providing, creation also responds to the approach of YHWH (v 32). By means of a continuance of anthropomorphic images, the psalmist describes the earth’s trembling and the mountains’ smoking in response to YHWH’s looking (\textit{fbr}) and touching (\textit{g}). In the same way the waters fled from YHWH’s rebuke (\textit{hrg}, hearing the voice of His thunder (v 7). The psalmist offers an awe inspiring description of the creator, who does not stand in a threatening relation to creation.

In the continuous cycle of creation and death, YHWH is described as present every step of the way. If YHWH takes away the \textit{jw}, which by implication He also gave, living beings die and return to dust (v 30). When YHWH sends forth His \textit{jw} creation is renewed and continues (v 31). For this reason YHWH in Ps 104 is above all the God of life.\textsuperscript{551} In this way the creation theology of Ps 104, describing the creator-creation relationship is suggestive of a cosmic intimacy. In as much as the creator is magnificent (v 2), He is also provident and caring. Thus, the creator in Ps 104 is trustworthy, also in bringing an end to injustice in creation (v 35). What is said of YHWH in relation to creation and death applies to this life, since the psalmist is silent concerning that which lies beyond the grave (cf. §2.5.4.3).

\textbf{2.5.2.2 The Theology of Creation in Ps 104}

The Israelite perception of life and death in relation to YHWH is pertinent for a consideration of the intimate creator-creation relation attested in Ps 104.\textsuperscript{552} Here both life and death are intimately connected with YHWH. As in the wider context of the HB Psalter YHWH is the origin of all life. Indeed, with YHWH is a “fountain of life” (\textit{myj rwm} Ps 36:9).\textsuperscript{553} While Ps 104 does not dwell on the question concerning the origin of life,\textsuperscript{554} it does formulate the dependence of all life on YHWH - as the source of life, other than the Sun - as well as the beneficent order established by YHWH in creation.\textsuperscript{555} As such the connection of YHWH with light (\textit{rw}) and water (\textit{ym}) in the opening verses is significant, since both are symbols of life.\textsuperscript{556} Light is directly


\textsuperscript{551} The notion of \textit{hwhy} as God of life is implicit in the divine name, associated with the verb \textit{hyj “to be”} (Exod 3:14). See also Deut 30:19-20; Jer 21:8; Ps 36:9; Job 12:10 for other instances affirming YHWH as God of life. Cf. Johnston, “Death in Egypt and Israel,” 114.


\textsuperscript{553} Kraus, \textit{Theology of the Psalms}, 162-163. Ps 36:9 further reads, “...in your light shall we see light.”

\textsuperscript{554} In fact, the Psalter does not dwell much on the question of origin of life (e.g. Ps 22:9; 139:13-17). Cf. K. Seybold, \textit{Introducing the Psalms} (trans. R.G. Dauphy; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 167-171.

\textsuperscript{555} R.B. Coote and D.R. Ord, \textit{In the Beginning: Creation and the Priestly History} (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 4 argue that the main concern of HB creation texts is “to describe order, structure, sequence, and relation, not the creation of matter per se.”

\textsuperscript{556} Barth, \textit{Die Errettung}, 28-29. In Gen 1:3 \textit{rw} as the first act of divine creation is associated with life, as is \textit{ym} (Gen 1:6, 7, 9), with its division constituting the second act of creation.
associated with YHWH (v 1), while the chaotic waters are put in their place by YHWH (v 9; cf. Prov 8:29), gaining a beneficial rather than threatening quality. Ps 104 is not concerned with an act of divine creation in some distant past, but with YHWH’s creative activity in the present. For this reason the psalmist does not undertake to discern the divine ordering of creation, as in the case of Gen 1, but rather states it as a given, based on his experience of creation. Because nature is brought under divine control, it has become knowable. Indeed, the praise of the creator in Ps 104 becomes a description of nature, which repeatedly returns to its origin, namely YHWH (v 24). The works of YHWH present the leading motif for awe and wonderment, and in this way the creation theology of Ps 104 may be characterised as experiential. It is significant that the doxological tone of Ps 104 allows room for creation’s dark edges (vv 6-9, 20, 26, 29, 32, 35).

As already stated, a moment of tension or chaos remains within the framework of the creation theology of Ps 104. But this does not imply that the text contains a clear Chaoskampf motif, or a struggle between YHWH and the representatives of chaos (e.g. Ps 74:13-14; Isa 51:9). Ps 104 is rather indicative of “creation without opposition.” While no real struggle with the life threatening forces of chaos is evident, it is significant that the representatives of chaos continue to exist within the framework of the creation theology of Ps 104. Indeed, they have become woven into the fabric of life, contained by the continued activity of the creator.

The deep (µwht, v 6) has been covered by YHWH, the waters (µym, vv 3, 6, 7) have been put in their proper place (v 9) and Leviathan has been fashioned by YHWH (v 26). These images are stripped of their divine qualities and became remythologised as the sun (µmv) and moon (µry) in v 19. While a reference to the lights (trwa) and stars (µybkk)

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557 Cf. Ps 56:13 (v 14, HB), “…that I may walk before God in the light of the living.” Here µy j rwa is related to µyhla. However, Ps 104 is the only pure creation context in which rwa is directly related to YHWH. For other occurrences of rwa in the Psalter, cf. 27:1; 36:10; 37:6; 56:14; 78:14; 89:16; 119:105; 136:7; 139:11; 148:3; 38:11; 44:4; 97:11; 112:4 (subject); 4:7; 36:10; 43:3; 49:20 (object).

558 In Ps 104:2-30 the psalmist sketches YHWH’s acts of creation that assures the stability and continuance of all life. Cf. Terrien, “Wisdom in the Psalter,” 71. Comparable are also Ps 104:27 and Qoh 3:11, where the “right time” is at issue. But Qoh 3:11 is immediately qualified by the statement that humanity cannot “find out” (axm) the work of God. In Ps 104 divine works of creation are intelligible. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 48.

559 For Schnocks, Vergänglichkeit und Gottesherchaft, 242-43 Ps 104 draws from motives occurring in older (Ps 93) and younger (Ps 97) psalms, yet the innovative aspect of Ps 104 is the focus on nature, which brings the psalm in close proximity to Gen 1:1-2:4a.

560 In a sense Ps 104 wants its audience to let their “Lebenserwartung” be informed and corrected by their “Welterfahrung.” Cf. Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 118. Thus, in terms of the Weltanschauung of Ps 104, humans can work, eat, drink and praise God, and must eventually die at a given moment.

561 Goldingay, Theological Diversity, 223.

562 Levenson, Creation and the Persistence of Evil, 53, 127.


564 Here we can compare Job 41:2, 5-11, where the splendour of Leviathan is described, tameable only by the creator. In Ps 74:13-14 and Isa 27:1 we encounter a different depiction of Leviathan, which is to be slain.

565 In Ps 104 the sun and moon are mentioned by name, while in Gen 1 it is referred to as part of the lights. Cf. Deissler, Die Psalmen, 409.
as encountered in Gen 1:14-19 is absent, these luminaries now have a chronological function, without any divine connotations (cf. Ps 136:7-9).

Psalm 104 presents a picture of a perfectly ordered and maintained creation, but a moment of chaos and tension remains. This is not entirely surprising, considering the experiential nature of the psalmist’s creation theology. However, the psalmist’s rhetoric of the creator partially debunks this tension, particularly by means of describing YHWH’s past acts (use of perfects), and His continued involvement in creation (use of imperfects and participles). Thus, despite the moment of tension inherent in creation, it is ultimately depicted as secure in view of the works of YHWH. Not even the moment of death (v 29), or the presence of the wicked and sinners (v 35) interrupts the divine continuance of creation (v 30). In this way the “persistence of evil” in creation (v 35) is viewed through the lens of the trustworthy nature of creation, implying that the psalmist’s petition for the removal of the wicked and the sinners presents a moment of hope in the psalm, rather than despair. In view of its very different theme, v 35a is probably a later addition, but it has a significant place in the present form of the psalm. In addition to presenting a moment of hope in the psalm, it also presents a reality check on the part of the psalmist, who does not turn a blind eye to creation’s incongruities. Theodicy is not a primary theme in Ps 104, and neither is the theme of eschatology, which is only reflected in the petition in v 35a. This eschatological moment is conditioned, since here the psalmist’s hopeful petition is directed towards this life, within the frame of creation. The petition for the removal of the wicked and sinners can further be read in view of the psalmist’s perception of death as the limit of life, i.e. that they share the same fate as all living beings, and will inevitably perish (cf. Ps 49).

Here we can note the doxological context of Ps 148, where the whole creation is called to praise YHWH, including the sun, moon and stars of light (v 3).

Niditch, Chaos to Cosmos, 6 argues that the Urgeschichte (Gen 1-11) contains two main movements, namely from chaos to order and from ideal order to reality. In Ps 104 ideal order is balanced by reality.


Böstrom, The God of the Sages, 152 for whom the God of the wisdom orientated Ps 104 is not just the supreme creator of the past, but continues to uphold everything in the present. The divine works of creation (Ps 104:2-30) gives an impression of the assured stability and growth of universal life. Cf. S.L. Terrien, “Wisdom in the Psalter,” in: L.G. Perdue et al., In Search of Wisdom Essays in memory of John G. Gammie (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 71. Also Murphy, The Tree of Life, 119, for whom creation is a happening that occurs over and over for all its inhabitants.


Brown, “The Lion, the Wicked, and the Wonder of it All,” 16 suggests that God’s engagement with creation in Ps 104 is more “aesthetically” than “morally” driven, and as such contrast with the recreation text of Gen 8:21b, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, because the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.”


Contra Deissler, Die Psalmen, 410 who identifies in v 35 a longing for a “new earth”, as in Isa 66:22f.

In Ps 104 the basic HB tripartite division of the world (µymv / Åra / µym + µubt) is upheld.\textsuperscript{575} We have already referred to the influence of ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies on the creation theology of Ps 104,\textsuperscript{576} but its closer affinity with the priestly creation account of Genesis 1 is indicative of its basic Hebrew cosmology.\textsuperscript{577} While the psalmist is clear concerning place of YHWH in the heavenly and earthly spheres, little mention is made of the underworld. YHWH is said to securely establish (dsy) the foundations of the earth in v 5 (cf. Job 38:4), which He covers with the deep (µubt, v 6). YHWH however is not said to be active in the underworld. Further, the reference to the deep in v 6 should not categorically be equated with the underworld in the sense of Sheol. The realm of death does not belong to the psalmist’s description of creation. Living beings are merely said to return to dust (v 29). The limited interest of the psalmist in the underworld stresses the concern with the realm of life.\textsuperscript{578} At the same time the creation theology of Ps 104, representative of a tripartite worldview, is indicative of YHWH’s sovereignty over all spheres of creation.\textsuperscript{579} The whole of creation is submitted to the power and providence of God, who is portrayed as having authority over life and death.\textsuperscript{580}

In §2.5.1.2 the affinity between the creation theologies of Gen 1 and Ps 104 was pointed out. Similarly the affinity between the creation theology of Ps 104 and the creation account of Genesis 2:4b-3:24 must not be overlooked. Admittedly the focus and intent of these two texts are very different, but affinities are identifiable. This pertains particularly to the status of human labour (v 23), and the fate of created beings at the moment of death (v 29). In Gen 2:4b-3:24 human labour is initially perceived as a neutral divine imperative (Gen 2:15), and eventually as the result of divine punishment for the transgression of a divine command (Gen 3:17-19). This latter notion lacks in Ps 104, where the result of human cultivation of the earth (wine, oil, bread) is described as a reason for joy (v 15). In Gen 3:17 the earth (hnda) is cursed (rra) on account of humanity (µda), yet in Ps 104:14 the earth (Åra) yields its produce to the service of beast (hmhb) and humankind (µda) alike. The relation between the earth and living beings is not distorted, and the harmony in creation persists.

In the J creation account humanity (µda) and the earth (hnda) are intimately related.\textsuperscript{581} Indeed, YHWH forms (rxy) humankind from the dust (rp) of the earth in Gen 2:7. As

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{575} Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 115 refers to the “kosmologischen Räume” (heaven, earth sea) reflected in the build-up of Ps 104, which is in line with the more traditional ‘models’ of describing the world within the HB.
  \item \textsuperscript{576} Clifford, \textit{Creation Accounts}, 114 argues for such an Egyptian influence on Ps 104.
  \item \textsuperscript{577} Allen, \textit{Psalms 101-150}, 30-31.
  \item \textsuperscript{578} This is further indicated by the description of the divine glory (dwbk), which is connected to images of light, fire and heaven, i.e. the opposite of that associated with Sheol.
  \item \textsuperscript{579} Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 119-120 regards the \textit{Wirklichkeitsverständnis} of Ps 104 as an interplay of order and chaos. While Sheol is not mentioned explicitly in Ps 104, the connection between divine activity and death in v 29, and the reference to the “deep” (µubt) in v 6 could allow for such a view. For µubt as primeval waters in the Psalter, cf. 36:7; 42:8; 71:20; 78:15; 104:6; 106:9; 107:26; 135:6; 148:7; 42:8; 77:17 (subject); 33:7 (object).
  \item \textsuperscript{580} Reventlow, “Leben und Tod im Alten Testament,” 10. Without the divine jw humanity is no more than dust of the ground. Also K.A.D. Smelik, \textit{De Dood en de Bijbel} (Haarlem: Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap, 2003), 15. The tone of Ps 104 is very different from that of Ps 90. Cf. Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie,” 115-16.
  \item \textsuperscript{581} In Gen 2-3 and Ps 104 humanity is depicted as “Erdmann,” i.e. called to cultivate the earth. Cf. Deissler, \textit{Die Psalmen}, 409.
\end{itemize}
already indicated, the earth (hmda) is eventually cursed on account of humankind (µda). However, humankind only becomes a living being (hy vpn) once it receives the breath of life (µyyj tmvn) from YHWH Elohim (µyhla hwhy). On account of humanity’s transgression of the divine command (Gen 2:16-17), they are doomed to return to the substance from which they were formed, namely dust (rp, Gen 3:19). Oddly enough it is not mentioned in this context that YHWH takes back the life breath with which he infused µda. Indeed, humanity does not die immediately on account of transgressing the casuistic command of Gen 2:16-17, but a limit is set to human life and the possibility for eternal life is lost (Gen 3:22-24). Nevertheless, the J creation account recounts the continued divine care for humanity (Gen 3:21), even after divine judgment has been cast. In Ps 104 an identification of humanity with the ground is visible in v 29, and here the return to dust (rp) refers to all living beings. While Ps 104 does not explicitly recount the creation of humankind, or any other living being for that matter, with the exception of Leviathan whom YHWH formed (rxy v 26), the creator-life relation is unmistakable. This relation is stressed in vv 29-30 by means of the identifying YHWH’s breath (jwr), with the jwr of all living beings. Also in this respect humanity fits within the larger scheme of things, having no distinguished place in creation. As in Gen 3:19, Ps 104:29 recounts that all living beings will return to dust. In Ps 104:29 this happens when YHWH takes away (1 sa) their jwr. Other than Gen 3:19, this is not limited to humanity, but pertains to all living beings. What is also different in the creation theology of Ps 104 is the description of the divine renewal of creation in v 30. While v 30 describes the creation (arb) of living beings when YHWH sends (j lv) His jwr, which is not unlike Gen 2:7, the main difference concerns YHWH’s renewal (vqj) of the face of the earth (hmda yp). In terms of the J creation theology of Gen 2:4a-3:24, YHWH continues to provide for humanity after divine judgment, yet the earth remains cursed and no mention is made of the divine renewal of creation. This notion of renewal is central to the creation theology of Ps 104, maintaining life and death in a fine balance.

Ps 104 engages with and draws from other creation theologies in the HB, but nevertheless presents a distinct picture of the created world. Creation is rhetorically presented as firmly established, well ordered, beneficial, maintained by the creator and for this reason perpetual. In terms of such a creation theology, life does not have to be faced with anxiety, and even death, apparently, loses its sting. In a world where the images of chaos, often associated with death, have become inherent to creation, death itself has come to be viewed as a natural, inherent part of divine creation. This we will consider in the next section.

582 Ps 90:3 also contains the notion of YHWH bringing (human) life to an end, “You turn man to destruction and say, ‘Return you children of men.” In Deut 32:39 and 1 Sam 2:6 creation and death are also attributed to the God of Israel, who kills and makes alive. Also indirectly 2 Kgs 5:7. 583 This idea is present in the flood narratives of Gen 6-9, but differs from Ps 104. 584 Mays, ”Maker of Heaven and Earth,” 85. In terms of Ps 104 “Our living and dying are knit together in the Lord’s way with the world.” 585 Israel’s thoughts on creation have a doxological intent, and are not merely theoretical expressions. Cf. H. Ringgren, Psalmen (KUTB 120; Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1971), 105. 586 Terrien, Elusive Presence, 317.
2.5.3 Death as a Theological Theme in Ps 104

In the Psalter the theme of death is numerously addressed and variously dealt with.\textsuperscript{587} It occurs in a variety of contexts,\textsuperscript{588} including the doxological context of Ps 104. While the life-death antagonism presents a fundamental characterisation of the Psalter,\textsuperscript{589} we have already argued for creation as theological \emph{Leitmotif} in Ps 104. Within its framework the theme of death functions only on the periphery. Indeed, \textsuperscript{twm} does not occur in Ps 104 as noun or verb.\textsuperscript{590} As such death does not constitute an independent theme. Its significance in Ps 104 is located in the context in which it occurs, i.e. creation, as well as the way in which it is described, namely in neutral and natural terms. Further, in Ps 104 death is not a random event, but is perceived as a natural part of the process of creation,\textsuperscript{591} and closely related to divine activity in creation (vv 29-30).\textsuperscript{592} This creator-death connection in Ps 104 is significant, but not foreign to the HB, given the Israelite discernment of life and death in relation to YHWH.\textsuperscript{593}

In the HB Psalter death is predominantly seen as the expected and absolute end of life.\textsuperscript{594} It is however the context in which death is dealt with (e.g. praise or lament), and the ways in which the author responds to the fact of death (e.g. fear, despair, anger – all in relation with YHWH), that results in the Psalter’s diversified view of death.\textsuperscript{595} When death intrudes into the sphere of life, it becomes a problem. As such it is particularly in the context of psalms of lament that the theme of death is pertinent,

\textsuperscript{587} In the Psalter the actual distribution of the verbal and noun forms of \textsuperscript{twm} has a low frequency. See Pss 41:6; 49:11; 82:7; 118:17 (Qal “to die”); 34:22; 109:16 (Pi “to kill”); 37:32; 59:1; 105:29 (Hi “to kill”), while \textsuperscript{twm} noun (“death”) occurs more frequently, cf. 6:6; 7:14; 9:14; 13:4; 18:5; 22:16; 33:19; 49:18; 55:5; 56:14; 68:21; 73:4; 78:50; 107:18; 116:3; 8; 118:18; 49:15; 116:15 (subject) and 55:16; 89:49 (object).
\textsuperscript{590} Once [\textsuperscript{mj} v 29] is used, which relates to the theme of the return to dust.
\textsuperscript{591} It is far removed from notions of a “premature,” “bad,” or “unjust” death. Further, Ps 104 does not reflect on death’s impact concerning the divine-human relation, contrary to Pss 6:5; 39:13; 41:5; 88:4; 115:17; 116:15, where death is perceived as bringing an end to this divine-human communion. Cf. Johnston, \emph{Shades of Sheol}, 200-201.
\textsuperscript{592} Weiser, \emph{The Psalms}, 670 identified in vv 29-30 the conquest of death by means of the continual process of recreation. But in Ps 104 death is not something to be overcome, but part of creation.
\textsuperscript{593} Kraus, \emph{Theology of the Psalms}, 165.
\textsuperscript{594} An expectation of future life is often identified in Pss 49 and 73, but here the nature of death remains unclear. M. Witte, “Aber Gott wirt meine Seele erlösen – Tod und Leben nach Psalm XLIX.” \emph{VT} 50 (2000): 541 argues that Ps 49, as wisdom psalm, concerns deliverance before death, not from death. So also J.D. Pleins, “Death and Endurance: Reassessing the Literary Structure and Theology of Ps 49.” \emph{JSOT} 69 (1996): 27 who argues that Ps 49 is not concerned with an afterlife, but with death “as the philosophic scale for measuring what endures on this side of the grave…”
\textsuperscript{595} Goldingay, “Death and Afterlife in the Psalms,” 65. The notion of the “terrors of death” (Ps 55:5, HB) is absent in Ps 104.
as exemplified in Ps 88). In this context death is experienced as invading into the sphere of life and cutting the lamenter of from the presence of YHWH, since the dead are considered as standing outside the orbit of the worship of YHWH. In this way affliction or illness may be experienced as a descent into Sheol, thus serving as motivation for lament (cf. Pss 30:9; 88:10-12; also Isa 38:18).

The situation in Ps 104 is very different, considering its doxological tone and the psalmist’s trusting perception of creation and creator. No lament or notion of a descent into Sheol is noticeable in Ps 104. In a very limited and indirect way, the return to dust (רְפַע) of v 29 might allude to this, but it is not an immediate concern of the psalmist. The psalmist does not elaborate on this “return to dust,” but rather presents it in a manner of fact way. As a result the psalm says very little concerning the creator-dead relation, as well as the fate of the dead. The psalmist’s concern is with the creator-creation relationship in this life. In Ps 104 death is a natural consequence of being created, i.e. receiving one’s breath (יָרָה) from the creator. At the same time it marks the absolute end of an individual life, since death sets in when YHWH takes away the יָרָה which He gave when creating human beings. It is this subtle ambiguity that characterises the creation-death relation of Ps 104. Nevertheless, in Ps 104 the reality of death does not cast a shadow over the light of life. Indeed, the creator-death relation in Ps 104 furthers the theme of divine omnipotence and creaturely dependence. YHWH commands life (v 30; cf. Ps 133:3), and also brings it to an end (v 29; cf. Job 34:14).

The theme of human ephemerality is central to the fourth book of the Psalter, particularly Ps 90. This is only partially present in Ps 104, and concerns life in general, not just human life. It is accepted as a fact of life, and not scrutinised. However, in Ps 104 as in the wider context of the fourth book of the Psalter, the themes of Vergänglichkeit and Geschöpflichkeit are closely related. Living beings are ephemeral because they are created. As such human mortality in Ps 104 is not presented as the result of human hubris or divine wrath. Creation and death in Ps 104 are two sides of the same cosmological coin, and are not negatively juxtaposed. For this reason the struggle between the experience of death and the longing for a restoration to life so pertinent in various psalms, is absent within the context of Ps 104. Still, created life does not imply life without limits (v 29). Life, which by
nature implies death, is set within the parameters of divine creation. The Diesseits orientation of Ps 104 is clear.

While Ps 104 maintains the basic tripartite worldview of the HB, any clear reference to Sheol or the underworld as “abode of the dead” is lacking, apart from the reference to µwht in v 6. YHWH secures the foundations of the earth amidst the chaotic waters (cf. Ps 93:1). As such the underworld does not threaten to intrude into the realm of life. In some instances in the Psalter the experience of deliverance from death is representative of a rescue from everything that interferes with life in an unwholesome and destructive way (cf. Ps 9:13; 16:10; 88:8). In Ps 104 not even the presence of the wicked and the sinners in creation (v 35a) leads to the psalmist’s longing for rescue. They do no present a threat to life. The continued presence of YHWH (hwhy dwbk) in creation (v 31), despite the hiding of His face, outweighs the presence of the wicked and sinners. It is also YHWH’s continued presence in creation that contributes to death loosing its threatening dimension. The necessity of the divine presence in creation is however made absolutely clear. In Ps 104 life and death are elements in a unitary reality, positively affirming the dependence of all creatures on God.

Further, the psalmist’s disinterest in the creator-death relation is motivated by the perpetual process of divine creation, or renewal of creation (v 30). For this reason the death of the individual life is overshadowed by creations’ continuance. This also applies to YHWH’s “killing” in order to provide prey (¹rf) for the young lions (v 21). The psalmist’s emphasis on life Diesseits directs the attention away from any Jenseits expectation (contra Ps 73:24b). It is in this life that the psalmist will sing praises to YHWH (v 33), while he has his life (µyyj), as long as he “continues” (dw[). While creation is renewed by means of YHWH sending His jwr (v 30), the ancient Near

closely related with divine activity, it is stripped of mythological and metaphorical dimensions in Ps 104.


605 Goldingay, “Death and Afterlife in the Psalms,” 64-65 has argued that the death within the psalms “cannot commemorate and give praise for Yahweh’s deeds not because they stand outside the orbit of worship but because they stand outside the orbit in which YHWH acts; they therefore have no deeds to commemorate or give praise for.” This is even more clearly reflected in the book of Qohelet – in which death is a central theme, pervading all life and casting a shadow over all life that is to be lived (Qoh 7:1-4).


607 Deissler, Die Psalmen, 408.

608 This contrasts with instances where the “grave” (r[w / t[v) presents the opening of the depths of Sheol into the realm of life, and where death is at times experienced in the midst of life, as in Ps 30:3 “YHWH, you have brought up my soul from the grave: you have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.” Cf. Kraus, Theology of the Psalms, 166. Also Barth, Die Errettung, 170.

609 For Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 441 Israel’s temple theologians did not attempt to rationalise YHWH’s actions by means of the categories of punishment and sin, but rather focussed on the consequences of the absence of God from His people and creation. The suggestion has also been made that within the Psalter one can speak of two modes of existence, namely a Totenexistenz and a Lebensexistenz, with the lamenter longing to be moved from a state of death to a state of life. Cf. Zenger, “Mit Gott ums Leben kämpfen,” 73. Both modes of existence are possible in life Diesseits, but this is not the case in Ps 104.


Eastern concept of dying and rising gods, also associated with the continuation of creation, is absent in Ps 104. Unlike Baal, YHWH never dies (cf. Hab 1:12). He lives (cf. Ps 18:46) and is not subjected to the sleep of death (cf. Ps 121:4). In this way YHWH as creator is contrasted to the ancient Near Eastern gods of life and death. A parallel does however occur with the Canaanite god El as creator, who is the guardian of order in the heavens and on earth.

Since YHWH is the God of life, anyone in need of life, experiencing the threat of death, will strive to go into YHWH’s presence. This does not categorically imply that death falls outside the divine reach, since YHWH is also described as lord over the ways that lead to death (cf. Ps 68:21, “He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto YHWH the Lord belong escape from death.”; cf. 116:15; 118:18). Nevertheless, YHWH is primarily in the “business” of life, which results in the lack of a concern with Sheol or a expectation in Ps 104. The divine renewal of creation does not present some sort of future life expectation. Rather, death as event coincides with divine acts of creation. It is, strangely enough, this certainty of death and its connectedness with divine activity that presents a reason for hope. This hope is not Jenseits but Diesseits directed. Death does not stand in opposition to divine creation, but fits within the boundaries thereof. For this reason death’s presence in life is not experienced as death’s infiltration into life. Death does not detract from the significance of life (v 33). Neither does it function as a dynamic power that intervenes in different ways in the everyday life of the individual and community.

This perception of death stands in stark contrast with the individual psalms of lament. As already pointed out, Ps 104:29 is not concerned with individual life or death. This is indicated by the use of the third person plural suffixes (i.e. “they are troubled; their breath; they die; they return; to their dust”). Neither does it refer to the death of humans in particular, but rather to created life in general. The theology of creation in Ps 104 is determinative for its perception of death. In the same way that chaos came to be an inherent part of the good order of divine creation, so death is assigned its place within the order of divine creation. As the forces of chaos remain present in

613 Mowinckel, Psalms, 68.
614 Barth, Die Errettung, 48. Considering the cultic setting of various psalms, it is particularly through cultic-ritual actions that life may be restored or preserved. So Mowinckel, Psalms, 63.
615 Kraus, Theology of the Psalms, 167.
617 This is often the perception of death in other psalmic contexts. Cf. Lindström, Suffering and Sin, 440. In this sense Ps 23 serves as a good example, where the “valley of the shadow of death” in v3 is juxtaposed with “the house of YHWH” v 6.
618 The “Vergänglichkeitsklage” of the individual as encountered in Ps 102, is not present in Ps 104.
619 Zenger, “Mit Gott ums Leben kämpfen,” 63 argues “Der Tod als Gegenmacht zum Leben kommt in vielfältigen Bildern zur Sprache. Sie sind der Versuch, die alltägliche Begegnung mit der Destruktivität des Todes und die unausweichliche Erfahrung der Begrenztheit des individuellen Lebens so mit dem Glauben an JHWH als den Gott des Lebens zusammenbringen, dass sich daraus Perspektiven für ein Leben trotz Tod ergeben.” In Ps 104 death does not stand opposed to life, but the perception of the creator does contribute to living life “in the face of death.”
creation, within the divinely established limits (v 9), so death is a reality of creation, and finds its place within the divinely established parameters of life. In part, hope in Ps 104 is to be found in the knowledge that despite one’s own limited lifespan, creation as such, of which each individual form of life is a part, will continue by means of YHWH’s continuous involvement in and providential care for creation. YHWH is the source of hope, instead of an expectation of a future life.

2.6 Conclusion

The Psalms incorporate various realities pertaining to creation and death. Ps 104 attests to one of these realities. The theology of creation and creator in Ps 104 is determinative for its perception of death. Within the framework of its creation theology, death has a natural place, be it peripheral. While the absence of death is not a prerequisite for doxology, it should be noted that the doxology in Ps 104 takes place in this life with a view on this life. Ps 104 is Diesseits orientated. As such the possibility of hope does not depend on the belief in some form of life after death. In Ps 104 the return to dust (v 29) does not imply a shade-like existence in Sheol (cf. the μανή in e.g. Ps 88:11; Isa 14:9, 26:19; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Job 26:5, or 1 Sam 28:13 where μνήμη is used). Death is not considered as an enfeebled life, which continues in the underworld. Death is final. But this does not imply that the death of the individual stands opposed to the continuation of creation (v 30), i.e. of life. The psalm’s report on creation and death concerns this life. The orientation of Ps 104 toward the present relates to its perception of the creator as active, and as such immediately “present” in creation. The creator is encountered in the context of creation (v 31).

In the opening of this chapter Ps 104 was characterised as a complex text. It incorporates theological ideas and literary motifs pertinent in various theological traditions of the HB (J, P, and wisdom), as well as its Umwelt. Ps 104 resists being

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620 In Ps 73 it is the power of death yields to the glory of YHWH, yet in Ps 104 death is not considered as an independent power, but closely associated with YHWH, falling within the range of his creative power.

621 While this perception of creation counters egocentric human claims, its significance for individuals and communities in desperate situations is disputable. Cf. Hermisson, “Observations,” 51. Yet, as Qoh 3:1 states, there is a time for everything, including a time to weep and a time to praise (3:4). Ps 104 presents such an occasion for joy.

622 Here O.H. Steck, World and Environment (BES; Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 167-168 observes that in the experience of the non-disposable gift of life and its equally non-disposable withdrawal, the individual in Israel actively experienced Yahweh the creator as acting in the event of life.

623 In Ps 104 it is by means of the basic view of the world as evoking awe, that appreciation and fear transcend its cultural barriers and allows the text to be heard within a cultural context with a very different picture of the world.

624 The hope for fullness in life Diesseits in Ps 104 corresponds with the hope assumed in the wisdom books of Proverbs, Job and Qohelet. Cf. Goldingay, “Death and Afterlife in the Psalms,” 61. While this view might clash with faith traditions in which the notion of resurrection and life after death stands central, the contribution of Ps 104 should not be neglected.

625 Cf. Allen, Psalms 101-150, 34 who argues that within the parameters of Ps 104 “Awe and appreciation are set in a religious context: the world and its phenomenon are regarded as windows through which divine activity of love and power may be glimpsed.”
categorised as belonging to a specific theological tradition. It presents an instance where different theological traditions of the HB intersect.\footnote{And could be regarded as an instance where the concerns of Israel’s sages met those of her priests. Cf. Ceresko, “The Sage in the Psalms,” 219 who observes that “If the wisdom movement involved itself in the handing down of the knowledge and values of the community (“the world” in which that community lived) to the next generation, the cult, with its sacred songs (psalms) functioned to maintain, reshape, and celebrate that world.”} As a result the creation theology of the psalm presents an attempt at reshaping or re-imagining the world,\footnote{W. Brueggemann, “Response to James L. Mays, ‘The Question of Context,’” in: J.C. McCann (ed.), \textit{The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter} (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 31 who points to the continual importance of the process of re-symbolisation of religious ideas for the post-exilic Israelite community. This is crucial for the comprehension of new experiences, and for older religious symbols to stay pertinent. Also Krüger, “Kosmo-theologie.” 92.} particularly after the catastrophic event of the Babylonian exile of 587/6 BCE. In a shattered world, left without a palace and temple, ancient Israel’s place was no longer secure. However, by turning the attention toward creation, particularly nature, the psalmist contributes to ancient Israel’s rethinking its own place in creation and its relation with the creator. The world envisioned in Ps 104 provides significance to communal and individual life.\footnote{The understanding of life reflected in the psalms was formed and developed during the time of the Israelite monarchy and was strong enough to survive the fall of Jerusalem Temple in 587/6. But a cultic-orientated worldview was challenged after the fall of Jerusalem, which in turn led to the incorporation of theological currents that originally had no place herein and so became part of the tradition of the Psalter. Cf. Brueggemann, “The Question of Context,” 32.} Not even death or the persistence of evil in a well ordered creation can detract from its significance. The foundations of creation are firmly established and cannot be shaken.\footnote{Contra Ps 60:4 (HB), where the foundations of the earth “shake” (שָׁקָה, \textit{shaqā}) as a result of distress from an enemy, or Ps 82:5 where it shakes due to the lack of law and justice on earth.} YHWH rules supreme over His creation. For this reason the need for a theology dealing with the fate of the dead, as encountered in later biblical traditions (Dan 12), is not necessary. The call for the annihilation of the wicked in v 35 is not so much indicative of the theodicy theme that is prominent in later wisdom, but rather affirms the applicant’s trust in creation and creator.\footnote{Hermisson, “Observations,” 52.} Such trust in creator and creation is disputed in the book of Job, predominantly due to the pressing and persistent theme of theodicy. The world of Ps 104 seems to be turned upside down in Job 3. It is to this text that our attention now shifts.
CHAPTER 3

JOB 3: THE EMBRACEMENT OF DEATH AS RESTORATION OF LIFE

The primary theological matrix within which the book of Job responds to the problem of Job’s suffering is that of creation. Our interest in this chapter does not concern Job’s suffering as a theological problem in itself, but rather the theme of creation as a theological matrix, and the place attributed to the motif of death within this theological matrix. For this purpose we will consider the text of Job 3, which offers the most acute expression of Job’s experience of the reality of suffering in the book as a whole. The themes of creation and death are intricately related in this verbalisation of Job’s agony. We will also consider the wider implications of this creation-death relation for reading the book of Job, and to what extent it is representative of the book’s wider theological landscape.

Exegetically and hermeneutically, the book of Job challenges its readership. This also applies to the consideration of creation and death as theological themes in Job 3. In this chapter we will again consider the delimitation of the text (§3.1), followed by a consideration of the structure (§3.2) and genre (§3.3) of the text. This is followed by a translation of the text (§3.4), while the analysis of Job 3 (§3.5) paves the way for the thematic discussion of the themes of creation and death (§3.6), followed by a conclusion (§3.7).

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633 R.N. Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 40 argues that Job 3 “does not pose intellectual questions concerning such matters as the reason for human suffering or divine justice, but simply exposes the rawness of Job’s feelings in a way that is very rare in the Old Testament.”
634 Job 3 shakes the foundations on which the *Wirklichkeitsverständnis* of the book of Job rests. Yet the book of Job does not contain a single, uniform worldview, as reflected by the prose and poetic sections.
635 In a real sense the book of Job is a polyphone text in which different voices, i.e. theological perspectives, operate simultaneously. Cf. C.A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 84-85.
636 An investigation into the book of Job comprises more than a mere pragmatic and functionalist explication of hard words and unfamiliar customs, but implies a wrestling with the text and imagery, and the structures and ideas operative in the text. Cf. D.J.A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1989), xiii.
637 In this regard W.P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 61 argues that the multi-level network of metaphors employed in Job 3 sets in relief the two foci of life and death.
3.1 Delimitation of the Text

Job 3:1-26, as soliloquy, constitutes an independent literary unit. This does not mean that it could be considered in isolation from the rest of the book of Job, given its relation to the prose prologue and poetic dialogues, particularly the divine speeches in Job 38-41. Job 3:1 commences with יָרַע which refers back to the events related to Job’s misfortune as recounted in the prose prologue of Job 1-2. It also introduces a new stage in the development of the plot of the book. This is indicated by the shift from prose to poetry, as well as Job’s change of tongue, i.e. that his patient response and actions develop into a raw utterance of despair in Job 3.

The introduction of a new phase is further indicated by the phrase “Job opened his mouth and cursed his day” ( molec א ש י ל פ א ב י). Hereafter the fixed formula follows ( molec א ש י ל פ א ב י) as a way of introducing Job’s first speech and to continue or elaborate on the theme introduced in Job 3:1. Job’s opening self-speech is brought to a close in 3:26, and here רָב י מ (“and trouble came”) refers to the speeches of the friends that follow, the first being that of Eliphaz, introduced in 4:1 by means of molec א ש י ל פ א ב י. But more importantly 3:26 indicates the end of Job’s first speech.

While those elements that set Job 3 apart from its immediate literary environment have been pointed out, it is particularly in terms of content that it is also related to that

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638 I.e. it is not addressed to a second party. God is merely implied in the lament, which also applies to the friends and Job’s wife.
639 Westermann, Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob, 30-32 assigns Job 3 its own place in terms of his structural division of the book as a whole, and points out that with chapters 29-31, Job 3 stands outside the disputes, being “bloße Klagen.” The build-op of the book of Job is presentable in the following way, namely 1-2; 42:7ff (prose prologue and epilogue); 3 (Job’s opening self-speech); 4-31 (the dialogues); 28 (the hymn to divine wisdom); 32-37 (the Elihu reason); 38:1-42:6 (God’s response and Job’s closing speech).
641 Three leading themes encountered in Job 3 make a re-appearance in the following speeches of Job. Cf. Ha, Frage und Antwort: Studien zu Hiob 3 im Kontext des Hiob-Buches, 93-144. So the creation motif reappears in the third (9-10) and ninth (26) speech of Job, while the death-wish motif reappears in the second (6-7), third (9-10), fourth (12-14) and fifth (16-17) speech of Job and, finally, theme of divine oppression recurs in the second (6-7), third (9-10), fourth (12-14), fifth (16-17) and sixth (19) speech of Job. In this way the reception of the main themes of Job 3 in the wider context of the book of Job is clear.
643 In 3:1 יָרַע probably refers to the seven days and nights of silence recounted in Job 2:13.
644 A shift in the characterisation of the friends pre- and post Job 3 is also noticeable. Cf. Fretheim, God and World, 221.
645 Here a contrast is identifiable between Job 3:1-2 and Job 2:10 where it is said that “Job did not sin with his lips” ( molec א ש י ל פ א ב י). Now his speech takes on a very different character indeed. The pious Job becomes the protesting Job.
646 See also 6:1; 9:1; 20:6; 16:1; 19:1; 21:1; 23:1; 26:1; partially in 29:1; 42:1 where molec א ש י ל פ א ב י is used as a set formula for introducing the speeches of Job, but also of the friends ( molec א ש י ל פ א ב י) as well as the divine speeches.
647 Job 4:2 presents the first attempt at dialogue after the seven days of silence, since Job 3 is essentially a soliloquy, lacking any direct address.
which precedes and follows on it. This does not impact on the delimitation of Job 3:1-26 and for this reason will be discussed as part of the analysis of the text (§3.5).

3.2 The Structure of the Text

Various suggestions have been made concerning the structure of Job 3. It is not the intention here to offer an exhaustive discussion of the various arguments, but rather to establish in what way the structure contributes to, or is determinative for the relationship of creation and death as theological themes in Job 3. Since Job 3:1-2 is still prose and presents a narrative transition between the prose prologue of Job 1-2, and the poetic text of Job 3:3-26, is not part of the poem proper.

Arguments concerning the structure of Job 3 fall basically into one of two categories. The first entails a two-strophe division, namely vv 3-10 and 11-26, with vv 3-10 constituting a curse and vv 11-26 a lament. The second involves a three-strophe division, namely vv 3-10 (strophe 1) constituting a curse, while vv 11-26 as lament are sub-divided into vv 11-19 (strophe 2) and 20-26 (strophe 3). Here the argument is supported that the vv 3-10 entail Job’s curse of his day of conception and birth, while vv 11-19 express the wish that if he had to be born, he could have died at birth, and vv 20-26 express a wish that what did not happen in vv 3-19, should now happen.

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650 It should be noted that the MT places a Petucha (ḥ) between 3:1 and 3:2, indicating that 3:1 should be seen as a small textual unit, beginning with Job 2:11. Job 3:1 could also be considered as functioning as a heading for the following poem in vv 3-26. Cf. K. Engljahäringer, *Theologie im Streitgespräch: Studien zur Dynamik der Dialoge des Buches Hiob* (SB 198; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003), 23.


In terms of the two strophe structure, the structure of each of these two units consists of a framing device in which the opening statement announces the subject of the outcry *dba* (imperf.) in v 3 and *hnh* in v 11, as well as the reason for the outcry established by a *yk* clause at the end of each strophe, namely vv 10 and 24-26. Such a two strophe division is plausibility, but it does not pay sufficient attention to the disjunction between vv 19 and 20.

In terms of a three strophe division, strophe 1 commences (v 3) with the imperfect of *dba* “let it perish,” while strophe two (v 11) and three (v 20) are introduced by *hnh* “why,” indicating that we are now dealing with a lament. Here it can also be argued that each strophe is introduced by a thematic statement that is subsequently worked out further in the following verses of the strophe. In this way strophe 1 commences with the theme of the “perishing” of day and night (v 3) and is followed by an elaboration of the day of his birth (vv 4-6) and the night of his conception (vv 7-9), ending with a motive clause introduced by *yk* (v 10). Within the context of the curse, day and night constitute a merism, indicating the all encompassing nature of his curse, even though it is directed toward his own creation and motivated by his own situation. Strophe 2 is introduced by *hnh*, i.e. “why” he did not die (vv 11-12) and elaborated by a discussion of rest envisioned to be found in Sheol (vv 13-15), a continuation of the introductory theme (v 16), again elaborated by a discussion of rest in the underworld (vv 17-19). Strophe 3 (vv 20-26) deals with Job’s present experienced reality, which is introduced by the theme of why (hnh) light and life are given to the miserable (v 20). It is then elaborated by the theme of those who are seeking death (vv 21-22), with a continuation of the initial theme (v 23). This in turn is elaborated by the theme of Job who fails to find rest (vv 24-26), while his experience of unbearable pain continues.

The structure and thematic division of Job 3 indicate that both curse and lament are constitutive elements of Job’s wish to die. In each of the three strophes elements of light and darkness, indicative of life and death, are employed (cf. §3.3).

### 3.3 The Genre and Language of Job 3

In §3.2 the question concerning the genre of Job 3 has already been raised. It should be reiterated that the text of Job 3 consists of both a curse (vv 3-10, with v 10 serving as motive clause introduced by *yk*) and lament (11-19, 20-26, both introduced by *hnh*), and in this way we can speak of a conglomeration of genres. Here we will give

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654 For van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 58, such a structural division is not tenable, seeing that vv 11-26 cannot be disconnected from vv 3-10 as a lament from a preceding curse.

655 Here we can note the argument of Fokkelman, *Major Poems I*, 153 namely that v 20 (*hnh*) does not introduce a new section, but rather v 11. It is unlikely that the two-fold occurrence of *hnh* does not have a particular rhetorical and structuring value. For this reason the argument of Fokkelmann is not shared.

656 Clines, *Job*, 75-76.


658 See also P.W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (CBQMS 1; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1971) for a discussion of language, genre etc. in Israelite wisdom literature.

659 In this regard Westermann, *Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob*, 59f aptly argued that “Grundbestandteile des Kapitels sind dann: Verfluchung des Tages der Geburt mit Begründung: v. 3 mit 10 (formal der Feindklage entsprechend); die Ich-Klage v. 11…und die Anklage Gottes v. 23; den Abschluß bildet die
attention to the nature of the curse and lament encountered in Job 3.\textsuperscript{660} Is Job’s self-curse in vv 3-10 really intended as a curse proper, with the intended effect of bringing about his death? Or should it rather be interpreted as an extreme form of lament, as Job’s reaction to his ill fate and as a desperate attempt to gain the attention of the God, whom Job holds responsible for his creation and existence?\textsuperscript{661} If this is the case then Job’s curse and lament are complementary. With both having the same intent, namely seizing the attention of God, which would bring about a change in Job’s situation. He longs for death in the hope of finding rest in Sheol. Concerning the nature of the lament, we will consider the argument that vv 11-26 contains two instances of the self-complaint or Ich-Klage (v 11f; 24-26) as well as a God-complaint or Gott-Klage (v 23). First we will consider the nature of Job’s curse (vv 3-10) and lament (vv 10-19; 20-26). While the curse and lament in Job 3 might be complementary, each contributes to the peculiar tone of the poem in its own way.

The self-curse of Job in vv 3-10 parallels the curse in Jer 20:14-18.\textsuperscript{662} Together these two texts present the only occurrences of the self-curse genre in the HB.\textsuperscript{663} Yet the self-curse in Job 3:3-10 is set within the wider context of Job 3 which also contains a complaint against God (vv 20-23).\textsuperscript{664} The theme of Job’s opening complaint also corresponds with his closing complaint in Job 30:24-31.\textsuperscript{665} Further, Gen 1:1-2:4a offers a textual background for the language employed in the curse of vv 3-10.\textsuperscript{666} The creation language of Gen 1:1-2:4a is utilised in Job’s self-curse, but is applied to Job’s situation rather than creation in general.\textsuperscript{667} Job wishes for the reversal of his own

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ich-Klage in der traditionellen Form (24-26).” Also Fokkelman, \textit{Major Poems I}, 174 who observes that several genres are touched upon in Job 3, most notably curse (vv 3-5, 6-9) and complaint (10-12; 20-23), counterfactual (vv 13-16), silent centre (17-19), reality (24-26).
  \item Engljähringer, \textit{Theologie im Streitgespräch}, 25-26 poses the question whether Job 3 should be regarded as a curse of his birth and conception or rather a wish that these events had never occurred or that it should be made undone.
  \item According to M. Bauks, \textit{Die Feinde des Psalmisten und die Freunde Ijobs: Untersuchungen zur Freude-Klage im Alten Testament am Beispiel von Ps 22} (SBS 203; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 67 the Feind-Klage in Job 3:3-9 has been transformed by means of the cursing of his day of birth.
  \item Fuchs, “Die Klage des Propheten,” 212-228.
  \item G. Fuchs, \textit{Mythos und Hiobdichtung: Aufnahme und Umdeutung altorientalischer Vorstellungen} (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1993), 65. It is significant that this self-curse genre was not taken up in the HB Psalter. It has been proposed by Westermann, \textit{Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob}, 59 that is was too “wild” to be taken up in the liturgical material of a religious community. He states that it found its way into the book of Job as part of the canonised material of the HB. It is indicative of tolerance toward theological diversity. For the theme of self-cursing in the HB, it should be noted that the practise of swearing an oath, as in Gen 15, does contain an inherent moment of self-curse.
  \item Fuchs, “Die Klage des Propheten,” 220.
  \item In Job 30:24, commencing with ḫa “surely,” Job is lamenting God’s apparent disinterest in his situation. Within the context of Job 30:16-31, vv 24-31 is part of his lament concerning God’s hostile attitude towards him. Cf. Ha, \textit{Frage und Antwort}, 156ff.
  \item The sequence of the incantations in Job’s opening speech in general follows the progression of events in the creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a. The theme of “rest” (j ṭb), which is taken from the seventh day (Ṭḇγ) of the creation account in Gen 1 is negatively developed within the self-lament of Job (cf. 3:11-19, 26). A similar pattern of the reversal of the order of creation and turning the order of the created world into chaos and darkness is encountered in Jer 4:23-26. Cf. M. Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern.” \textit{VT} 21 (1971): 153-155.
  \item Habel, \textit{Job}, 104. He observes that in the structure of Job’s curse “it is his personal origin rather than Israel’s fate which is made contemporaneous with the primordial through the ritual act of execration.” Also Whybray, \textit{Job}, 38.
\end{itemize}
The “pattern of reversals” presents the main literary feature of Job’s opening self-speech, particularly in vv 3-10. This reversal of creation in vv 3-10 is reminiscent of the envisioned reversal of Jer 4: 23-26. Job’s self-curse is directed toward past events and in this way gains a rather unrealistic dimension. For this reason the question arises whether vv 3-10 should rather be regarded as an extreme verbalisation of Job’s experienced agony, which could better be described as a Fluchwunsch or Verwünschung. But the style of these verses are clearly that of a curse, even if the intent of these uttered words is considered as bringing about a change, rather than an end to Job’s existence. But judged in terms of the employed language, Job does not wish for a prolongation of his agony, but rather that it should come to an immediate end. For this reason it is fitting to speak of Job’s self-curse. After all, this is Job’s first reaction after breaking the silence. He cursed his day. That llq is used instead of rra (also absent in Jer 20:14-18) does not detract from the urgency and intensity of the language employed in vv 3-10.

In considering Job 3:11-26 as lament we should note the distinction between two types of lament in these verses, namely the self-lament (vv 11-19, 24-26), and the God-lament (vv 20-23). The significant point concerning the self-lament in Job’s opening speech is that it is not aimed at bringing about an improvement of his situation. Characteristic of the lament in Job 3 is the “why” (hwh) question (vv 11, 12, 16, 20, 23) as well as the depiction of the sad state of the lament, which Westermann termed the “primordial individual lament.” The self-lament in the book of Job serves to introduce his personal condition, but also introduces his central complaint against God, namely that by means of his present experience of suffering...
his “purpose” (ûrû) has become obscured by God, and as such his life has become pointless (3:23). In vv 12-23 the theme of turmoil and rest are developed by means of a series of “why” exclamations (vv 12, 16, 20, 23), interspersed by portrayals of the realm of the dead and those who long for death. A progression within the “why” exclamations is noticeable, seeing that the first two relates to Job’s own condition, while the latter two have a broader interest concerning the question of suffering. Within the first two laments the theme of ‘light’ (r’ē) is of central importance and serves as a transitional term between the two sets of exclamations. All these exclamations lead to the climactic question of Job 3:23, namely why light (inferred from v 20, serving as metaphor for life) is given to a person whose way is hidden and whom God has hedged in. In terms of Job’s lament, such a life is not worth living, which in part provides a reason for his longing for death.

While the text of Job 3 entails elements from both the genres of curse and lament, the question regarding the function of the text remains. In essence Job’s opening self-speech, by means of employing the language of curse and lament, serves to announce his distress, breaking the seven days of silence, and does so in a way that invites a response from his friends and eventually from God. As such Job’s opening self-speech functions as the “springboard” for the following dialogue. Job will not allow that his present dilemma to function as proof of his guilt. This theme reoccurs in his following responses to the arguments of the friends. The opening speech of Job presents a departure from tradition, while the following arguments of the friends stay resolutely within the parameters of tradition. As already pointed out, Job’s opening self-speech does not intend the improvement of his situation, though within the wider context of the book of Job, it marks the beginning of his transition into the sphere of the living, since his present situation is indicative of someone being in a state of death, or at least near death (cf. Ps 88).

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677 Habel, Job, 106.
678 Idem, 105.
679 Clines, Job 1-20, 77 argues that the function of Job’s opening self-speech “is suggested by the forms it employs together with its position in the book.”
680 Newsom, The Book of Job, 91, 92-93. This is an apt argument, even if, as she observes, the response of Eliphaz (4:2) seems to be the first attempt at initiating dialogue. Newsom further observes the difference between the opening of the Babylonian Theodicy and the opening speech of the dialogue in Job. The prose prologue (chs. 1-2) gives Job a different function and character. The dialogical style in the Babylonian Theodicy functions to establish the presence of a listener, but in Job the prose prologue already serves this purpose.
681 In reference to the divine response from the whirlwind Clifford, Creation Accounts, 186 observes that while Job wants to wish away creation, inviting the return of chaos, God’s description of the created world affirms that the chaos for which Job is longing is part and parcel of that world. Thus, Job’s curse of creation is eventually matched by God’s or reaffirmation of the goodness of creation. Cf. W.P. Brown, The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 325.
682 Clines, Job 1-20, 77. This is seen from the authorial perspective and in the greater contexts of the book of Job. Form Job’s own perspective the poem seems to have been designed for no purpose at all.
683 Habel, Job, 105.
3.4 Translation of Job 3

1 a  After this Job opened his mouth,
 b  and cursed\(^{684}\) his day.
2  And Job answered\(^{685}\) and said:
3 a  Let the day perish\(^{686}\) in which I was born,
 b  and the night\(^{687}\) that it was said, A male\(^{688}\) is conceived.\(^{689}\)
4 a  That day, let it be darkness;
 b  let Eloah not regard it from above,
 c  and let not light\(^{690}\) shine upon it.\(^{691}\)
5 a  Let darkness and the shadow of death\(^{692}\) stain\(^{693}\) it;
 b  let a cloud dwell upon it;
 c  let the darkness\(^{694}\) of the day terrify it.
6 a  That night, let it be dark;
 b  let it not be joined unto the days of the year,
 c  into number of the months let it not come.
7 a  Behold,\(^{695}\) that night, let it be barren,
 b  let no joy come therein.
8 a  Let them\(^{697}\) utter a curse, the cursers of the day,\(^{698}\)
 b  who are ready to rouse\(^{699}\) Leviathan.\(^{700}\)
9 a  Let it be dark, the stars of the twilight;\(^{701}\)

\(^{684}\) The Pi of \(ll\) is translated with “curse,” but the exact nature of this “curse” will still be determined. That a curse is here implied is supported by the LXX that reads \(\text{kathrasato}\). Here \(\text{ty}v\) can imply Job’s response following the seven days of silence (2:13). A translation “Job spoke up” (JPS) is quite fitting, as is also argued by Fokkelman, \textit{Major Poems} I, 150.

\(^{685}\) For \(\text{dba}\) the LXX reads \(\text{apolvum} “to destroy,” that affirms the idea that Job wants the day of his birth and the night of his conception to be undone.

\(^{686}\) The LXX reads \(\text{nux “nightly watch,” i.e. the bearer of the news of Job’s birth.}

\(^{687}\) The LXX reads \(\text{apolvum} “to destroy,” that affirms the idea that Job wants the day of his birth and the night of his conception to be undone.

\(^{688}\) As Qal passive \(\text{hrh} “be conceived” is a hapax in Job.

\(^{690}\) Gordis, \textit{Job}, 32 regards \(\text{hrn\(\text{rs} a\) a Hebrew form of the Aramaic \(\text{archh. The LXX reads \(f\eg\o_\text{ro}, which apart from “light” or “splendour” can also refer to “moonlight.”}

\(^{691}\) LXX reads \(\text{mhde; elqoi eij “aujthn fevggo,” i.e. “may light not come into it.”}

\(^{692}\) A. Brenner, \textit{Colour Terms in the Old Testament} (JSOTSup 21; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 163 argues that while the traditional pointing \(\text{t\(\text{\in}x}\) is translated “shadow of death,” the alternative pointing \(\text{ru\(\text{\in}x}\) (root \(\text{\in}\) \(\text{x}\) has the meaning “be black / dark.” Here \(\text{t\(\text{\in}x}\) should be read.

\(^{693}\) Usually \(\text{l\(\text{a}c\)connotes the meaning of cultic impurity or pollution, but in this context darkness and death are called upon to “reclaim” his day.

\(^{694}\) Brenner, \textit{Colour Terms}, 163 refers to the use of \(\text{ryrk} in Job 3:5, with \(\text{\(\text{\in}\) and \(\text{\(\text{\in}\) as parallels, arguing that the context of the term and its Syriac cognate \(\text{kmr} point toward a “blackness, darkness.” Cf. also Habel, \textit{Job}, 100. Pope, \textit{Job}, 29 translates “eclipse” on the basis of Amos 8:10.}

\(^{695}\) The LXX, Peshitta and Vulgate do not read \(\text{hnh Fohrer, \textit{Hiob, 110 favours deleting it.}

\(^{696}\) The LXX reads “pain” and thus contrasts what is expected to accompany his night of conception. \(\text{v7b continues this theme, where the night should be lacking joy. But the MT reading is sensible.

\(^{697}\) The LXX reads a 3 masculine singulat suffix “he.”

\(^{698}\) In the analysis of \(\text{v8} the alternative reading \(\text{y\(\text{\in}t\)} discussed.

\(^{699}\) \(\text{r\(\text{\in}k\) read as a Pol of \(\text{r\(\text{\in}\) The LXX reads \(\text{cel\(\text{\in}rasq\(\text{\in}l (from \(\text{cel\(\text{\in}p\(\text{\in}w)}\), i.e. “master, subdue.”}

\(^{700}\) The LXX translates \(\text{t\(\text{\in}\) in Job 3:8b with \(\text{m\(\text{\in}g\(\text{\in}a k\(\text{\in}t\(\text{\in} “great fish,” while \(\text{t\(\text{\in}\) in Isa 27:1 x 2; Ps 74:14; 104:26; Job 40:25 is translated with \(\text{dr\(\text{\in}n. Cf. H. Heater, \textit{A Septuagint Translation Technique in the Book of Job} (CBQS 11; Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982), 39-40.

\(^{701}\) LXX reads “that night” as in 3:6-7, specifying that the night of Job’s conception is at issue.
b  let it wait for light, but for naught;
    c  and let it not see the eyelids of the dawn.\(^{702}\)
10  a  For it\(^{703}\) did not shut up the doors of my mother’s womb,\(^{704}\)
    b  nor hid sorrow\(^{705}\) from my eyes.
11  a  Why not from the womb did I die,\(^{706}\)
    b  from the belly\(^{707}\) I came out and die?\(^{708}\)
12  a  Why\(^{709}\) did the knees meet\(^{710}\) me,
    b  and why breasts for me that I should suck?
13  a  For now I would have lain down\(^{711}\) and been quiet,
    b  I should have slept then, there would have been rest\(^{712}\) for me;
14  a  With kings and counselors of the earth,\(^{713}\)
    b  who build desolate places\(^{714}\) for themselves,
15  a  Or with princes that had gold,\(^{715}\)
    b  who filled their houses with silver.
16  a  Or as a hidden\(^{716}\) miscarriage\(^{717}\) had I not been;
    b  as infants\(^{718}\) which never saw light.
17  a  There the wicked cease\(^{719}\) from troubling;
    b  they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.\(^{720}\)
18  a  There the prisoners rest together;\(^{721}\)
    b  they do not hear the voice of the taskmaster.\(^{722}\)

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\(^{702}\) Or “dawning of the day.” The LXX reads \(\textit{i\[doi eJwsfo}}\), i.e. “see the morning star arise.”

\(^{703}\) The subject of this verse can be either “night” or Job’s “day.” Ha, \textit{Frage und Antwort}, 50 suggests God as subject. Also Fokkelman, \textit{Major Poems} I, 151 who reads “he,” i.e. God, instead of “it.”

\(^{704}\) Here \(\textit{ynfb}\) is problematic. That the LXX reads \(\textit{mhtro}\) in 3:10a could serve to specify the owner of the \(\textit{\[doi}\), but 1:21a should not be left out of consideration as motivation for the use of \(\textit{mhtro}\). Cf. Heater, \textit{A Septuagint Translation}, 41, Clines, \textit{Job 1-20}, 71 understands “my womb” as the “womb that carried me and gave me life.” Also Ha, \textit{Frage und Antwort}, 50.

\(^{705}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) can also be translated with “trouble” and would fit this context.

\(^{706}\) Such a literal translation is a bit forced, but aids in grasping the gist of the text.

\(^{707}\) Another translation for \(\textit{\[doi}\) is “womb.”

\(^{708}\) The use of \(\textit{\[doi}\) in place of the expected \(\textit{twm}\) is noteworthy.

\(^{709}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) could also be translated with “wherefore.”

\(^{710}\) The precise meaning of \(\textit{\[doi}\) in this context is unsure. For \(\textit{\[doi}\) the LXX reads \(\textit{sunantaw}\) “to meet,” supporting a translation of the knees “meeting” Job in the MT.

\(^{711}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) and \(\textit{\[doi}\) functions as euphemisms for “being dead.” Cf. \(\textit{\[doi}\) in v 13b.

\(^{712}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) stands in contrast to \(\textit{\[doi}\) in v 10b.

\(^{713}\) Dead kings and counsellors are implied. Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) may be read as a reference to Sheol.

\(^{714}\) The use of \(\textit{\[doi}\) “place of ruin” is significant. See also Lev 26:33; Isa 5:17.

\(^{715}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) and \(\textit{\[doi}\) indicates status or worth, contrasting the fact that all end up the same way.

\(^{716}\) The reason for the use of \(\textit{\[doi}\) remains unsure.

\(^{717}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) could also be translated with “stillborn.” For v 16a the LXX reads “Or as a stillborn coming from the mother’s womb?” As in 3:10 \(\textit{mhtro}\) is added. Cf. Heater, \textit{A Septuagint Translation Technique}, 41.

\(^{718}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) (“child, stillborn”) parallels \(\textit{\[doi}\) (“miscarriage”).

\(^{719}\) In this context \(\textit{\[doi}\) may imply “dying.”

\(^{720}\) For 3:17 the LXX reads “There the ungodly burst forth in fierce anger” (\(\textit{e\[doi e\[doi e\[doi e\[doi e}\)). Cf. Heater, \textit{A Septuagint Translation Technique}, 42. This reading could be related to developing ideas in the Hellenistic environment concerning the underworld.

\(^{721}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) is refers to life and ability. One of the features of the dead is the loss of strength and ability (cf. Ps 88:4). Death also deprives the wicked of the ability to work iniquity.

\(^{722}\) The use of \(\textit{\[doi}\) indicates the communal and egalitarian character of Sheol.

\(^{723}\) Here \(\textit{\[doi}\) refers to the one guarding the prisoners, but also the one bringing about turmoil.
19 a Small and great are there; and the servant free from his master.

20 a Why is light given to the sufferer, and life to the bitter soul?

21 a Who wait for death, but it does not come, though they dig for it as if for treasure;

22 a Why is light given to the sufferer, and life to the bitter soul?

23 a Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and Eloah has covered it?

24 a For before my bread comes my groaning, and are poured out like water, my roaring s.

25 a For the dread I have dreaded has come upon me, and that which I have feared has come unto me.

26 a I was not at ease, and not was I quiet, and I was not at rest, but it came, turmoil.

3.5 An Analysis of Job 3:1-26

In this section we will give a further consideration to the text of Job 3, which will serve as a preamble for the thematic discussion of §3.6.

724 Here [Lv], as implied in v 18, indicates location. Verse 19 continues the theme of v 18.

725 The LXX reads “And the servant not fearing (qerápwn) his master.” Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 49.

726 The LXX reads “Why is life given to those in bitterness, or life to those souls in grief?” Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 43.

727 Here ṫv functions as qualification of vpn. See also Job 21:25.

728 Here ṫv functions as qualification of vpn. See also Job 21:25.

729 In 3:21a the LXX adds Tugcavousin (“to hit”), perhaps as explanation of wytw. Cf. Dhorme, Job, 38. It could also be taken from 3:22 where katabwsi (“to hit ones mark, be successful”) serves as a translation of ṫv. Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 45.

730 See also Job 24:16 “In the dark they dig through houses which they have marked for themselves in the daytime...”

731 The LXX reads pericarei de; egemonto, ēp katabwsi, i.e. “and they would be very happy should they find it,” that is if they are successful.

732 Compare Isa 40:27b that reads “My way is hidden from YHWH” (hwy wd rtsn).

733 Only here, indirectly, is God mentioned by name (hwla).

734 Alternatively ṫv (here Hi) implies “hedged in.” See the analysis of v 23.


736 The LXX reads dáktrw de; egw; sunecwmen, i.e. “and I weep being gripped with fear.” Cf. Heater, A Septuagint Translation Technique, 95. Here “groaning” (h) and “roarings” (hgav) have a parallel function.

737 The verbs dp and ṫv functions in parallel, while the “dread” (dp) in v 25a serves as preamble for ṫv in v 26b.
Verses 1-2: Narrative Transition

In the opening verse of Job 3, a tension is reflected between the prose prologue and the poetic dialogues. While Job 3:1-2 still constitutes prose, a change in theme and style, particularly concerning the character of Job is evident. It is indeed indicative of a narrative transition, as shown by the opening phrase "Ayrja" ("after this") in verse 1, indicating a separation from and continuation of the preceding prose narrative. By means of "Ayrja" an end is brought to a period of seven days of silence (Job 2:13), which have become too much for Job to bear. As a result, Job opened his mouth and cursed his day (wmwyAtalqyw). This Joban conduct stands in stark contrast to that of the pious Job of the prologue, where Job (2:10) rejects his wife’s suggestion (2:9) to “bless” (ûrb), i.e., “curse” God as an appropriate response to his present experience of turmoil and as a means of bringing it to an end. He does not sin with his lips. But in 3:1 Job explicitly “curses” (llq) his day (µwy, i.e., his own creation by means of his mouth, with the intent of bringing about an end to it. While the cursing of God would certainly have led to his death, Job follows a different path in chapter 3. His curse is directed towards his own creation and not against God.

The genre of Job 3:3-10 as “curse” was considered in §3.3. But the precise nature of the use of llq (Pi, “declare,” “curse”) in 3:1 remains open for discussion. Its meaning here should be established in the broader context of the poem. It has already been argued that we can here indeed speak of a curse, even if the object of Job’s cursing, i.e. a past event, is quite absurd, seeing that it is non-reversible. It is not too easily be read as constitutive of early Israelite thoughts on cursing, since the curse, despite the acute nature of the language employed, is ineffectual. For Clines, Job 1-20, 79 the power of the curse is “wholly literary,” while its extravagance reflects “the violence of Job’s feeling.” Clines, Job 1-20, 79. R.P. Gordon, “llq” in: W.A. VanGemeren (ed.), NIDOTTE (vol. 3; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1997), 926-927 points out that in Akkadian qal *lu has the meaning “to discredit,” while the Aramaic llq can mean “to curse.” By cursing his day, Job is also trying to bring to an end a yearly occurrence, i.e. to wipe away his day from the calendar, as such bringing an end to the ritual of remembrance. Cf. Habel, Job, 107. The veneration of his name by his children was cancelled out with their death (Job 1:18-19), and now Job wants all traces of his existence to be wiped away. Cf. Habel, Job, 107 regards curses such as that uttered by Job in the ANE as “automatic agents,” with the words thereof being efficacious formulae and the powers they summoned were released in the utterance of the formula.
important to note that Job’s curse is directed toward “his day” (םוי), i.e. his personal situation is the immediate context of his curse. For this reason we should be cautious in considering the curse of Job as directed toward creation as such. By means of cursing “his day” (of birth), Job is cursing that moment that marks his entrance into the sphere of the living. By means of his curse he is wishing for its undoing, seeing that he already finds himself in a near death state. Job’s curse is real, and not merely an extreme expression of grief, i.e. lament. In a rather ironic fashion, Job’s curse functions as a catalyst for setting in motion the process of his re-entrance into the land of the living. This process takes place in the ensuing dialogues, but in the immediate context of Job 3, no longing for life occurs.

Verse 2 serves as a continuation of the theme introduced in 3:1. Together these verses serve as a preamble for what follows in the remainder of the poem, particularly vv 3-10, in which the theme of curse is further developed. The use of וָֽיְמָּעֵת in 3:2 is problematic in the sense that Job’s addressee, and that to which he would be responding is unclear, particularly in view of 3:1. This is further indicated by the fact that what follows constitutes a soliloquy. For this reason וָֽיְמָּעֵת has the meaning of “breaking into speech” instead of answering. Further, given that that which follows in 3:3ff does not provide an answer, וָֽיְמָּעֵת introduces the content of Job’s curse, which is also pointed out by רָמָּעֵי.

A: Verses 3-10: Curse

The poem proper commences with verse 3. Here the theme of Job’s day is continued, but וִֽיָּמַי is used instead of וָֽיְמָּעֵת. In v 3 the theme of Job’s “night” (ניָּמַי) is also introduced. Both the day of his birth (ניָּמַי) and the night he was conceived (ניָּמַי) is also pointed out by רָמָּעֵי.

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Clines, Job 1-20, 78 favours a reading of וָֽיְמָּעֵת as equivalent to Job’s life, since וִֽיָּמַי by itself does not elsewhere have the meaning of one’s day of birth.

Gordis, Job, 32. For a different view see J. Blenkinsopp, Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel (Louisville: Westminster, 1995), 51-52. He observes that Job’s curse is not only directed at his own situation, since the the disasters which befall Job in the form of hostile raids and meteorological disturbances affect not only Job, but also his family and the entire land of Uz. This implies that “Job’s protest against the God of traditional religion is not limited to the disasters inflicted on his own person…”

Cf. the reaction of the friends in Job 2:12, that is comparable to a weeping for the dead.

For van der Lugt, Rhetorical Criticism and the Poetry of the Book of Job, 60 the leading idea of Job 3 is partly found in v 3, which is further elaborated in vv 4-10. He argues that v 3 (“objective malediction of Job’s origin”), together with vv 16 and 13 (“subjective filling in of the preceding curse”) form the key thought of the poem.

The LXX reading נַעְיָּמַי implies that the messenger rather than the night is to be cursed. But seeing that “day and night,” as “light and darkness” presents a merism, the reading “night” is preferred. The lacking definite article of וִֽיָּמַי and נַעְיָּמַי can be found in that of וִֽיָּמַי in v 4. Cf. Gordis, Job, 32.

The sequence of ויָּמַי and נַעְיָּמַי is not problematic, since Job 3 is not a physiological report.
are to perish (dba). This is a step further than merely wishing for death. Job longs for the absolute annihilation of his existence. In this regard it has been suggested that what we encounter here, and in the greater context of vv 3-10, is more than just a wish of a person struck by ill fortune. The words of Job reflect a rejection of his creation, and by implication a rejection of his creator. But Job does not curse God as his wife suggests in 2:9. His curse is also not directed toward his mother or his father (prohibited in Lev 20:9), who contributed to his coming into existence. As such Job is not “sinning with his lips” (2:10; also 1:22). But the discontinuity with his character in the prologue is clear. At issue is Job’s own creation. Job proclaims a return to the mother’s womb in 1:21 as the natural course of events. What is also significant is the reversal of the usual value ascribed to the birth of a “male” (rbg) in the ANE. Since rbg has the connotation of “health” or “vigour,” its use here adds to the bitter irony of Job’s curse. By cursing the day of his birth and the night he was conceived, the process of the reversal of his beginnings is set in motion. In this curse day (µwy) and night (hlyl) become two personified figures that Job wishes to annihilate, since this will bring an end to his miserable state of being.

Job’s desire to find rest from his experienced predicament is further highlighted by the cosmic language in verse 4. He employs the language of creation in an attempt to undo his creation. This is indicated by the specification of “the day” (µwy) by means of awhh. It is the day of his birth, mentioned in v 3 that should become (hyh) darkness (ûvj). This day should not be regarded (vrd) by God (hwla) from above. Light...
should not shine (πυ) on it. Job now desires rest even at the expense of creation and the creator. In 3:4 ὑψυχοπαρουσία presents a reversal of the divine command in Gen 1:3, ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κόσμου 771 This inversion can be described as a “counter-cosmic incantation,” 772 but it remains limited to Job’s own creation, his personal cosmos. This idea of reversal is continued within 3:5, where Job invokes a reversal of the event of creation whereby darkness ‘reclaims’ (ιὲν) the day of Job, 773 along with all the light that gives it existence. 774

Job wishes for the undoing of his creation by means of bringing about a reversal of the first divine act of creation in Gen 1:2. However, he still accredits God (ὁ θεὸς) as creator, and ultimately presiding over his existence and predicament. This lies behind his wish that God should not regard (ὐρίδ) “that day” from above. It can also be regarded as recognition of his own inability in bringing about a change in his situation and an undoing of his creation, in contrast to the ability of God. In v 4 as in the greater context of Job 3, light (metaphor for life, cf. vv 16, 20, 23) and darkness (metaphor for death, cf. 10:21-22, 23:17) constitute a binary opposition, with Job wishing that the light would be swallowed by darkness. 777 Without the light which is given by the personal character. As a result the curse is not merely intended to undo his conception and birth, but in effect creation per se. But the return to chaos and darkness applies first and foremost to Job’s creation, with his day as object of the curse. For other uses of ὑψυχοπαρουσία in Job cf. 10:21; 12:22; 15:22; 23, 30; 17:12, 13; 18:18; 23:17; 24:16; 26:10; 28:3; 29:3; 37:19; 38:19 and as object in 5:14; 12:25; 19:8; 22:11.

768 The use of the singular form ὁ θεὸς for the deity (41 times in Job) came into use especially during the postexilic time. Fohrer, Hiob, 118.

769 The use of ὁ θεὸς θεὸς is a hapax and according to Gordis, Job, 32-33 presents a Hebraized form of the Aramaic noun αρχήν. In view of the relation with Gen 1:1-2:4a the reader might have expected ὁ θεὸς.

770 In the HB πυ is used in reference to the light of the sun only in Job 3:4. Cf. Day, Yahweh and the Gods, 159 on this point in his consideration of the relation between YHWH and the Sun. See also Deut 33:2 where (πυ) is used of YHWH.

771 Darkness” (ὑψυχοπαρουσία) is an important theme in Job’s soliloquy and occurs elsewhere in connection with creation (Job 26:10, 38:19), with turmoil (Job 29:3), with representations of death (Job 10:21, 15:22f, 15:30, 17:12f, 23:17) and the combination of representations of death and darkness as inhabitual place (Job 18:18).


773 Job’s call on darkness (ὑψυχοπαρουσία) as a means of bringing about “rest” in v 4 contrasts with Job 23:17, where ὁ θεὸς lacks this “positive” quality, and where Job does not long for it.

774 Habel, Job, 104; L.G. Perdue, Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job (JSOTSup 112; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991), 97-98. Brown, Character in Crisis, 61 argues that the commencement of Job’s curse presents a structural and theological antithesis to Gen 1 (Job 3:4a). His exclamation ὑψυχοπαρουσία contrast with the divine fiat ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κόσμου of Gen 1:3. The seven days during which the friends of Job do not speak are also indirectly contrasted with creation in the P account, where God speaks and orders creation into being. Essentially, Job wants creation as imagined Gen 1:1-2:4a to be reversed.

775 The use of the singular form ὁ θεὸς for the deity (41 times in Job) came into use especially during the postexilic time. Fohrer, Hiob, 118.

776 It has been suggested that ὑρίδ belongs in a magical context, or that it is frequently found in association with magical terms. Cf. Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 153. Given its use here with ὁ θεὸς as subject it is unlikely that it latches unto the motif of cursing. Cf. Clines, Job 1-20, 84. The wish that YHWH should not regard his day does present a departure from the longing for divine providence, as experienced in earlier days (cf. Job 29:2).

777 Thus ὑψυχοπαρουσία and τὸ ὅλον (3:5) are associated with the netherworld (Job 10:21-22; 17:12; 38:17), but could also be a designation for death (Ps 35:6, 1 Sam 2:9).
God, creation remains in a state of darkness, i.e. chaos (e.g. Gen 1:2), which is the theme of the first line in v 5.\footnote{In the divine speeches (Job 38:16-18) latches unto these themes of darkness and Sheol which Job incorporates in describing his experience of turmoil. Cf. J.G. Janzen, “The Place of Job in the History of Israel’s Religion,” in: P.D. Miller et al., Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 534.}

In verse 5 Job’s day is still the object of the curse, with an elaboration on the theme of darkness.\footnote{Longing for death, Job “…flirts with mythic powers beyond his control by exhorting the precarious darkness to seize and destroy, and Leviathan to subvert the cosmos (vv 4-6).” Cf. Brown, The Ethos of the Cosmos, 323. Leviathan, darkness and the shadow of death become entities called upon, thus achieving a mythic status.} Here darkness (ûvj) and the shadow of death (twmlx) are called upon to stain (lag) his day. Further, a cloud (hnn) is to dwell (÷kv) upon it. To crown his invocation in v 5, the blackness (ryrmk) of the day should terrify (t[b]). The intense nature of Job’s longing for deliverance from life is reflected in the desperate language employed in this verse. That which is terrible is called upon to undo a past event. But his wish is as intense as it is ineffectual. For he calls on that over which he has no authority, while his curse is directed at an event that cannot be made undone. Death can bring his present dilemma to an end, but Job is in effect calling for more than this. Absolute annihilation is what he has in mind.

For Wolfers the vocalisation of the twmlx in the MT demands the translation “the shadow of death.”\footnote{If one reads twm as having a superlative force, twmlx could be interpreted as “deep darkness.” The connotation of darkness as death’s shadow is most probably present in Job’s summoning the forces of darkness or chaos. The root of yyrmk most probably stems from rnk “be black” or rrm “be bitter.” Dhorme interprets “blackness of day” as “fogs,” while Pope considers the “bitterness of day” as a reference to an eclipse (cf. Am 8:10 for a reference to the ‘bitter day’ rrm.)} If one reads twm as having a superlative force, twmlx could be interpreted as “deep darkness.” The connotation of darkness as death’s shadow is most probably present in Job’s summoning the forces of darkness or chaos.\footnote{Habel interprets “blackness of day” as “fogs,” while Pope considers the “bitterness of day” as a reference to an eclipse (cf. Am 8:10 for a reference to the ‘bitter day’ rrm.)} The root of yryrmk most probably stems from rnk “be black” or rrm “be bitter.” Dhorme interprets “blackness of day” as “fogs,” while Pope considers the “bitterness of day” as a reference to an eclipse (cf. Am 8:10 for a reference to the ‘bitter day’ rrm.)
3:5b  render seems to anticipate render “those who curse the day” in 3:8. A wordplay could exist between render ‘curse’ and render ‘bitter’. 789

In verse 6 a shift takes place concerning the focus of Job’s curse. While the day of his birth presents the object of his cursing in vv 3-5, Job now goes back a step further in directing his curse at the night of his conception. This shift is immediately clear from the use of render at the beginning of v 6. As the day in v 4a, the night is specified by means of render, i.e., “that night,” referring back to render in v 3. 790 Here the object of Job’s cursing is just as ludicrous as in vv 3-5, also being directed at a past event. Rather ironically, the night of his conception is to be seized ( render) 791 by darkness ( render). 792 It should not be “joined” ( render) 793 among the days of the year, nor should it come ( render) in number of months. 794 I.e., his night of conception should not find a place in a yearly calendar. 795 This would further eliminate any possibility of his remembrance. 796 The basic meaning of the curse is that it’s object, i.e. Job’s birth, never should have been, or that it should only have been short lived. In both vv 5a and 6a, darkness is personified as a force that can “seize” or “reclaim.” The difference is the object of that which is to be reclaimed.

In verse 7 the personification of night as “barren” ( render) resumes the motif that the night in some way determines Job’s origin, as in 3:3. 797 As in 3:6 render is specified by means of render with render adding to the seriousness of Job’s curse. The night of Job’s

789 Habel, Job, 100.
790 Here Job curses the night of his conception, but in 3:3 his curse is aimed at the night announcing render his conception. It is not necessary to delete render render.
791 Here render indicates Job’s desire that darkness should seize his night of conception, but also that it should be “carried away,” i.e. as if it had never been. Cf. Clines, Job 1-20, 85.
792 That the night is cursed by means of render is odd, but deliberate. Here render may refer to Sheol (cf. 10:22; 28:3) and thus latches unto the first line of v 5, where render is used instead of render. The use of render indicates that more is at stake than mere darkness, given the association of disaster and evil with render and the related render (cf. Exod 10:22; Prov 4:19; Joel 2:2). In Job 30:26 render is parallel to render.
793 The root of render v 6b is uncertain. Suggestions include render “be reckoned, joined,” as a Ni of render “let it not see,” or render “to rejoice,” as suggested by the vocalisation of the MT. Cf. Habel, Job, 100; Gordis, Job, 34. For Gordis render exemplifies render in render, i.e. where two meanings are simultaneously intended by the author, namely be ‘reckoned’ (primary) and ‘rejoice’ (secondary). For the latter he suggests the root render (cf. Exod 18:9), allowing a translation “let it not rejoice.” Given the theme concerning the undoing of Job’s creation, a meaning of “not being joined” is fitting. L.L. Grabbe, Comparative Philology and the Text of Job: A Study in Methodology (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 32 observes that most early versions translated the word in this way, suggesting that they understood it to have the meaning “join,” i.e. from the root render As such maintaining the lectio difficilior in the MT is preferable. See also Gen 49:6; Van der Lugt, Rhetorical Criticism, 51, favours a reading “let it not unite with.”
794 For the verbs render and render a reading yechad / yode’ has been suggested, which results in the double meaning “be united / rejoice” and “enter / desire.” Cf. Rendsburg, “Double Polysemy,” 48-51. Such a double meaning could have been apparent to readers of the consonantal text.
795 Fohrer, Hiob, 117. He argues “Die Verwünschung des Geburtstages ist letztlich eine Verwünschung seines Lebens.”
796 Wolfers, Deep Things, 377 maintains the vocalisation of the MT, since v 6 has an important function, indicating that Job’s curse is “looking-forward.” As such Job is cursing the day / night every time it reoccurs annually, rather than retrospectively. This view is not shared by Clines, Job 1-20, 85 since Job wishes that his night of conception had never been, and not that his day should be wiped from the calendar. Yet both interpretations support the notion of absolute annihilation.
797 Habel, Job, 108. Cf. Isa 49:21 for such a personification.
conception is to be barren (דָּמָה), i.e. the night of his conception should never have been. But this undoing of his (past) creation presents another futile wish. The wish that no joy should come into the night of his conception both points to the process of procreation leading to his conception, which he now wishes had never taken place, and that that night should not be considered as any cause for joy. In terms of his present experience it would have been better had it never taken place. By means of the specification of the night, Job’s curse is still directed toward the anguish of his own existence, and not creation in general (cf. §3.3).

The focus on the night of Job’s conception is continued in verse 8, though the content of the verse is quite different from the preceding. For here he calls on “them,” i.e., the “cursers of the day” (יָוֵרָה) to utter a curse (בּוֹא), and thus introduces other participants as part of this process of cursing his day of birth and night of conception. Those who are invoked to curse are further qualified as those ready (דָּקַּי) to arouse Leviathan (יִתְו). An immediate question concerns the identity and nature of the “cursers of the day,” who are ready to arouse Leviathan. It could be that magicians or some or other cultic officiates are implied here. But since such characters have no other role within the book of Job, it remains unclear. Still, we have no real alternative. A point of concern regarding the “cursers of the day” (יָוֵרָה) is the suggested emendation to read יָוֵר (sea) instead of יָוֵר (day). In this way יָוֵר presents a parallel with יִתְו (cf. Isa 27:1). In terms of this emendation Job is calling on the forces of chaos (יִתְו and יָוֵר) to engulf his night of conception. The occurrence of

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798 Job’s wish for “barrenness” in v 7 contrasts the divine imperative of Gen 1:28a that humans should be fruitful and multiply. While God qualifies creation as good and bestows His blessing thereupon, Job does not regard his own conception and birth, i.e. his creation as a reason for joy, but rather as an occasion for a curse and lament.

799 The use of דָּמָה implies “childlessness” (cf. Isa 49:21), here as a result of the night’s barrenness. It presents a parallel with Job 3:6b.

800 Clines, Job 1-20, 85; Fohrer, Hiob, 118. Also S. Terrien, Job: Poet of Existence (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 64.

801 Watson, Chaos Uncreated, 322.

802 Reading רְכֹס Пол of יָוֵר “to rouse, wake up” is comparable with Isa 14:9, where the shades (יָוֵרָה) in Sheol are “roused” (פִּי of יָוֵר) to meet the one about to descend to Sheol. Cf. Gordis, Job, 34. Cf. Habel, Job, 108, 109.


804 The forces of chaos in conjunction with magic, appears only in Job 3:8 (יִתְו) and Exod 7:8-13 (יְתִט). Cf. R. Schmitt, Magie im Alten Testament (AOAT 313; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 95. The suggestion of H. Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895) 59-61 that here an “angel of God” is intended is unfounded.

805 Pope, Job, 30 suggests that Job is here invoking the help of a “master curser” among the gods.

806 Originally suggested by Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos, 59 who identified a mythological allusion in v 8a and b, in view of Ps 104 and Job 40f. All the versions however reads “day.” Grabbe, Comparative Philology, 35-36 points to the prevalence of יָוֵר particularly since the Ras Shamra texts (Baal and Anat Cycle) showed both Yam and Leviathan as part of an elaborate mythology. Cf. O. Loretz, “Ugaritisch-Hebräisch in Job 3:3-26.” UF 8 (1976): 123-127. In this regard see also Isa 51:9-10 where יָוֵר is paralleled with יְתִט, and Ps 74:14 where יְתִט is paralleled with יִתְו. Cf. Habel, Job, 101. Support for reading יָוֵר also concerns the parallellism found in Aramaic incantation texts from Nippur were we read, “I enchant you with the adjuration of Yam, and the spell of Leviathan the serpent.” Cited in Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 160. He identifies the use of Leviathan and Yam as archetypal precedents for magical practice and important for the interpretation of Job 3:1-13.

the *Chaoskampf* motif in the broader context of the book of Job is supportive of reading יַלְעַי.

Creation in the book of Job is nowhere explicitly described as the result of a struggle between God and the forces of chaos. Rather, particularly in the divine speeches of Job 38-41, chaos is not eliminated from creation, but rather assigned to its proper place in creation (cf. Job 38:8-11). The emendation יַלְעַי is suggestive, but various scholars prefer to maintain the reading of the MT, i.e. יַלְעַי which fits the immediate context well.

We also opt for this reading. Here יַלְעַי suggests a wordplay on the themes of light (life) and darkness (death).

Reading יַלְעַי also supports the idea that the curse is first and foremost directed at Job’s own creation, i.e. his day, and not creation in general.

It is significant that in v 8 Job does not call on his creator for help, but rather on those that he envisions to have dominion over the forces of chaos, and who are able to summon chaos to bring about an end to his existence. In terms of his present predicament and resultant experience, God is not regarded as able to change his situation. Or, perhaps, regarding God as instigator of his predicament (3:23), calling on God at this stage would be quite ineffectual. The desired effect of this rousing of Leviathan is unclear, but it could be to swallow up the sun and moon (i.e., light / life), causing an eclipse (i.e. darkness / death). Or, that the mythic Leviathan may

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808 Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 100 discusses God’s conflict with the dragon and the sea in the HB. He identifies Job 3:8, 7:12, 9:8, 13, 26:12-13, 38:8-11, 40:15-41:26/34 as representative of such instances. In Job 9:8, 13, 26:12-13; 38:8-11 the context of the conflict is that of the creation of the world. In Job the *Chaoskampf* motif it is a prominent theme, but is basically absent from the broader wisdom corpus of the HB. For Day, *Yahweh and the Gods*, 100 this suggests that the author of Job employed cultic psalms of praise in which such conflict is visible (cf. Job 9:8, 13).

809 Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 319-327 considers the notion of chaos in Job 3, particularly vv 3-13 and v 8, and argues that an identification of “chaos” in Job 3 should be rejected (contra Day).


811 Habel, *Job*, 101; Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 151-167. Reasing יַלְעַי allows for a clever wordplay, preserving a so-called dual mythic tradition. Namely that of the dragon’s battle with Baal and of his causing an eclipse. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 118-119 does not share this view of Fishbane, since Job is calling on magicians who can place a curse on only a part of divine creation.

812 The vv 7 and 9 the theme of night is at issue and this might make a reading יַלְעַי in v 8 seem out of place. The theme of night brings into focus the theme of chaos, and for this reason reading יַלְעַי as representative of chaos with יַלְעַי is not inappropriate.

813 Clines, *Job 1-20*, 87. For Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 153 Job’s cursing of his day as in 3:1, presents an unrestrained death-wish for the whole of creation.

814 The “keepers” (יָדָד) in 3:8 is comparable with Dan 4:10, 14, where the “keepers” are indicated in Aramaic by יָדָד (plural יָדָד), from the root יָד. I.e. Job is calling on the “keepers” of chaos. Cf. Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung*, 66-67.

815 In the second divine speech (40-41) Leviathan is referred to as ferocious when “roused” (רָכָב) and that only God can confront him (41:1-2, MT). As such Job is seeking for a means beyond God in bringing an end to his creation. Also Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 324.


817 Also Job 7:12 where Job complains, “Am I the sea (יָדָד or a whale (יָדָד) that You set a watch (רָכָב) over me?” Now Job calls on these forces over which God has set a guard, that his creation might be wiped away by a frenzy of chaos. Cf. Gordis, *Job*, 35.


819 Clines, *Job 1-20*, 87. Job’s night of conception would have been consigned to the power of Leviathan, being raised up by those skilled to do so. Fohrer, *Hiob*, 119 does not share this view, arguing that Leviathan “…hat nichts mit einem Himmelsdrachen zu
swallow up Job’s night of conception, preventing his day. The basic theme is that of darkness, and the extinguishing of (Job’s) life.

In verse 9 the themes of night and darkness, here related to the night of Job’s conception as in v 7 are continued, while the style of v 9 matches that of v 7. So also the imagery employed in v 8, for the roused forces of chaos should bring about darkness and prevent a finding of light (i.e. life), or a seeing of the dawn. Those introduced in v 8 should prevent the transition from darkness into light. With this juxtaposition of light and darkness, a tension is brought about between the themes of life and death. This juxtaposition of the forces of light and darkness entails that the stars of the twilight should be dark, that no light should be found despite the “search” for it, and that the “dawning of the day” should not be seen. Here the ability to see is indicative of being alive, which is exactly what Job here does not wish to be.

In view of the significance of the imagery of the “dawn” in the ANE, as the time of the epiphany of the sun god, coming into action against all forms of evil and injustice, it may be considered whether such a connotation of the dawn is here reflected. But this is not the case, since Job is not wishing for justice, but for death before dawn. At most such a potential time of divine help is “wished away.”

In verse 10, the Leitmotif for Job’s curses directed at his night of conception is provided, as indicated by yk. The night could have aided to prevent his conception, but instead it aided in the facilitation of the event of procreation, leading to Job’s day of...
birth, which eventually gave rise to his present experience of suffering (ל נפ). It did not shut (רג) the doors (תל) of his mother’s womb (ףב), and as a result it did not hide (הrts) sorrow (ל נפ) from his eyes (ף). The resultant experience of suffering (ל נפ) and trouble (ג) is in direct opposition with his longing for the rest and tranquility that he hopes to find in Sheol, which will be facilitated by the event of death. In v 10 and the following lament of vv 11-19 we have a parallel with Jer 20:18 (“Why did I come forth from out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?”). In both v 10 and Jer 20:18, ל נפ serves as Leitmotif for the ‘complaint against life.’

B: Verses 11-19: Lament

With verse 11 the tone of the poem changes from that of curse to lament, as indicated by the use of נרה. Lament rather than malediction is at issue in vv 11-19. Job’s opening lament, an Ich-Klage or first person lament is comparable to that in some of the lament Psalms (e.g. Ps 10:1; 22:1). The distinction however lies in the fact that Job is not wishing for an improvement in his predicament, but rather for the dissolution or negation of his life. Since we are here dealing with a first person lament, נרה does not require an answer, having no specific addressee. In vv 11-19 Job’s outcry takes on the form of a death wish, rather than a curse directed at his day of birth and night of conception as in vv 3-10. In v 11 µjr (womb) and ¤fb (belly) are used synonymously, but also latch on to the theme of v 10. The use of נמ in v 11 indicates a specific time, namely that Job wishes he had died immediately after emerging from the “womb” (µjr נמ ¤fbm). Thus the immediacy of his wish, in the

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829 Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 166.
830 Some regard “the day” (µwyh) as subject of rg. Cf. Gordis, Job, 35. But “the night” can also be the subject and fits the immediate context.
831 The MT reading יגfb is problematic, causing the LXX to read γαστριν mhtrov mou, thus making apparent what is implied in the MT. Cf. Job 1:21.
832 J. Reindl, Das Angesicht Gottes im Sprachgebrauch des Alten Testaments (ETS 25; Leipzig; St. Benno-Verlag, 1970), 90 discusses the נrts under the rubric of “God hiding his face.” He notes five instances where נרְשִׁה is used with the meaning to conceal something (Job 3:10 - sorrow; Ps 119:19 - law; Isa 29:15 - plan; 1 Sam 20:2; Prov 25:2 - נרְדִי and can also be translated with “keep secret.” See also Job 13:20; 34:22; 3:23; 28:21 (Ni) and 3:10; 13:24; 14:13; 34:29 (Hi).
833 Eliphaz (4:8; 5:6) and Zophar (11:16) interpret Job’s reference to נפ as misery resulting from sinful action. Their arguments stay within the parameters of the Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang.
834 Contra Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 153.
835 For Clines, Job 1-20, 89 the malediction of the previous unit is given up since it does not have the desired effect, unable to change his experience of נפ.
836 Fohrer, Hiob, 121. Job is appealing for the “Verneinung seines Daseins,” freeing him from his present experience of being enslaved by his own existence.
837 God rather than the friends is the probable addressee, who is responsible for Job’s coming into existence. Cf. Clines, Job 1-20, 89.
838 Supported by the LXX reading εὐγετ, i.e. “immediately.” Clines, Job 1-20, 89 points to the parallelism of תמרדַי // µ jr ‘expire’ in 14:10, while the parallelism of µjr ‘womb’ // ¤fb ‘belly’ occurs in Job 10:18-19, 13:15; Ps 22:11(10), 58:4 (HB); Jer 1:5. Also 2 Bar 10:6 and 4 Ezra 7.116. This verse contains conventional language, familiar in the broader early Jewish context.
form of lament, is indicated. He should not have experienced even a single moment of life.\(^{839}\)

The basic theme of v 11 continues in verse 12. The interpretation of the first line of v 12 is unclear. By means of [\(\text{\textit{w\dth}}\) (“wherefore”) in 12a and [\(\text{\textit{h\dth}}\) (“why”) in 12b, the language of lament is continued. The question concerns the subject of the feminine noun [\(\text{\textit{ur\rd}}\) (“knee”; cf. 2 Kgs 4:20 as a reference to the “mother’s lap”). This image implies that the mother’s knees meet [\(\text{\textit{ur\rd}}\) Job, i.e., she takes the infant on her knees so that it can “suckle” (\(\text{\textit{qny}}\)). But in the wider context of the ANE, it can also refer to a symbolic act of the father taking the infant on his knees, thus recognising the child as his and by laying it on the mother’s breast indicates the will to preserve its life.\(^{841}\)

Give the immediate context of v 12, the former interpretation is fitting. Since Job’s conception and birth could not have been prevented, perhaps the absence of life-giving nourishment could have brought death that he longs for so vehemently.\(^{842}\)

**Verse 13** marks the midpoint of the poem and is comparable to v 26.\(^{843}\) In both verses the themes of quiet (\(\text{\textit{fqv}}\)) and rest (\(\text{\textit{jwn}}\)) are prominent. The [\(\text{\textit{yk}}\) in v 13 serves to indicate the reason for Job’s lament in vv 11-12. If he had died from the womb, he would have lain down (\(\text{\textit{bkv}}\)) and been quiet (\(\text{\textit{fqv}}\)); he would have slept (\(\text{\textit{\dvy}}\)) and would have been at rest (\(\text{\textit{jwn}}\)). This description of Job’s envisioning of the underworld, with the leading theme being that of quiet and rest, is in contrast with his experience of the land of the living,\(^{845}\) where [\(\text{\textit{l\nf}}\) and [\(\text{\textit{zj}}\) are the leading themes.\(^{846}\) This positive envisioning of Sheol contrasts with that of other lament texts such as Ps 88, but also with other parts of the Joban dialogue (10:21-22). This envisioning of death as an inviting domain brings about a (desperate) reversal of traditional conceptions.\(^{847}\)

However it should be evaluated in the context of Job 3, seeing that the book of Job does not contain a uniform depiction of the underworld. As result of his present experience of [\(\text{\textit{l\nf}}\), the curse and lament of Job indeed reflects a radical “reordering of

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\(^{839}\) In parallel with Qoh 4:2-3. In Qoh 6:3 an untimely birth is better than a person without a proper burial, since the name of such a person shall be covered in darkness (cf. Job 24:20). In Job 3 this is exactly Job’s wish. See also Hos 9:11 for such language of brevity. Cf. Gordis, Job, 35.


\(^{841}\) In Gen 50:23 Joseph’s grandchildren are said to have been born upon his knees.

\(^{842}\) Clines, *Job 1-20*, 90.


\(^{844}\) Job’s inability to sleep (\(\text{\textit{\dvy}}\) a hapax in Job) results from his experience of [\(\text{\textit{l\nf}}\). In the HB sleeplessness can indicate the severity of that which is troubling a person (e.g. Isa 38; Ps 102; Job 7; 30). Cf. T.H. McAlpine, *Sleep, Divine and Human, in the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 38; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 21. Sleep should not be equated with death too hastily, but the HB does contain non-metaphorical descriptions in which death is evaluated as some kind of sleep and vice versa. Cf. McAlpine, *Sleep*, 135-136.

\(^{845}\) For Clines, *Job 1-20*, 91 the images used to describe Sheol and the state of existence within Sheol in vv 13-15 and 17-19 “portray in inverse mode Job’s present experience…”

\(^{846}\) A connection between death and rest is also encountered in the Gilgamesh Epic (X.vi.33-35):

“The resting and the dead, how alike are they!
They do not compose a picture of death,
The commoner and the noble,

\(^{847}\) Habel, *Job*, 110.
reality,”848 which includes his depiction of Sheol. But Job 3 does not go as far as in Job 17:12-16, where it said that one embraces the pit as father and maggots as mother. Still, Sheol is preferable to the land of the living.849

Verses 14 and 15 do not move in the same direction as the verses which precede or follow on it. But this does not suggest that vv 14-15 have a mere decorative or elaborative function concerning Job’s vision of Sheol.850 If vv 14-15 are read in view of the social order dictated in vv 17-19, they form part of the larger argument and have more than an aesthetic purpose. In view of vv 17-19 they contribute to the notion of death as the great equaliser and that in death all are equal.851 In the world of Job, people are simply not equal “and that what is desirable about Sheol is not its egalitarianism as an abstract principle, but the absence of the strife between unequal humans that constitutes ‘trouble’ in the upper world.”852 In terms of the description of Job in 1:3 as “greatest of all in the east,” he fits quite well with those described in vv 14-15. In v 14 it is with (µ) kings and counselors (Å) of the earth (Å), the builders (hbr) of desolate places (hbr)853 that he will find rest in Sheol.

The theme introduced in v 14 continues in verse 15. Job adds to his list of co-habitants of the underworld princes (rc) who had gold (brz), filling (alm) their houses (tyb) with silver (sk). Just as the building projects of kings and counselors eventually amount to nothing, so the gathering of riches provides no safeguard against descend to Sheol.854 In this life they know only agitated unrest, and for this reason the stillborn of v 16 is judged to be more fortunate (as in Qoh 6:3) than those insatiable souls described in vv 14-15. Job’s experience of turmoil instigated a change in his evaluation of the worth of human labour, i.e. that it has no lasting value. In this way the argument here is brought in proximity to that of Qohelet. But the emphasis in these verses is on the peace and rest offered by the grave and not on the futility of human labour in the first place.

Various suggestions have been made concerning the position of verse 16 in Job 3. Some scholars suggest that it should be moved up three verses and read with vv 11-12,855 or that it should be placed between vv 11 and 12.856 Some even suggest its

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849 Isa 14:9-11 reflects a tradition in which former kings and heroes have a continued shadowy existence in Sheol. But the notion that Sheol is a place where rest can be found in comparison with the turmoil encountered in life is hard to parallel in the HB. Qoh 6:5 is comparable, though some read it as an idiosyncratic text. Cf. Clines, Job 1-20, 91-2.
851 Dhorme, Job, 31. The presentation of Sheol in these verses is that of the great equaliser and the ultimate meeting place of all humanity.
852 Clines, Job 1-20, 94. In vv 14-15 and 17-18 eight groups of persons are described, dividable into two basic categories, namely the oppressors and the oppressed.
853 Here twbrj (“ruins / desolate places”) is somewhat problematic. It can allude to the practise of resoring ruined cities by kings of the ANE (e.g. Isa 58:12). Cf. Pope, Job, 31. Also Horst, Hiob, 51. Habel, Job, 102 maintains the MT, but regards this verse as reference to the end result of royal building enterprises, rather than the object of building itself. For hbrj as object in the HB, cf. Ezra 9:9, Isa 5:17, 44:26, 51:3, 58:12, 61:4 and Mal 1:4.
854 For Newsom, The Book of Job, 95 the subtle irony in vv 14-15 is “at the expense of the great ones, whose lives were characterised by restless but ultimately futile activity…”
855 De Wilde, Hiob, 99; Dhorme, Job, 30; Van der Lugt, Rhetorical Criticism, 50-51. For Whybray, Job, 38 µv, which occurs in 17, 18, and 19 has no antecedent unless it follows immediately after v 15,
omission from the text. But v 16 can be maintained in its present location. For the futility of the great ones described in vv 14-15 prompts Job to evaluate the hidden (מָּשָּׁמֶר) “miscarriage” (יִסְכֹּס) or stillborn (לָאָבָם) that never saw light (רָאָב) as more fortunate (cf. Job 10:18). It is more fortunate because it will never know the strife, tribulation or futility that characterise the land of the living. This envisioning of Job is not unlike Enkidu’s report to the king concerning the order of the netherworld and the status of its inhabitants. The use of יָבָם (“there”) in vv 16 and 17 emphasise Sheol as the place where the subject of v 16 will find rest.

In verse 17 as in vv 18-19, Job’s envisioned state of the underworld is continued, with יָבָם functioning as a reference to Sheol. There the wicked (יָבָם) cease (לָאָבָם) from troubling (אֲבָל), and there (יָבָם) they rest (יָבָם), weary ((יָבָם) of strength (יָבָם). Scenarios in the present with which Job is familiar, are altered in Sheol. Indicative hereof is that even the activity of the wicked comes to an end in Sheol. Here resulting from their changed condition, i.e. being “weary of strength.” The later idea of the wicked being separated in Sheol is lacking here. All find rest in Sheol, where the differentiating structures functioning Diesseits have become obsolete. This view concerning the fate of the wicked also puts a question mark behind the basic tenets of the Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang. If all share the same fate, ending up in Sheol, what value, or profit, to use the term of Qohelet, would a life lived according to the principles of wisdom have? Perhaps the point is that within the wisdom material of the HB the value of wisdom and the Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang is to be found in this life. The profit of the wise is to be found in this life. In death all share the same fate, regardless of earthly conduct. However, the primary concern of v 17 is to continue the description of Job’s vision of Sheol.

refering to the place of the dead. He regards v 16 as interrupting vv 13-19 and thus fits more logically and structurally after v 12.

Pope, Job, 31. If the negative particle א is retained (instead of reading וי “o that, if only”), the line can be read as a question, namely, “could I not be / have been.” Also Freedman, The Structure of Job 3, 504-5, though he does not regard such a textual rearrangement as crucial. He regards the present location of v 16 as enclosing vv 13-15 within the statement of the main theme of the poem, resuming the earlier contention while also introduces a parallel set of anticipated conditions in Sheol (vv 17-19).

Fohrer, Hiob, 123; Hesse, Hiob, 49.


לָאָבָם occurs only in 3:16, Ps 58:9 and Qoh 6:3 (subject). The LXX reads έξ η δήμα “untimely birth.”


Here יָבָם is employed as metaphor for life (cf. v 23).

In the Sumerian text of the Gilgamesh Epic we read of Enkidu’s report on the netherworld:

‘Did you see little stillborn babies, who knew not names of their own?’ ‘I saw them.’ ‘How did they fare?’ ‘They play amid syrup and ghee at tables of silver and gold.’

Did you see the man who died a natural death? ‘[I saw him.] How does he fare?’

‘He lies drinking clean water on the beds of the gods.’ Cf. George, The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic vol. 2, 776 line 268 r 1 – s 2. Job experiences neither the tranquility of the stillborn or that associated with a natural death.

The LXX reads έξ η δήμα “to burn out” (the fury of rage). But any notion of punishment of the wicked in Sheol is absent.

This view of the dead as weary of strength (Ps 88:4) is in closer proximity with the more traditional view of the dead, e.g. as the יָבָם. Cf. Job 26:5 for the only occurrence in the book.

The value of a good name, so important in Proverbs, is reiterated. It is remembered and lives on Diesseits, even when the carrier of the name have descended to the underworld.
The theme of rest in Sheol is continued in verse 18. In Sheol prisoners (גּיָם) are “at ease” (דָא)\textsuperscript{865} together (דָיו)\textsuperscript{866} and they do not hear (דָּב) the voice (דִּב)\textsuperscript{867} of the “taskmaster” (כִּנָּה)\textsuperscript{868}. While the prisoners should not be equated with the wicked in v 17 too quickly, a connection between these two groups cannot be ruled out. Here we encounter another reversal of conditions typical in life and in this way it further contributes to Job’s positive portrayal of Sheol as place of rest and equality.\textsuperscript{869} In terms of Job’s lament, death has come to present a radically different configuration of social relations compared to that of his present life, which merely offers Job l רֶפֶן, and that in isolation.\textsuperscript{870} Job casts himself in solidarity with those who long for death (3:21-22).

In verse 19 Job’s depiction of the state of the dead in Sheol is brought to a close. Social status differentiation in this life is again turned on its head in v 19. Small (יָהָ) and great (לֹד) and the servant (כֶּדִּי) is free (יָנָּה) from his master (שָׁם). That small and great function in parallel with the servant and master is clear, indicating that such difference in status is dissolved by means of death.\textsuperscript{873} Sheol is indeed the “house appointed for all living” (Job 30:23), where all social divisions are erased and, freedom is to be found. By means of his curse and lament, Job longs for the “democracy of the dead.”\textsuperscript{874} In terms of Job’s present experience of l רֶפֶן and ג, life has become a form of slavery and enforced labour (cf. Job 7:1-2).\textsuperscript{875} He wishes to be set free from this life, i.e. to die.\textsuperscript{876} For Job, and others in his situation, death offers a viable alternative to life.\textsuperscript{877} Job ultimately longs for a Dasein that is as peaceful as

\textsuperscript{865} In Prov 1:33, Jer 30:10 and Job 46:27 דא is contrasted with fear, with the use of being at “ease” or “quiet.” For Clines, Job 1-20, 97 the ease of the dwellers of Sheol does not result from a new found liberty, but is rather a matter of being released from fear. These two reasons are complementary.

\textsuperscript{866} Here דיו illustrates the notion of union or community.

\textsuperscript{867} Thus, the fear associated with the voice of the taskmaster is dissolved.

\textsuperscript{868} Given the use of גיָם translating the participle כִּנָּה “taskmaster” fits this context. Fohrer, Hiob, 124 identifies a possible Egyptian influence with the reference to כִּנָּה give the motifs encountered in the Egyptian Dispute over Suicide. Cf. ANET (3d ed. 1969) 405-407. Further, the text might recall Israelite labour under Egyptian oppression, since the כִּנָּה is the Egyptian “taskmaster” (cf. Exod 3:7; 5:6, 10, 13, 14). But this interpretation stands apart from Job’s lament.

\textsuperscript{869} Job longs for the indiscriminate and egalitarian nature of death lamented by Qohelet. Job curses life and cloaks death with positive images. Cf. Brown, Character in Crisis, 62.

\textsuperscript{870} After loosing his family and place in society Diesseits, Job now looks through “the threshold of death toward a new establishment of social ties that knows no boundaries.” Cf. Brown, Character, 62.

\textsuperscript{871} For the the translation of גיָם l יָדִי+ף as “the small and the great are there,” יָה יָד seems to be required. But since גיָם can mean “the same, alike” an emendation of the MT is unnecessary. Cf. Gordis, Job, 38. The emphasis here is more on status differentiation than actual location.

\textsuperscript{872} Here יָנָּה does not have any special social significance. For Fohrer, Hiob, 124 its original meaning is that of being freed from forced labour, particularly in connection with the task of “building.” Clines, Job 1-20, 97 does not share this view, but the notion of “oppression” is certainly present.

\textsuperscript{873} For Clines, Job 1-20, 97 the attraction of the underworld lies not in the dissolution of distinct social classes, but in the dissolution of the strife between those belonging to the different social stratifications. Nevertheless a reversal of conditions fits this context of lament well, even if a statement about the inherent equality those in Sheol is lacking.

\textsuperscript{874} Brown, The Ethos of the Cosmos, 323.

\textsuperscript{875} Habel, Job, 111. Due to Job’s present conundrum, “the greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:3) can now identify himself with a very different social group.

\textsuperscript{876} For Fohrer, Hiob, 124 Job’s actual wish in terms of his desperately uttered words is not death, but rather a peaceful life. He hopes to find it in Sheol.

\textsuperscript{877} Life rather than death has become the limiting factor for Job. Cf. Brown, The Ethos, 323. The order of life Diesseits enslaves, while the chaos Jenseits liberates. This idealised depiction of Sheol in vv 13-19 is countered in Job 10:18-22, offering a more traditional understanding of Sheol. Whybray,
his vision of the grave and Sheol.\textsuperscript{878} This longing should be interpreted in terms of his suffering in this life.\textsuperscript{879}

While we are here still dealing with the \textit{Ich-Klage}, it has been suggested that the \textit{÷wda} should be identified as Job’s taskmaster,\textsuperscript{880} and even that here refers to God, the one responsible for Job’s misery and enslaved existence.\textsuperscript{881} While such an interpretation is suggestive, it is not necessary, given the general lack of a subject for Job’s lament. The emphasis is on the enviable condition in Sheol, where God, who is partially responsible for Job’s misery, is absent. Job’s vision of the underworld includes a particularly harmonious existence. Wisdom had as its task the safeguarding of such a harmonious existence \textit{Diesseits}, but in terms of Job’s experience of \textit{l ṫ}, wisdom has failed. As a result of the absence of order in the world of his experience, Job is now longing for Sheol as a place were order is to be found. This entails an order where absurd conflicts have made room for “a pacific meaninglessness.”\textsuperscript{882}

\section*{C: Verses 20-26: Lament Continued}

\subsection*{C1: Verses 20-23}

Job’s lament continues in verse 20, as indicated by \textit{hml}, which here, as in v 11, functions as a structural marker. While this third strophe (vv 20-26) also contains a \textit{Gott-Klage} (v 23), it corresponds with the foregoing lament in that no real answer is expected. While vv 11-19 provide a glimpse of Job’s vision of the underworld and the state of the dead, it is striking that v 20 resumes the theme of “light” (\textit{rwa}) and “life” (\textit{µyyj}),\textsuperscript{883} here used synonymously, as indicated by the parallelism.\textsuperscript{884} As such v 20 is differentiated from the previous section, where darkness and death are prominent themes. For the tormented Job it remains incomprehensible why light (\textit{rwa}) is given to the sufferer (\textit{l ṫ}) or life (\textit{µyyj}) to the bitter (\textit{l ṫ}) soul (\textit{vpn}).\textsuperscript{885} Here (vv 20-23) his lament has a more general character, other than vv 24-26, in which he reflects on his own situation. In v 20 the concern is not on the one responsible for Job’s present dilemma, but rather on the inescapability of life.\textsuperscript{886} The life that Job is experiencing has lost all dimensions of meaning. What he longs for in his curse and lament has not

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[877]{Job, 38 interprets these two different modes of viewing the underworld as an indication that in Job’s present experience, “overcome by a sense of hopelessness, his normal repugnance towards death and its aftermath has been driven from Job’s thoughts.”}
\footnotetext[878]{Contra depictions of Sheol in Ps 88 6-7 or Isa 14:11.}
\footnotetext[879]{In Job 18:4a Job’s interpretation of his experience of and resultant wish to die is countered by Bildad, asking “You who tear yourself in anger – shall the earth be forsaken because of you?”}
\footnotetext[880]{G.J. Janzen, \textit{Job} (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 64.}
\footnotetext[881]{Fokkelman, \textit{Major Poems I}, 169.}
\footnotetext[882]{Clines, \textit{Job I-20}, 105.}
\footnotetext[883]{In Job 9:21; 10:12 \textit{µyyj} occurs as object; in 7:7 as subject, and also 10:21; 24:22; 33:20.}
\footnotetext[884]{Barth, \textit{Die Errettung}, 29. The use of \textit{rwa} in v 20 is motivated by the earlier use of cosmogonic imagery in Job 3: 4-5, 10, 16.}
\footnotetext[885]{Newsom, \textit{Job}, 96. For Job the “intentionality of human existence” has been lost amidst experiences of \textit{l ṫ}. Only death remains as a means of bringing relief. See also Sir 30:17, “Death is better than a miserable life, and eternal rest than chronic sickness.”}
\footnotetext[886]{Clines, \textit{Job I-20}, 99; Horst, \textit{Hiob}, 54. The reality of his suffering occupies his horizon totally, excluding the thought of who is to blame for the suffering.}
\end{footnotes}
yet eventuated and he realises the ineffectual nature of both curse and lament. This is indicated by the desperate nature of the imagery employed in v 21, communicating a sense of urgency.

Verse 21 elaborates on the sufferer and bitter soul of v 20. By means of this elaboration the theme of the purposelessness of life given to those who cannot profit from it is also continued. In this way they “yearn” (hkj) for death (twm) and they dig (rpj) for it as if it is a treasure (ânhm). Here the theme of death (twm) is contrasted to that of life (âlj) in v 20. Unlike Ps 33:20 or 106:13, the afflicted here does not yearn for YHWH and his counsel, but rather for death. This characterises the use of hkj as rather ironic, and so also the image of digging for death as if for a treasure. It also presents a very apt and vivid description of the intense longing for the reprieve that death will bring. An intensification of the yearning for death is indicated by the fact that the “yearning” of v 21a proceeds to “digging” in v 21b. Here we can note another comment on the failure of wisdom (hmkj) in terms of Job’s experience of l r. The search for wisdom was supposed to bring and ensure life, also as a reward. Here the sufferer yearns for death, digs for it and rejoices greatly on finding it, as stated in v 22. Here finding death, rather than wisdom presents a cause for joy.

While the theme of v 21 is further elaborated in verse 22, the translation of this verse is rather tricky, given the three terms used to indicate rejoicing. The result of the yearning and digging for death in v 21 is described in v 22, namely they rejoice (hm) exceedingly (lyg) rejoicing (cwc) for finding (axm) the grave (rbq). Since the normal result of death would be mourning, the irony in this response of joy in finding the grave is clear. Finding the grave has the same result as finding a hidden treasure. In terms of Job’s positive depiction of Sheol and conditions in Sheol in vv 13-19, the joy of those digging for it on finding it is comprehensible. What they will find in Sheol, in terms of Job’s depiction, serves as motivation for their digging and cause for their resultant joy on finding it. But in Job 24:19 Job argues that “Sheol engulfs those who have sinned.” It has however been suggested that this is exactly the point

887 K.J. Illmann, Old Testament Formulations About Death (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1979), 169 cites vv 20-21 with other texts where death and life are presented as opposites, requiring a correct decision.
889 In wisdom literature rpj also refers to “searching / desiring.” Clines, Job 1-20, 100 favours this interpretation.
890 The graves (µyrbq) are ready for Job (cf. 17:1b).
891 This image of “digging for death” contrasts Job 28, where humanity’s capacity to search the earth for natural riches is contrasted with their inability to discover wisdom (hmkj). Cf. Habel, Job, 111.
893 The critical apparatus of the BHS suggests lg (“heap”) for lyg allowing a reading “burial heap,” constituting a parallelism with rbq. For Gordis, Job, 39 “exultation” is the primary meaning and “burial heap” secondary. Also Grabbe, Comparative Philology, 38. Ha, Frage, 51-52 follows the suggested reading of the BHS. But such an emendation is unnecessary and as Grabbe, Comparative Philology, 41 argues, v 22 makes good sense if lyg is interpreted as “rejoicing.” Cf. Hos 9:1.
894 In view of the reference to twm in v 21, it seems probable that death is here intended as object, of which the grave here serves as metaphor.
895 Fohrer, Hiob, 125. Not finding the grave they are again confronted with the bitterness of their being, causing them to dig or to search even more vehemently for the grave and the reward that it brings. The background of this image could be grave robbers who rejoice at finding the grave and the promise of treasure that it holds.
that Job is repudiating, namely the doctrine of individual retribution. An identification between Job 29:22b and Job 3:22b has also been suggested, in the sense that the former is influenced by the latter in terms of the metaphors employed therein. But at issue here is the qualification of the result, i.e. joy, in finding the grave.

**Verse 23** presents a further qualification of the one yearning and digging for death, namely as the man (rbg) whose way (ûrd) is hidden (rts), and has been “covered” (ûks) by God (hwla). Again, the meaning of this verse is quite clear, but its translation remains problematic. In v 23 we are dealing with a Gott-Klage rather than an Ich-Klage (cf. §4.3). His complaint is directed against God. Further, by employing the singular rbg Job moves closer to his own situation. Important here is the reference to ûrd, which in Proverbal wisdom is used with the meaning of a “way” of life. Wisdom has the function of “steering” (twlbjt, Prov 1:5; 11:14; 12:5) the wise through life, but in terms of Job’s experience wisdom has lost its ability to perform this function. Here God is accredited with bringing this situation about, since He is the one that “hedges in” (wilb hwla ûsyw). He is held responsible. We cannot however speak of a direct accusation against God, as encountered at a later stage in

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897 Heater, *A Septuagint Translation Technique*, 91.
898 Job’s longing for death and idyllic depiction of Sheol is reminiscent of the Egyptian text *A Dispute Over Suicide*, where death is portrayed as a land of pleasure and release from captivity, sickness and confinement of living.
899 “Death is in my sight today (Like) the recovery of a sick man, Like going out into the open after confinement. Death is in my sight today Like the odour of myrrh, Like sitting under an awning on a breezy day (line 131-136)
Death is in my sight today Like the longing of a man to see his house (again) After he has spent many years held in captivity” (line 141-143). Cf. *ANET* (3d ed.; 1969) 405-407.
900 In Job 3:3 rbg refers to a male infant. In Prov 30:19 it refers to a strong or young male person.
901 For v 23 the LXX reads, “Death is rest to such a man, for God has shut him in.” Cf. Heater, *A Septuagint Translation Technique*, 44-45. He regards qanatō~ in 3:23a as reflection of rbg in 3:22b.
902 A tension is felt with his praise of God in 1:21. For Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 30, vv 24-26 provide a thematic counterpoint.
903 Here rbg can refer to any person in Job’s situation. Cf. Clines, *Job*, 101. By means of the use of the third person, the gap is bridged between references to humanity in general in the previous verses and vv 24-26, where the first person refers to Job’s own situation.
904 In proverbial wisdom discovering or knowing the correct “way” (ûrd) is of central importance for success in life (Prov 4:10-19).
907 Job’s accusation that God has hedged him in (ûks, used negatively) reverses the Satan’s allegation in 1:10 that Job’s integrity was conditioned by a hedge (ûkc, used positively) of divine blessing. Cf. Habel, *Job*, 111-112. For Driver and Gray, *Job*, 39 ûkc in 1:10 refers to God’s protection of Job, while in 3:23 it refers to the “mental embarrassment” which God’s treatment of Job had brought about. See also Job 38:8, where the sea (µy), as symbol of chaos, is “hedged in” (ûmu) by God.
908 For Hesse, *Hiob*, 49 the lament has been intensified to an accusation. Clines, *Job*, 101 does not share this view, since divine restriction does not equal divine hostility. Job’s lament affirms the inescapable reality of his situation.
the Joban dialogue (Job 19). Still, here Job’s lament against the futility of (his) life is clear.

C2: Verses 24-26

In verses 24-26 the Ich-Klage is resumed, and here the lament is clearly applied to Job’s own situation. But the particle יֶק in verse 24 points to its relatedness with vv 20 and 23. The יֶק also provides a reason for Job’s earnest wish to be dead. The translation of v 24 is tricky. Here Job’s “groaning” (חָנָה) and “roarings” (חָגוֹנָה) have become, metaphorically speaking, his food and drink. Bread (לחם) and water (מים) no longer serve as basic forms of nourishment in the face of שֶׁרָה and מַג. Rather, his “groaning” accompanies his food and his roarings are “poured out” (✉ָנ) like water. By means of this imagery a very vivid picture is painted of Job’s experience of suffering. It is indeed comparable to a description of mourning.

The translation of verse 25 is likewise tricky. Literally it could be rendered “I feared a fear and it has come upon me, and that which I feared has come unto me.” By means of the use of דּו (x 2) and מַצ the theme of fear and dread is the main concern. It has arrived (הָתָא) and it has come (אֶב). The subject of this fear and dread remains elusive. A further question is whether v 25 concerns Job’s present or past experience. The rather strange temporality of v 25, indicated by the verb tenses, seems to indicate that what Job is encountering, i.e. that which is come upon him, did not take him by surprise. Seeing that no “past events” are recounted in the book of Job which could serve as background for his present experience, it seems most likely that what is at issue is his present experience, i.e. the events recounted in the prose prologue. Against the background of these experiences, no surprises are left.

The basic question of v 25 also applies to verse 26. Job was not at ease (וְלֹא), he was not quiet (כְּבוֹד), he had no rest (יָכָה), yet trouble (מָג) came. This can clearly be a reflection on the result of Job’s experience of suffering and turmoil and the absence of rest (vv 10, 17, 20, 26), resulting from the events narrated in the prose prologue (Job

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909 Van der Lugt, Rhetorical Criticism, 60, regards vv 24-26 as an independent strophe from vv 20-23.
910 Clines, Job, 102.
911 In Job 4:10 and Ps 22:2 חָגוֹנ ("roarings") is used of a lion in pain. Job’s roarings are comparable.
912 Clines, Job, 102. Wolfers, Deep Things, 320, suggests the translation “For I confront my bread with sighing: And outpoured like waters are my groans.”
913 Here ✈ָנ("pour out") is comparable with Jer 42:18, 44:6, Dan 9:11, 27; 2 Chr 12:7, 34:25.
914 Job 7:3-6; 30:15; 31:23 elaborates on this portrayal of his suffering.
915 The LXX reads εἶναι τὰ ὑπερήφανα "think, consider." I.e. the terror of his meditation has come upon him.
916 For Newsom, The Book of Job, 94 the language of v 25 consolidates Job’s suffering into a single experience “that has the quality of a ghastly encounter.” This LXX supports this notion, reading ἅπαντα "to meet." I.e. that which Job feared is come to meet him.
917 The LXX reading suggests that v 24b ("and I weep being beset with terror") anticipates v 25a. For that which Job fears (מָג) reappears later in his speeches (13:21, 30:15, 31:23), and that of the friends (15:21; 22:10).
918 Clines, Job, 102-3. V 25 may refer to Job’s conflict with others, or to his “inner conflict.”
919 In 16:12 Job laments the fact that he was at “ease” (וְלֹא), but that God brought about a change in his situation, shaking him to pieces and setting him up for target practice.
920 Job continues to endure a threefold absence of peace, rest and quiet in the land of the living, which is contrasted with a threefold exaltation on discovering the grave. Cf. Habel, Job, 112.
contrasted with the rest and quiet which he expects to find in Sheol (vv 13-15, 17-19). The reference to trouble that comes, leaves a question mark behind the nature of the trouble referred to. While the nature of $\text{zgr}$ is uncertain, its cause is clear. It reflects back on that, i.e. the conditions of the “bitter soul,” described in the foregoing lament, but also that it expects the responses of the friends in the ensuing dialogues. It is most probable that the imperfect $\text{abyw}$ is indicative of the continuation of Job’s experience of agony. His curse and lament hitherto has had no effect on his situation. The only result is a series of dialogues, including that of the divine. Instead of escaping $\text{zgr}$, it continues.

In v 26 $\text{zgr}$ is a keyword, but also as keyword for the entire chapter, providing the dominant tone. It summarises his immediate experience, as well as his continued experience brought about by the dialogues. As such it provides a fitting conclusion to Job’s opening self-speech. While death and the desire for death presents the main theme of the poem, the image of restlessness in v 26 serves as an indication to the reader that it will not be Job’s last words, preparing them for the continuation of the Joban tale. If Job were to have died at this stage, his death would certainly be characterised as a bad death. But as a result of his intense experience of $\text{Infl}$ and $\text{zgr}$, the rest that Sheol offers Jenseits is preferable to a blessed name Diesseits. Job still longs for the peaceful communion of Sheol, where even the “raging” ($\text{zgr}$) of the wicked cease (3:17). Ultimately, in his present state of being, death is preferable to life (cf. 7:15).

### 3.6 Thematic Discussion

The preference of death over life is not an unqualified preference. Here we will consider the significance of the socio-historical context for interpreting Job 3 (§3.6.1), followed by the themes of creation (§3.6.2) and death (§3.6.3) as they function theologically in Job 3.

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921 In 2 Sam 22:8, Amos 8:8, Hab 3:7 $\text{zgr}$ describes the physical shaking of inanimate objects, and in 2 Sam 19:1, Jer 33:9, Joel 2:1, Ps 99:1 intense emotional agitation.

922 Given that which Job feared in v 25, $\text{zgr}$ can refer to the reversal of the cosmic moral order, now perceived as chaotic. Cf. Clines, Job, 103, 105. For Whybray, Job, 40 it provides the reason for Job’s longing for death, namely, his world has become shattered. This argument is not conclusive.

923 For Newsom, Job, 94 $\text{zgr}$ should be read retrospectively, i.e. within the light of his curse.

924 De Wilde, Das Buch Hiob, 101

925 Job 29-30 demands a declaration of innocence from God, without an expectation of His adherence.

926 In this regard Brown, Character in Crisis, 63 argues, “The peaceful communion for which Job desperately yearns among the dead is about to be displaced by strife among the living.” Here an expected logical movement, Job following the advice of his wife (2:9) and finding rest in Sheol, is interrupted.

927 Clines, Job 1-20, 77, 104. He regards v 26 as nodal verse in Job 3, since it contains in positive and negative form the dominant image of the poem, namely the presence of “turmoil” and absence of “ease.”

928 The placement of $\text{zgr}$ sums up what, for Job, is wrong with life and what is desirable about Sheol. Cf. Clines, Job, 104.

929 Such an expectation is already created by means of the violent nature of Job’s death wish in vv 3-9.

930 Cf. Job’s consideration of the contrast between one dying in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet (Job 21:23), while another dies in the bitterness of his soul (Job 21:25). Yet both will lie down alike in the dust (Job 21:26).

931 Cf. Job 10:1; also 10:8-12, where Job reminds God of his being created, contrasting Job 3.
3.6.1 The Context of the Book of Job

The search for a socio-historical context of the book of Job often results in an impasse of scholarly opinion. But despite the difficulties in establishing a context for the book of Job, it remains significant, since a better understanding of the conditions of the book’s composition can contribute to a better understanding of the theological questions it addresses, why such questions became pertinent, and the response that it offers to these questions. This applies particularly to the tenets of Israelite wisdom theology. Unfortunately the book of Job reflects very little of the times and conditions of its composition. The widely shared notion of multiple authorship indicated by the lack of stylistic uniformity, further complicates the question pertaining to the book’s composition.

Attempts at establishing a context for the book of Job are mostly based on ideological, linguistic, or literary grounds. In terms of a focus on ideology, the conditions of the Persian period have potential for comprehending the theological questions raised in the book of Job. The question of context is closely related to the envisioned audience of the book of Job. In this context the complaint of Job might be reflective of the changed socio-economic conditions experienced by the Israelite elitist class in the Persian period. As such it is comparable with the conditions under Persian rule attested in Neh 5:1-5. But evidence from the book of Job is too meagre for


933 Both the real-time and narrative frame reflected in the book.


935 Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 240 argues that the Sitz im Leben of the Joban dialogue is most likely that of the first generation of the exile, between 585-570 BCE.

936 The Sage and Pious Wisdom in the Book of Job: The Friend’s perspective” (trans. L.G. Perdue), in: L.G. Perdue et al., The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 248, 260 interprets the lack of any clear eschatological thinking in the book of Job as indicative that Job and the friends belonged to a specific social class, and that their “conceptual horizons” are limited to one social class. Traditional wisdom thus became questionable as a result of social developments of the time.

937 R. Albertz, “Der sozialgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Hiobbuches und der ‘Babylonischen Theodizee’,” in: L. Perlitt and J. Jeremias (eds.), Die Botschaft und die Boten: Festschrift für Hans Walter Wolff zum 70. Geburtstag (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1981), 349-372 regards the character of Job as an old fashioned aristocrat, contra the new elite of the Persian period who do not care about their social obligations toward the poor and the needy. They are the wicked in the book of Job. This implies that the social standing and interest of the author is comparable to that of Nehemiah’s author. L. Finkelstein, The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith (3d ed.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), 231-32 regards the book of Job in its original form as an accusation against God and the elite, with notions of equality reflected in Job 3:19 and 31:31. This indicates that the book was not written by a “man of wealth” in the 4th century BCE Jerusalem. For Whybray, The Intellectual Tradition, 65 the debate within the book of Job is between educated farmers, and not between members of an elite or professional class, thus supporting the argument of Finkelstein.

postulating such a specific context and concern.\textsuperscript{939} The theological issues raised in Job are also of such a nature that no uniform or particular audience is identifiable.\textsuperscript{940}

Further, a much wider audience than merely an elitist class would be able to identify with the persistent theme of theodicy. It is not the fate and suffering of the elite that is specified in Job, but rather the fate and suffering of the righteous.

Difficulties encountered in trying to establish a context for the book of Job do not deter some scholars, such as Albertz, from interpreting Job 3 as a representative part of the theological wisdom of the dispersed Israelite elite.\textsuperscript{941} As such the development that takes place within the book of Job, that is from the hatred of life to its positive affirmation (cf. 3; 7:11ff; 10; 29:2ff; 31), is regarded as having a social function, addressed to the flabbargested Israelite elite.\textsuperscript{942} This argument is not without merit,
but again it points to the class-specific limitation of Job’s theological wisdom, and as stated, the book of Job’s theological argument and implications transcend class specific boundaries.

The search for linguistic evidence has equally proven itself as an unsatisfactory avenue for determining a context for the book of Job. So, for instance, scholars often identify a variety of Aramaisms in the book of Job, indicative of a late compositional date, i.e. the Persian period, due to the advance of Aramaic as lingua franca. In this regard the criticism has been uttered that care should be taken when using the term Aramaism in reference to the material of the MT. Also in the book of Job such evidence remains disputable. The numerous *hapax legomena* occurring in the book of Job also complicate attempts at establishing a compositional context for the book of Job based on linguistic evidence. Literary evidence concerns both the literary form of the final shape of the book of Job (e.g. the prose prologue and epilogue and poetic dialogues), as well as the literary relation between parts of the book of Job (e.g. Job 3) and other texts in the HB (e.g. Gen 1:1-2:4a and Jer 20:14-18), and the wider literary familiarity of the character of Job in the HB (cf. Ezek 14:12-20). Literary, linguistic and ideological evidence offers insufficient grounds for establishing a certain historical and compositional context for the book of Job. This prompts the suggestion that the final form of the text should serve as point of departure for trying to determine a context for the book of Job. That is, acknowledging that the book of Job is the product of redactional labour, implying that the narrative frame (earlier) and poetic dialogues (later) stem from different periods and authorial hands. In view of these difficulties in establishing a context for the book of Job the question should rather concern the minimum that we can deduce from the text of Job. As such linguistic, literary and ideological approaches point to a late date (4th century BCE) for the book of Job. The book of Job in its final form is a literary work that does not merely try to address a particular audience within a particular socio-historical context grappling with a theological issue pertinent for a specific audience. The author rather followed the way of traditional wisdom thinking

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943 Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion* Vol. II, 517. This ideological-critical approach of Albertz and Crüsemann is reflective of a particular *Zeitgeist* in Germany in the 1970's, with student revolts etc. and found its way into biblical scholarship.

944 Habel, *Job*, 40. A. Hurvitz, “Date of the Prose-Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered.” *HTR* 67 (1974): 17-34, made such an attempt and concluded that the book should be dated no earlier that the 6th century BCE.


946 Habel, *Job*, 41.

947 The relevance of references to “Job” in Ezek 14:12-20, with Noah and Dan(i)el, is problematic, since the prophet Ezekiel operated at the time of the destruction of Judah and the Babylonian Exile. For Clines, *Job*, lvii this reference is of no historical value, since it is probably a reference to an ancient folktale, rather than the character encountered in the book of Job.

and created a work with universal dimensions.\textsuperscript{949} In this way its readership and theological implications are not bound and limited to a socio-historical context.\textsuperscript{950} A further implication is that the book of Job does not lend itself very well for tracing a linear development in wisdom thinking and theological argumentation. In the case of Job 3 the familiarity with existing theological traditions (P and prophetic) at least points to a late date for the text.

### 3.6.2 Creation as a Theological Theme in Job 3

The primary theological matrix of the book of Job is that of creation.\textsuperscript{951} This is also the case in Job 3. How the theme of creation functions theologically in Job 3 requires further consideration, as well as the rhetoric of God within the creation language of Job 3. First we will consider creation as a theological theme within the broader context of the book Job, and then focus on the text of Job 3.

#### 3.6.2.1 Creation as a Theological Theme in the Book of Job

Creation provides the parameters for the soliloquy in Job 3,\textsuperscript{952} and remains a pertinent theme throughout the book.\textsuperscript{953} The author(s) incorporated traditional ideas within the framework of his (their) own theological agenda, complicating attempts at determining its precise nature.\textsuperscript{954} Technical terms for creation as encountered in the Priestly tradition (e.g. \textit{arb})\textsuperscript{955} or Deutero-Isaiah (e.g \textit{rxy}) do not occur in the book of Job. But it does share the use of creation terminology such as \textit{hnb} (“build”)\textsuperscript{956} and \textit{hc[}

\textsuperscript{949} Habel, \textit{Job}, 42. Wolfers, \textit{Deep Things}, 75 also argues that the content of Job does not confirm to any real or specific social setting. Though the prologue reflects an attempt to place the book within a certain socio-historical context (that of the patriarchs), this does not account for all the features of Job’s existence reflected in the book.

\textsuperscript{950} Clines, \textit{Job}, lvii. Similarly Roberts, “Job and the Israelite Religious Tradition,” 114 argues that if it is accepted that the author of the book of Job stood in a long literary tradition, the actual dating of the composition of the book becomes irrelevant for exegetes, since the same issues being addressed also occur within a wider literary and cultural context. As such it is not necessary to assume that the book was composed within a period of national crisis, since this is not a prerequisite for addressing the issues at hand in Job. It does not have to be connected with the Israelite national history.


\textsuperscript{952} The complaints and accusations of Job stem from an assumption that there is an order in creation and as such a system of justice in creation (principle of retribution). Cf. M.K. George, “Death as the Beginning of Life in the Book of Ecclesiastes,” in: T. Linnefelt (ed.), \textit{Strange Fire: Reading the Bible in the Holocaust} (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 280-293 at 281.

\textsuperscript{953} Fretheim, \textit{God and World}, 227-228. A motivating factor for setting the dialogue in terms of creation is that Job’s most immediate experiences of suffering and ill-fortune are directly related to nature, or natural events, i.e. fire and windstorm (1:16-19), and disease (2:7-8). The question of Job’s suffering also brings into question the nature of God’s creation and His continuing relationship with it. Thus it is not surprising that God responds (38-41) to the speeches of Job by referring to creation.


\textsuperscript{955} It occurs only in Qoh 12:1 (as participle) in the HB wisdom literature.

\textsuperscript{956} For \textit{hnb} in Job cf. 3:14; 20:19; 27:18 (Qal); 12:14; 22:23 (Ni).
This contributes to a correspondence with and deviation from the creation theology in other theological traditions of the HB. Further, the book of Job does not reflect a uniform creation theology, as evidenced by the poetic dialogues. This demonstrates the book’s polyphone nature. These contesting voices are not unrelated, but rather constitutive of the larger theological debate (or inner dialogue), in the sense that the different voices respond to one another. However, within the parameters of this theological debate a theological constant is identifiable, namely God’s portrayal as omnipotent creator – which is experienced both positively and negatively by the different characters of the Joban plot (cf. §3.6.2.3).

The book of Job contains a topsy-turvy theological landscape, and its creation theology is no exception. Not merely in Job 3, but also in the divine speeches (38-41). Overcome by his experience of suffering and turmoil, creation as Job knew it has come to an end. This is particularly evident in his opening soliloquy, expressing his desire for oblivion. But Job is offered a new perspective on creation in the response from the whirlwind. In this sense we can speak of an initial deconstruction (Job 3) and an eventual reconstruction of creation (Job 38-41) in the book of Job. In between these two poles we encounter the attempts of the friends who try to uphold the pillars on which the basic tenets of proverbial wisdom rest. This implies an ordered creation, governed by the principle of retribution (Tun-Ergebn-Zusammenhang), for which a just creator God is responsible. While these diverse perspectives at times constitute a tension within the book of Job, it is significant that they were retained, rather than dissolved by means of editorial labour. The centrality of creation as a theological theme in the book of Job is identifiable in the sense that it expands Job’s vision of the world, calling him to deepened faith that goes beyond mere human understanding.

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958 E.g. the motif of being fashioned in the womb (31:15), being formed from clay (Elihu, 33:6), being made and fashioned by the hands of YHWH (10:8) and the breath of every living being belonging to the creator (12:10). Creation can also be called to witness (12:7-8).
959 According to Clifford, Creation Accounts, 185-6 Job sees God’s creation as a violent and careless manipulation of things and living beings (9:5-13, 10:8-13; 12:13-25), while Bildad holds on to the concept of order and majesty in the created works of God (25:1-6, 26:5-24). For Elihu nature forms the basis for unquestioning awe (36:24-37:24). The reflection on creation within the speeches of God (38:1-40:5, 40:6-42:6) differs from all the foregoing, while at the same time engages in a dialectical discourse with the perspectives of Job and the friends. Also Wagner, “Schöpfung im Buche Hiob,” 183-189.
960 In contrast to the inconsistent way in which death is addressed within the book of Job, it is rather consistent in its portrayal of God as omnipotent creator, though this omnipotence may be positively or negatively interpreted.
961 The Joban rhetoric and vision of creation stands in a critical relation with creation theology of Proverbial wisdom. Cf. H.D. Preuß, Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur (KUTB 383; Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1987), 93. The creation theology in the book of Job fits within the framework of the hymnisch-weisheitliche Tradition. This view is comparable to the doxological perspective on creation and the creator within Ps 104 (God as the “playful creator”).
962 Here Job’s anthropocentric perspective of creation is challenged, since humanity is marginalised in terms of the divine response. These speeches stand in closer proximity to Ps 104, and both stand in contrast to Gen 1:1-2:4a.
963 D. Bergant, “The Greening of Creation: The Wisdom Tradition and Creation.” Theology Today 47 (2000): 124-134, at 25. The absence of a reference to the creation of humanity in the divine speeches may be indicative of a move from an anthropocentric to a cosmoscentric worldview. Anthropology is re-incorporated into a new cosmology, requiring the re-examination of various tenets of traditional faith.
3.6.2.2 The Rhetoric of God in the book of Job

In the book of Job the person of God is intriguing and difficult to comprehend. An immediate difficulty is that the book does not portray any single image of God, but rather a plurality of often contrasting images. Thus, in a sense, too much is known about the Deity. There are too many contesting theologies operative in the book of Job. However, the diverse designations and depictions of the deity in the book of Job indicate that the author(s) of the book of Job did not hesitate to scrutinise existing views of the deity, while at the same time refusing to discard tradition. In Job the transition from prose to poetry brings about a different picture of the deity. Ultimately, through a process of vigorous theological debate, it is the (informed) traditional view of the deity that is confirmed in the book of Job. In this way the rhetoric of God in the book of Job is dynamic rather than static. Nevertheless the deity remains the Deus creator omnium in Job, responsible for all that exists, and envisioned as being above.

The rhetoric of God in the book of Job brings into focus the variety of designations for God. In the prose prologue God is referred to within the earthly realm by the name µyhla and in heaven by the name hwhy. In the poetic dialogues between Job

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964 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 38. Also Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 129. Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, 221 argued that in Job it is not so much the question of suffering that has become problematical, but God.

965 Wolfers, Deep Things, 77 judges the designation of the deity in Job as presenting a “convention in the use of the divine names which is unique to that Book, with a very meticulous restriction placed on the use of “The Lord’ as an indication of His ‘presence’ and personality as distinct from his function, status and power.” He does not share the notion of a lack of theological uniformity in Job.


968 According to Mettinger, “The God of Job,” 48 the deity encountered in the Job is not an amoral God who has brought about an amoral creation. Rather, “It seems that the idea of God as the preserver and protector of his creation has a more important place in the author’s agenda than the question of the ultimate origin of evil.”

969 Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, 217 argued that in the poetical responses of Job there is a new tone in which God is presented as the direct enemy of humankind. Also Crenshaw, “The Concept of God,” 11.

970 The author(s) of the book of Job can at least be considered a “critical Israelite.” Cf. Habel, Job, 40.

971 God is referred to as “maker” in Job 4:17; 9:9; 40:19 (ptc. of hc[ ]; also 32:22; 35:10; 36:3 (ptc. of I[ ]p). See also Job 26:5-14 which describes the power of the deity as creator.


973 Crenshaw, A Whirlpool of Torment, 60-61. Here Job differs from Qohelet, for whom God (µyhla) is above all Deus absconditus.


975 Cf. Job 1:1.5, 8, 9, 16, 22; 2:1, 3, 10 and as object 2.9.

976 Cf. Job 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 21; 2:1.2, 3, 4, 6, 7.
and the friends, lă and hīwā are predominant, thereafter ydv, while µyhē a299 occurs rarely, and hūly and yrdl only once. In the Elihu speeches lă is predominant, while hīwā and ydv occur with equal frequency, while µyhē a occurs twice. Within the divine speeches µyhē a and lă occur three times each, hīwā twice and ydv once. In the prose epilogue only the name hūly is used (ET, 42:1, 7, 9, 10-12). In addition the name hcl is also used by Elihu, Eliphaz and the deity. Bildad uses only lă and in parallel also ydv. In Job 28, the poem on wisdom, Job uses the name yrdl (28:28) as well as three rare names, vidq (5:1; 6:10; 15:15), y phv (9:15, as Ptc.) and y agr (19:25, as Qal ptc.). This diversity of designations for the Deity contributes to the complex theological landscape of the book of Job, and contributes to the elusive nature of the deity in the book of Job.

In the prose prologue, God is presented as the one who dialogues (1:7; 2:2), who negotiates (1:11; 2:6), who is appeased by offerings (1:5), who gives and takes (1:21), who is responsible for both good and evil (2:10) and who destroys (2:3). Job’s wife judges God to be responsible for the fate that befell Job (2:9). In response to His actions God may be either blessed (1:21) or cursed (2:9). In the Joban dialogues, the image of God as destroyer is latched unto, with Job proclaiming God to be his adversary (cf. 16:9-14; 19:11-12), destroying (Ḥlk) the blameless (µt) and the wicked ([Wr; cf. 9:22]. This picture of God, as active “persecutor,” conflicts with Job’s complaint regarding God’s absence (cf. 13:24) or His observation of Job’s suffering without delivering him (30:20). The depiction of God as absent implies that Job cannot establish a rendezvous with God to present his case of innocence before Him (23:8-9). God is simultaneously experienced as too distant and too close. God is the Deus ludens who can make or break Job (Job 9:1-35). Ironically He remains Job’s only source of hope. This is achieved particularly by means of Job’s recollection of his former relationship with God, which has now become tension-filled. If we consider the way in which God is addressed in the speeches of Job, a progression is


979 Cf. Job 5:8; 20:29; 32:2; 34:9; 36:2; 38:7; as subject 28:23; 31:6; 33:12; 35:10; 39:17.


983 The traditional imagery of God as divine warrior “is redirected so that the deity is not understood as a cosmic benefactor, bearing back the forces of chaos, but as a demonic figure devouring his own helpless creatures.” Cf. Burkes, God, Self and Death, 39. See also Job 9:24, 6:8-9, 7:20, 10:3-8, 13:24-25, 14:18-19, 30:21-23 for instances where God is depicted as destroyer and watcher of humanity.

984 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 40. Job’s bitter complaint concerning God’s absence presents a sharp contrast with Ps 139:7-10 that reads “Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and set at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.”

noticeable. In his first speech God is addressed directly, while in the second and third speeches, God is spoken of in a vague manner. This creates the impression that He is some distant reality, not immediately present (cf. 11:7-8).

These contrasting depictions of the Deity are not readily accepted by Job’s friends. God is depicted in the speeches of Bildad (8:1-6), Zophar (11:6) and Eliphaz (22:5-11) as doing no wrong and rewarding each according to their deeds (34:10). This supports the notion of a just creator God governing an ordered creation. In fairness to the friends, room is allowed for the possibility that God both wounds and heals, as Eliphaz argues (5:18), while Elihu regards God’s adversity as a tool for instruction, leading to deliverance (37:13). Zophar maintains God’s justice, though his description of God’s incomprehensible nature (11:7-9) has implications for his own attempts to defend the justice of God. This is also the case in the description of God’s greatness and incomprehensibility in the speeches of Eliphaz (22:1-3) and Elihu. In this way their view of God differs significantly from the prose prologue and epilogue, since they do not accept that human action affects the Deity in any way. Such a view of the Deity however raises the question concerning divine justice and mercy, given that creation is subject to the volatile will of the Deity and that the Deity remains out of human reach.

In the divine speeches God is first and foremost depicted as the powerful creator, the grand architect of creation, who measured everything to the point of perfection (cf. 38:5-6) who cares for every aspect of creation, and also nourishes (38:39-41). The motif of God as divine warrior reappears in the second of the divine speeches (cf. 40:9), particularly in the references to Behemoth (40:19) and Leviathan (41:34). But within this context divine omnipotence is positively portrayed, i.e. hedging in the forces of chaos, ascribing to everything its proper place. Indeed, the Deity rejoices over creation.

This positive depiction of the Deity is continued in the prose epilogue, where God is portrayed as the restorer of Job’s good fortune (42:10f), requiring a sacrifice from the friends and intercession from Job on the friends’ behalf, as intercession for the friends...

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987 This is partially so because they cling to the notion of God’s justice and power, refusing to accept Job’s innocence.
988 Burkes, *God, Self and Death*, 41.
989 Burkes, *God, Self and Death*, 42. This presents a contrast with Job’s own declaration of the greatness of God, as the creator of everything in 9:1-21. In the speeches of the friends, statements regarding God are far removed from deuteronomistic theology that states God’s expectations and the consequences of human actions.
990 By clinging to the principle of retribution, the friends actually “imprison the deity in a rigid system that human beings actually control by their conduct.” Cf. Crenshaw, “The Concept of God,” 13.
992 Job already described God as the one trampling the Sea and subduing Rahab’s helpers (9:8-9) and arguing that Sheol, Abaddon, Sea, Rahab, and the serpent are subjected to the power of the divine warrior (26:5-6, 12-13).
993 Burkes, *God, Self and Death*, 43. Also Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 33 who observes that within the speeches of God, the portrayal of God is modelled neither on Baal or El, since God does not appear in western storm clouds of Baal or in dreams as El typically would. God is portrayed as appearing in the whirlwind of the arid desert storm, “associated mythologically, if anything, with Mot, the god of death.” Yet God does not bring death, but rather restores life.
(42:8) who have not spoken rightly about Him. In this way God is depicted as acting in a way comprehensible to humans, and perhaps even more significant, God is presented as accessible in and responsive to the cult.\footnote{Burkes, \textit{God, Self and Death}, 44. In the editorial epilogue of Qohelet (12:9-14), the role and function of the cult is presented in a similar fashion. In Job this view is limited to the prose prologue and epilogue, where God responds favourably to ritual and sacrifice.} So the predominant view of God as elevated and elusive is qualified to some extent.\footnote{In the epilogue God does not return to the realm of heaven to re-engage in a debate with the Satan as in the prologue. Rather, as Brueggemann, \textit{Theology of the Old Testament}, 393 argues “Yahweh’s rightful place is not in the speculations of heaven, but in the realities of the earth.”} What is possible to say about God is not limited to human expectation or experience.\footnote{Job interprets this as indicative of an inconsistency in the character of God, threatening his worldview with collapse. Cf. Crenshaw, “The Concept of God,” 11.} Thus, the process of theological scrutinising draws the confession from Job’s lips “but now my eyes have seen you” (42:5). Within the Israelite religion God and world belong together and therefore any inquiry concerning God is also an inquiry into the world. For this reason it can also be judged that Job has come to see the world through different eyes.\footnote{Burkes, \textit{God, Self and Death}, 44. In the editorial epilogue of Qohelet (12:9-14), the role and function of the cult is presented in a similar fashion. In Job this view is limited to the prose prologue and epilogue, where God responds favourably to ritual and sacrifice.}

### 3.6.2.3 The Rhetoric of God in Job 3

In Job 3 the Deity is mentioned twice by name (Job 3:4, 23), and in both cases by means of \textit{hwla}. The contexts in which these references to God occur are overtly negative. Job does not want God to regard his day of birth or his night of conception from above (v4), and God is accredited with hiding his way and hedging him in (v23). In both cases God is brought in direct relation with Job’s origin and his life course. These two references to God latch unto the prose prologue (Job 1-2), where God entices Satan to “consider” His servant Job (1:8), and where Satan accuses God of putting a hedge around Job (1:10), keeping him safe, and that this would explain his piety.\footnote{This accusation that \textit{hwla} has “hedged in” (\textit{ûks}) reflects an awareness of the challenge and response taking place between God and the Satan.} In 3:20 we have an indirect reference to the Deity, inferring that God is considered the sole source of light and life. Here also the positive images of light and life occur within a very negative context. Job fails to understand why God grants life to those who are not in a position to enjoy it. In all of these instances, God appears as the subject of an action in the first strophe of a stanza. The picture that emerges of the Deity in Job’s opening self-speech is rather complex. God is accredited with bestowing life, but also with bestowing life to the bitter soul, and even being the cause of such bitterness. While Job is longing for death’s relief in chapter 3, God is not associated with death. After all, Job wants to hide in Sheol, betting on God’s absence. While Sheol is depicted as part and parcel of divine creation, it is nowhere said that God created death.\footnote{For the Satan as Accuser, cf. Zech 3:1-2, where the Satan opposes Joshua the high priest. Also Ps 109:6 and 1 Chr 21:1, where the Satan “stood up” against Israel.}\footnote{Fokkelman, \textit{Major Poems} I, 160.} The God of Job 3 is not merely the source of light and life, but...
also the one who can bring an end to life (cf. Job 1:21, with YHWH as the one that gives and take, here also related to life).

3.6.2.4 Creation as a Theological Theme in Job 3

For Job universal creation is so closely linked to his own creation “that God’s randomness and injustice toward him is simply one more instance of God’s randomness and injustice toward the world.” This Joban view is advanced by his experience of suffering, and as a result, anthropocentric is a term applicable to the creation theology of Job 3. In this way it differs from the otherwise theocentric orientation of the creation theology operative in the book of Job. For this reason Job’s curse and lament apply in the first instance to his own creation. It is this positioning of Job in the centre of creation that forms the background for the divine response from the whirlwind in Job 38-41 (cf. §3.6.2.2.3).

It remains significant that the language of creation was chosen as a theological vehicle for verbalising Job’s acute experience of agony. While familiar creation imagery is employed in Job 3, neither creation nor creator are presented as objects of praise. Rather, Job’s experience of suffering has transformed a perceived beneficial created order into meaningless chaos. Creation has lost its beauty, meaning and beneficence. It is perceived as unfortunate, devoid of peace and justice, and as such unfair. It brings only desire and dread. Creation has become subject to divine volatility, containing no guarantees. For this reason scholars often refer to the creation imagery employed in Job 3 as a reversal of creation. I.e., the creation imagery or sequence of creation as encountered in Gen 1:1-2:4a is reversed in Job 3, predominantly in the curse section, bringing it in closer proximity to the imagery encountered in Jer 20:14-18.

Job’s suffering has become the determining principle for his consideration of creation and creator, i.e. for his theology of creation. In spite of this, God remains the theological constant. Creation might be experienced as bad, but it is still God’s creation. God is brought into proximity with Job’s pre-created state of being, as seen from his cursing of the night of his conception, recognising God’s involvement

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1003 Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 185.
1004 One can note the potential cosmic dimension of his curse. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 185 refers to the relatedness of Job’s creation and that of the universe, resulting in a perception that “God’s randomness and injustice toward him is simply one more instance of God’s randomness and injustice toward the world.”
1005 Thus it is far removed from the doxological creation theology of Ps 104.
1006 Contra Qoh 11:7.
1007 The tenets of proverbial wisdom, supporting the causality principle, no longer provide a foundation for making sense of the world. Cf. Clifford, *Creation Accounts*, 196.
1008 Reventlow, “Leben und Tod im Alten Testament,” 11. He employs the term vorgeburtliche Sorge. See also Job 10:8, 10-12. This theological thinking concerning a vorgeburtliche Sorge is brought into question in the creation theology of Qohelet (cf. 11:5).
in his creation from the onset. This adds to the bitterness of his experience of suffering, resulting in a preference of death over life.

3.6.2.4.1 The Creation Theology of Job 3 in view of Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Job wishes for the undoing of his creation. This undoing is reflective of the process of creation as it is described in Gen 1:1-2:4a. But to state that Job’s wish for the undoing of his creation presents a reversal of creation as described in Gen 1 is claiming too much. The primary picture of creation (both the process and result) that emerges from the Priestly creation text of Gen 1:1-2:4a is that it is ordered and beneficial. It enjoys divine approval and humanity enjoys a privileged position, being created in the image of $\mu\gamma\ell\alpha$. It is particularly the notion of creation as ordered and beneficial, i.e. as good, which is challenged in Job 3. The divinely created order that constitutes the conditions for life is no longer recognisable to Job. As such creation is no longer comprehensible or trustworthy. In Gen 1:1-2:4a divine rest (ר$\nu$ב, Gen 2:2) presents the climax of the creation account, which indicates its completeness. In Job 3 death presents the expected climax of Job’s wish for the undoing of his creation.

The author of Job 3 did have the creation account of Gen 1:1-2:4a in mind. In Gen 1:1-2:4a we read that the earth was empty and void (ע$\nu$ב$\nu$ד$\nu$) and darkness (ע$\nu$ג) was upon the face of the deep (ע$\nu$ג$\nu$ת, 1:2). But the spirit of God (ע$\nu$ג$\ell$א $\nu$ו) moved upon the face of the “waters” (ע$\nu$ג). In this way the powers of death, here darkness and water, have already been “breathed upon” by the $\mu\gamma\ell\alpha$ even before the creation of light (v 3), and the separation of light and darkness (v 4). Still, that which is representative of death is not said to have been created (contra Isa 45:7), while allusions thereto indicate that it is not denied. In the P creation account it is rather

\[1009\] For Terrien, Elusive Presence, 370-371, Job is contemplating the creator at work, particularly at a time when the history of Israel became meaningless. Within a situation utter meaninglessness, Job turns to creation and creator in search of meaning.

\[1010\] Janzen, “The Place of Job,” 528 regards Gen 1, Ps 8 (Jonah 7:17-18; 25), Gen 2-3, the traditions of the exodus and of Sinai, Second Isaiah as the main traditions on which the text of Job 3 works it transformations. He shares the argument of Cross that Gen 1 in particular is reflected within Job 3.

\[1011\] Watson, Chaos Uncreated, 321-322 argues that the only real parallel between these two texts, presenting a reversal, concerns the imperatives ר$\nu$א $\nu$ג$\ell$א and ע$\nu$ג $\nu$ג

\[1012\] The P creation account does not merely communicate something about the way in which creation took place, but also about the One responsible for creation. Cf. E. Noort, “The Creation of Light in Genesis 1:1-5: Remarks on the Function of Light and Darkness in the Opening Verses of the Hebrew Bible,” in: G.H. van Kooten (ed.), The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Re-Interpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics (TBN 8; Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), 20. This is important, given the polemical context in which the P creation account was composed.

\[1013\] Cline, Job, 81 challenges the argument of Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 151-167, namely that Job 3:3-13 represents a reversal of the world-ordering events of Gen 1. He proposes that Job’s concern in 3:3-13 is not with the created order as established in Gen 1 as a whole, but only with those elements that brought about his own existence. Thus it is directed against the two events that made his life possible, namely conception and birth, and directed against the day and the night when those events occurred. Cf. Ps 19:2-4 (HB 2-4) where day and night are personified as living entities. Job 3:3 might contain a similar notion.

\[1014\] Janzen, Job, 70.

\[1015\] Noort, “The Creation of Light,” 16 points to the $\mu\gamma\ell\alpha$ being taken over from Ezekiel, and that it is given a very different place in the P account of creation.
limited by µyhla.  

By means of his curse, Job wants (his) creation to return to such a dark and chaotic state. For this reason the divine command in Gen 1:3, “let there be light” (rwa łyhy), is countered by Job’s wish, “let there be darkness” (ûvj łyhy). He wants the light of his life to be extinguished. But Job’s curse does not have the same effect as the divine fiat of Gen 1:3.

In Gen 1:4 the works of divine creation are judged as good (bûf, also 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25 and finally 1:31 dambûf as conclusion of the divine evaluation). In Job 3 creation is not qualified by this adjective, since creation’s ugly side has been revealed to Job. That creation is good implies that it is ordered, and this ordering of creation by means of divine separation (lydbh) is central to the text of Gen 1:1-2:4a. In this way Gen 1:5 recounts the separation of day (µwy) and night (ûvj). Job in turn curses both his day of birth and night of conception (3:3). This results from Job’s experience of creation’s de-ordering. The ordering of creation by means of divine separation continues in Gen 1:6-10, while Job sees the structure of his existence crumbling. Therefore he desires to be dissolved by chaos.

While Gen 1:11 recounts the divine command for the earth (Åra) to bring forth life (vegetation, cf. 1:24 for animal life), Job does not judge the world as a place worthy of bringing forth life. The divine ordering of creation by means of division – this time of lights - continues in Gen 1:14, while Job calls for the extinguishing of all light and lights (3:4-10). In Gen 1:20 the waters (µym) no longer presented as a threat, since it has been ordered) are commanded to bring forth life. Job would rather that the waters cover all of creation. The creation (arb) of the µnynt in Gen 1:21 is a further instance of how everything, even earlier representatives of chaos, has its ordered place within creation. On his part, Job would rather be swallowed by the great fish (cf. 3:8, the rousing of êtywl).

All living creatures are said to be created after its kind in Gen 1:25, stressing the ordered nature of creation. For Job, such a class division is derogatory, since God does not seem to distinguish between the miserable and the happy. The distinctly Priestly concept of Gen 1:26-27, that humanity is created in the image (µlx) of God, is put to question in Job 3. In view of the description of Job’s physical condition (Job 2:7-8, 12; 7:5), he would not consider himself in any way as a reflection of the divine. Gen 1:28 recounts the divine blessing and command to be fruitful – to multiply – to look after, and to subdue the earth. This divine imperative is painful to the ears of Job, since he kept to this command, but to no avail. He lost his sons (1:19), and his possessions (1:14-17), and his good stewardship (31:16-21, 24, 31-32) brought him no profit. God’s care for creation continues with the designation of food for humans (1:29) and animals (1:30). Among the ashes Job lost his appetite, expecting to soon become food for the maggots (21:26).

After the completion of his works of creation (Gen 2:1), God rests (tûbv) on the seventh day (Gen 2:2), and He bestows his blessing (ûrb) on everything He has made (2:3). After seven days and nights of silence and mourning (Job 2:13), Job finally

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1017 Darkness (ûvj) and light (rwa) are leading motifs in Job 3, carrying the connotations of “death” and “life.” In Gen 1 luminaries are included in the divine judgment of creation as “good,” but in Job 25:5 Bildad regards not even the moon (j rî) or stars (µybkwk) as pure in God’s sight.
breaks the silence and curses (יָאָר) his creation (Job 3:1). He seeks rest (יָיוֵשׁ) and quiet (פָּנִים), but all he could find is trouble (זָעֵז). These literary relations are based more on thematic than pure linguistic grounds, but a relation is noticeable nonetheless. What God created in Gen 1:1-2:4a, Job wants to undo by means of his curse. Not in any overtly systematic way, since he merely wants order to return to chaos - bringing an end to his already miserable existence. While the texts of Job 3 and Gen 1:1-2:4a employ related language of creation, it is employed for very different purposes. Gen 1:1-2:4a stress the ordered, beneficial and good nature of creation, while Job 3 regards creation to be devoid of any kind of order, beneficence or goodness.

3.6.2.4.2 The Creation Theology of Job 3 and 38

While the prose prologue (Job 1-2) presents the background for Job’s opening self-speech, Job 3 presents the background for the first of the divine speeches in Job 38. It offers no direct answer to the questions raised in the poetic dialogues, but it does have the important function of removing Job from the centre of creation, forcing or at least inviting him to consider creation from a different perspective, namely that of the creator (38:4). While Job’s world is falling apart as a result of his experience of suffering, it does not imply that creation as such becomes meaningless. This dislocation of Job is assisted due to the absence of any reference to humanity within the divine speeches as a whole, and contributes to debunk Job’s anthropocentric view of creation.

God’s encounter with Job in the whirlwind (םֵש) is significant. In response to the laments and challenges of Job, God does not choose the court of law (contra Job’s longing for it, cf. 13:3; 23:3-7), but rather the arena of creation. It presents a very fitting response to Job’s opening self-speech, in which (his) creation is the object of his curse (3:3-10). In contrast to Job’s hatred of (his) life in Job 3, Job 38 affirms the “splendor and vastness of life.” In this way Job’s affirmation of death in

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1020 For Preuß, Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur, 92 the divine speeches indicate “daß dieser JHWH von keinem Menschen (vgl. Qoh 3, 11), keiner menschlichen Weisheit, von keiner Welt(ordnungs)theorie und daher auch von keinem Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang eingefangen werden kann.”

1021 In a sense, “The poetics of suffering in chapter 3 seeks to contract the whole world to a point of extinction, and it generates a chain of images of enclosure and restriction. The poetics of providential vision in the speech from the storm conjures up horizon after expanding horizon, each populated with a new form of life” Cf. Alter, Biblical Poetry, 103-4.


1023 The lawsuit (בָּרַץ) theme is not entirely absent from God’s opening speech. So e.g. Job is accused of darkening counsel (38:2), by words without knowledge. In 42:7 (ET) the Diety states that Job has spoken rightly of him.

1024 According to Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 177 the thrust of the poem consist of “the titanic struggle between the power of the death wish and the power which invites Job to come to terms with reality.”

1025 Alter, Biblical Poetry, 97.
chapter 3 is turned into an affirmation of life in the images and language of God’s opening response. Indeed, each act of creation is celebrated for its own sake, testifying to the omnipotence of the creator.

In Job 38:3 YHWH addresses Job as rbğ latching unto Job 3:3 (“a man is born”). The rbğ is invited to listen, and challenged to respond if he can. Job is indeed flabbergasted by the divine magnificence. YHWH “established” (dsy) the earth (38:4). He further “placed” (µyc) and “measured” (hfn 38:5) it; he “fastened” ([bf, litt “to sink down”) the foundations and “laid” (hry the cornerstone (htnp ÷ba) of the earth (38:6). YHWH leaves no doubt that His creation is secure, as also indicated by the “exaltation” (÷nr) of the “morning stars” (rqb ybkwk) and the “shout” ([wr, Hi) of all the “sons of God” (µyhla ynbAlk; 38:7).

YHWH “commands” (hwx, Pi) the morning (rqb) and is responsible for each new sunrise ([v], i.e. for each new day (38:12). Thus, Job’s wish for the undoing of “his day” (3:3-10) is entirely ineffectual. The divine speech goes a different direction in 38:13, where YHWH is said to “shake” ([n the wicked ([v) from the earth as one would shake dirt from a cloth. Also, “light” ([wa is withheld from the wicked (38:15). In this way the accusation that the Deity makes no distinction is countered.

In Job 38:16 the divine speech goes in another direction. Job’s attention is now turned to the “springs” (ûbn) of the sea and the “deep” (µwht), and in 38:17 the “gates of death” (twmAy[ v] come into focus, as well as the “doors of the shadow of death” (twmlx y[ v]). It is this “shadow of death” (twmlx) that Job wanted to cover his existence (3:5). God’s questions to Job are rhetorical, but also point out that these regions, hidden to human perception, are part of divine creation and as such accessible to the creator. Thus, Job’s gamble of betting on Sheol as a place of rest and the absence of God will not pay off. The “breadth of the earth” (ÅraAybjrAd) is subjected to God’s commands, and the sea is brought under control (38:8-11).

YHWH shuts up (ûws) the sea (µy) and brought the life threatening waters under control (38:8-11). Depending on the interpretation of µy / µwy in Job 3:8, Job’s wish for oblivion is here countered by YHWH’s declaration that the sea and waters are secure within the boundaries that He has set.

Death is not perceived as an independent power in Job, but is “allowed” within creation as a natural, though at times lamented, part of human existence.
to the creator’s omnipotence (38:18). In 38:19-21 ḫw and ūvj are brought in close proximity. The way and abode of both are unknown and inaccessible to Job despite his great number of days, though both have their proper place within creation.

In Job 38:22-29 the divine speech turns to the height of the heavens, where the mystery of rain and other meteorological phenomena are listed and ascribed to the creator, as sole progenitor. Job 38:30 belongs with vv 22-29, but refers to the frozen surface of the “face of the deep” (ḥjmt yp), i.e. the waters. The focus swiftly shifts back to the heavenly realm in 38:31, where even the constellations make an appearance (Pleiades, ḫnyk and Orion, lyšk in 38:31 and Mazzaroth, twnm and Arcturus, yf in 38:32). Ultimately the ordinances of heaven remain unknown to Job (38:33). As such he cannot lift up his voice, i.e. order the clouds to cover (ḥsk) him with water (38:34). He has no authority over or insight into what happens in the realm of heaven (38:35-38), which is considered as the abode of the divine (cf. §4.6.2.4).

The content of Job 38:38-41 is of a different nature, but the theme is quite similar, namely the creator’s providence and omnipotence contrasted with Job’s limited understanding and inability. He “fills” (alm Pi) the appetite of the young lions, responding even to the cry of the young and exposed ravens. Thus, that the cosmogony in the first speech of God is described in terms of procreation and not in terms of some Canaanite cosmogonic myth is significant. Due to the employment of this specific imagery, the reader is invited “to imagine in this fashion creation not as the laying low of a foe but as the damming up and channeling of powers nevertheless allowed to remain active” (cf. Job 38:-11). Thus, when read against the background of Job’s soliloquy, Job 38 serves to counter Job’s experience of creation.

3.6.2.5 Creator and Creation in Job 3

Job and the friends accredit God as the one responsible for all creation and life. The connection between divine creation and divine wisdom is also an important theme (cf. Job 12:12-13). But the “attitude” of the creator toward creation (particularly individual creation) remains ambiguous. In this way Job can give a very vivid description of his being created by the deity (10:8-10), but in the same breath accuse his creator as the one who despises the work of His hands (10:3), who hedges in and darkens the way; as the one who loosens his cord (30:1), and that he is troubled by the divine presence (23:15). Indeed, he wishes that the Deity would depart from him in order that he may die (7:19). The divine response from the whirlwind prompts the question concerning the nature of the relationship between the Deity and Job. We

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1034 For Alter, Biblical Poetry, 98 light and darkness in Job 38 exist “in a delicate and powerful dialectic beyond the knowledge of humanity and that the balance between light and darkness is part of the unfathomable beauty of creation.”
1035 Alter, Biblical Poetry, 99-100.
1036 Crenshaw, “The Shadow of Death in Qoheleth,” 205. He states that after Job realised the futility of death, he “perceived the revelatory potential of creation.”
1037 Job contrast’s his critical view of wisdom with the traditional view of the friends, stating in 12:2 that “wisdom will die with you.”
have already pointed to the difference between this divine-human relationship as it is envisioned in Job 3 (negative) and Job 29:2-6 (positive). This relationship as envisioned in the voice from the whirlwind departs from the relationship as envisioned in the Priestly or Jahwistic account of creation, but also from traditions as encountered in Ps 8 (echoed in Job 7:17-19) or at times in Deutero-Isaiah. Other than the divine-human relation envisioned in the divine speeches, this relationship as it is envisioned in Job 3 does however stand in closer proximity to such creation traditions. Job’s wish for the undoing of his creation presupposes an intimate divine-human relationship (cf. 10:8-10; also 31:15, where the Deity is said to have fashioned all life in the womb). In view of his suffering, this presupposition has become problematic. In this way Job 3 (also Ps 39) offers a basis for reflection on human existence in relation to God.

While the omnipotence and magnificence of the creator is celebrated in the book of Job, it also brings with it the question concerning the creator’s responsibility and commitment toward His (suffering) creation. This question was already brought into focus by the Satan’s challenge to God in the prologue (Job 1-2). According to the Satan, Job’s commitment to God is preconditioned (cf. 1:9). When he has been deprived of all divine privilege and his life is threatened, he will turn against God (cf. 1:11; 2:4). The testing of Job has some horrific consequences, including the death of his sons (1:19), which in effect lends it greater social significance. But is ordered to preserve Job’s life (2:6), which remains the exclusive possession of the creator (27:3, 8). In all this testing of Job, the Accuser is not at leave to act outside the divine stipulations. Thus, while Job is given into the hand of the Accuser (2:6), his life remains secure within the parameters of the divine will. While the divine-human relationship is not discarded, the human

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1039 J.E. Hartley, “From Lament to Oath: A Study of Progression in the Speeches of Job,” in: W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), The Book of Job (BETL 114; Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 90. In Job 3:2 Job asks why light is given to the man whose way is hid (rts), while in Job 29:3 he recalls a time when he walked through darkness (ûvj) by means of God’s light (rwa).
1040 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 46. Elihu’s reasoning in Job 33:4, stating “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life,” stands in close proximity to Gen 2:7, as part of the J creation account (Gen 2:4b-3:24).
1041 This motif is well reflected in Isa 40:26-28, “Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out there host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because He is great in strength, mighty in power not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from YHWH, and my right is disregarded by my God?’ Have you not known? Have you not heard? YHWH is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; His understanding is unsearchable.”
1042 Lindström, “Theodicy in the Psalms,” 301. It is within the framework of a brief, personal life that meaning must be sought.
1044 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 45.
1045 In the prose epilogue (42:10-17) this theme reoccurs. Here Job’s fortunes, including his social relations, are restored to an even grander status than before. Job becomes “reintegrated into the fabric of the community.” Cf. Burkes, God, Self and Death, 47.
1046 A dualism between the physical person of Job and his is absent, but the question does arise concerning the lamenter’s “state of deadness.” The notion here is that as long as the creator keeps the in tact, the lamenter remains in a state of being alive.
1047 The need for such divine stipulations is unclear and leaves a question mark behind Satan’s ability. In contrast to Job’s accusation (16:12-14) and wish (9:18), the Deity does not wish for Job’s death (cf. 1:12; 2:6).
dependence on the divine is stressed. Indeed, the life (vpn) of every living thing and the spirit (j w) of all mankind is in the hand of the divine (12:10). This does not deter Job from exclaiming, “for I know that you will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living” (30:32).

In contrast to the elevated status ascribed to the Deity in the book of Job, all major players in the Joban plot (Satan, Job, the friends) seem to share the same low estimation of human worth (4:17-21, 5:14-16). Human life, in terms of Job’s judgment, is short and troubled, and even trees are regarded as better off since being “cut off” brings the possibility of new growth, while the same potential is not inherent to human nature (cf. 14:1-14). The positive elements of the divine-human relation are filtered out in the curse and lament of Job (3). He does not want God (hwla) to regard his day, and accuses God of hedging in his way. As such, his trust in the divine-human relation is broken, since the basic tenets that form the basis of this relation have been severely shaken. Job’s relation with the Deity is indeed balanced between the two poles of hope and utter despair.

3.6.3 Death as a Theological Theme in Job 3

Here we will consider the function of death as a theological theme in Job 3. First the theme of death in the wider context of the book of Job will be considered. This will include an inquiry into the nature of the wisdom operative in the book of Job and its impact on the theological evaluation of death. Death, as indeed creation, is a central theme in Job 3. The precise nature of this theme requires further consideration. What is so remarkable is the nature and tone of Job’s opening soliloquy. It is dark and bitter, resonating Job’s experience of creation, and indeed his creator. At this moment death (as event and location) begins to take centre stage. His hope now rests

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1049 Here divine activity is identified with the event of death, which makes it more than just the natural end of human life. Cf. 30:22, “You lift me up to the wind: you cause me to ride upon it, and dissolve my substance.” The deity’s active involvement in Job’s demise is again stated, and Job is contrasted with God, who “rides upon the wings of the wind” (cf. 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:10; 104:3).

1050 God actually finds great reason for joy in his servant Job, the quintessential “wise man” (cf. 1:8).

1051 Cf. Job 25:6 where “maggot” (hl[w] and “worm” (hrn) are adjectives with which Bildad describes mortal humanity (here contrasted with the µyhla ynb). In the “night vision” of 4:17-21, humans are envisioned as no more than “dwellers of dust.”

1052 The speeches of Zophar (7:16; 9:25; 21:13) describe life as fleeting and lbh. Also Job 7:9, “As the cloud fades and vanishes, so those who go down to Sheol do not come up.” Further Job 4:19-21; 8:9; 9:25-26; 14:1-14; 34:14-15; 34:20. It appears as if any link with the dead is excluded in Job, particularly in view of 4:7-10, 19-22.

1053 Satan sees it differently, stating that “…all that a man has will he give for his life.” (2:4). This statement is contradicted in Job’s opening self-speech, hating life and longing for death.

1054 Qoh 12:5 also echoes the contrast between nature’s potential regeneration and the cessation of human life. Also Job 4:19-20, 7:6, 8:9, 9:25-26, 34:20.

1055 Job’s struggle with his creator transgresses the admonition in Isa 45:9 stating, “Woe to him that strives with his Maker…” (rxy). In 13:24 Job considers the deity as hiding his face and holding him as His enemy.

1056 The sequence of curse and then lament in Job 3 does not imply that the curse of life is displaced by the question of the lament. The longing for death and the quest for meaning are interwoven in Job 3. Cf. Janzen, Job, 68.

1057 Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 152. The consistently maintained tone of anger, despair, and bitterness, but also the well-maintained theme of the death wish, sets Job 3 apart.
with death and in the realm of the dead, though only for a moment.\footnote{Crenshaw, _Old Testament Wisdom_, 98.} Death might offer him some rest, but no vindication or divine declaration of innocence.\footnote{This motivates his relentless cry for justification (cf. 16:18). Cf. Spronk, _Beatific Afterlife_, 312.} This raises the question concerning the precise nature of Job’s longing for death and his positive evaluation of the dead and Sheol, which as already stated, is conditional.

### 3.6.3.1 Death as a Theological Theme in the Book of Job

The theme of death is present in the prose prologue (1:15-19; 2:9), remains a theme throughout the dialogues, and brings the book of Job to a close, stating that Job died old and full of days (42:17).\footnote{D. Cox, “The Desire for Oblivion in Job 3.” _LA_ 23 (1973): 37-49.} As such he died a “good death,” despite his longing for a quick and consequently bad death in Job 3.\footnote{X.H.T. Pham, _Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible_ (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 29.} The first occurrence of death results from the Satan’s challenge (1:9). God refrains from hedging (1:10) Job in, including those immediately related to Job, and offers the Satan a free hand, barring the person of Job (1:12), and subsequently the \textit{vpn} of Job (2:6). In this process innocent victims fall fowl to a heavenly duel. But Job retains his life (\textit{vpn} and integrity (\textit{hrb}), refusing to “curse” God (1:22, 2:10) as his wife prompted him (2:9, \textit{ûrb}) and the Satan suggested that he might do (1:11, \textit{ûrb}). Job conforms to the customary practice of mourning (1:20; cf. also 16:15-16a), as do the friends (2:12bf, weeping, renting their mantles, sprinkling dust upon their heads) when they come to mourn (\textit{mâ} with Job in order to comfort (\textit{µjn} him (2:11). Initially they fail to recognise him due to his severe physical condition (2:12a),\footnote{Job is already experiencing death in life, with which the actions of the friends correspond. Cf. Whybray, _Job_, 36. The notion of “death in life” is not unfamiliar in the Psalms (e.g. Ps 88).} but eventually sit with Job for seven days and seven nights (2:13a), mourning without speaking a word (cf. Jer 22:10 for ritual actions normally performed over the dead).

After this proper period for mourning,\footnote{The silence narrated in Job 2:13b is recognised by some scholars (e.g. Lohfink) as part of the mourning ritual, with loud weeping and accompanying actions followed by a period of silence.} Job breaks the silence and attempts to unleash all “hell” upon his own creation (3:1), which has become too much to bear (see the discussion in §3.6.3.2).\footnote{Job 10:18-19, “Wherefore (\textit{hnh}) did you bring me out of the womb? If I had given up the ghost and no eye had seen me. I should have been as if I had not been. I should have been carried from the womb to the grave.”} Job wishes for an “unnatural” and bad death, but death itself is not ascribed any negative or unnatural connotations (e.g. Ps 49:14, “death will feed on them”). For Job death is humankind’s natural and inevitable end, since their days are numbered (cf. 7:16; 14:5; also 21:23 for a “good” death and 21:25 for a “bad” death. The latter seems to be Job’s fate, “And another dies in the bitterness of his soul, and never eats with pleasure”). While natural, his descriptions of death are not always positive, e.g. that all lie down alike in the dust and are eaten by worms...
(21:23-26). This view is also shared by Zophar and Elihu (34:15), for whom all flesh shall perish together and humankind shall return to dust. In the speeches of Bildad we encounter a different picture, namely that (premature) death is the fate of the wicked (18:17-19, 21). The best that one can hope for is a “good death” (5:24-26). The negative connotation of death is also reflected in Zophar’s vision of the underworld, as a place of dust (20:11). The perception of death as the natural end of all created life is shared by the friends in the dialogues. They do however differ concerning the cause of death.

In the speeches of Elihu the notion is reflected that God will bring back (בֹּא) the soul (נֶפֶשׁ) from the pit (תֶּעֶק) to be enlightened with the “light of the living” (33:30, with a similar theme in v 28). But the restoration of justice and of Job’s present condition is what is here at issue, rather than resurrection from the dead. Death and destruction are also present in the hymn to wisdom (28:3, 22).

In the divine speeches death and the realm of the dead are still themes of theological significance. The “gates of death” (תַּוְַעַי [v]) and the “doors of the shadow of death” (תַּוְַעֲחַי [v], 38:17), through which Job whishes to pass, are presented as beyond the scope of his comprehension (38:18). They fall within the range of divine omnipotence, and are presented as a natural part of divine creation (e.g. 28:14). Death is further related to YHWH in the sense that he “hunts” (דָּאָשׁ, 38:39) and provides food for the hungry animals (38:39-41). As such, YHWH is responsible for “killing” (as a means of providing) in the animal realm. This is presented as an inherent part of creation, not as standing in opposition to the divine will. In the prose epilogue Job, after the Deity restored his good fortune, dies a good death (42:17; cf. 29:18, dying in his nest and multiplying days).

Job’s attitude toward death goes through several stages, reflecting both fear and fascination. In the first stage (Job 3:1-10 and 11-19) Job moves from hatred of life to love of death. In the second stage (Job 6:8-13) Job moves from his earlier wish for death as escape to a desire to remain faithful to a God of love, thus a longing for

1066 This corresponds with Proverbial wisdom’s view on death (e.g. Prov 24:20). Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 311 suggests that this difference between a future and no future in Israelite wisdom has also been formulated as a difference between life and death (Prov 9; compare Prov 12:28; 14:32; 15:24 as examples of the notion that hope in YHWH is not merely limited to life Diesseits).

1067 Bildad also refers to the “firstborn of Death” (תָּוְַעְרִיד, 18:13) and the “king of terrors” (תִּפְלָל בּל מ, 18:14), and that Sheol snatches away those who have sinned, thus ascribing to death a personified or mythological character.


1069 So also לֶאֶשֶּח in 38:16.

1070 Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 236. In Job 26:6a it is stated that “Sheol is naked before God.” Also Prov 15:11 and 139:8, 11-12. Terrien attributes this to the fact that in wisdom theology, creation is not the result of a victory over a so-called primal or pre-existing ocean.


1072 Burkses, God, Self and Death, 56 indicates that this language is similar to that describing the death of the patriarchs in e.g. Gen 25:7-10, describing the death of Abraham.


1074 Idem, 46.
death as “prevention.” In the third stage (Job 7:1-21) Job’s attitude toward death is motivated by fear, rather than fascination of death. As a result Job complains about the brevity of his existence (10:18-20), forgetting his initial longing for death to come quickly. As a result of Job’s own complex attitude toward death, complemented by the diversity of attitudes of the friends, which are all further refined by the voice from the whirlwind and brought to conclusion by the epil ogist, the book of Job lacks any uniform view of death, the dead or the realm of death. Yet these diverse views in general do not depart radically from the broader Israelite tradition. Job 3 offers an exception.

3.6.3.1.1 Curse and Death in Job 3 and Jeremiah 20:14-18

The “death wish” motif is not unique to the HB, but also does not occur frequently in the HB. The closest HB parallel for the text of Job 3, in terms of structure and content, is Jer 20:14-18. The literary contexts of these two texts differ, and an exact literary correspondence does not exist. Job 3 is more elaborate. Nevertheless, the undoing of a personal creation is at issue in both texts. In both curses the words of cursing are not uttered to a listener, but rather to a specific object, namely a personal creation. A number of affinities are identifiable between Jer 20:14-18 and Job 3. This includes the cursing of the day (μwy of birth (Job 3:3a; 4f // Jer 20:14, r̄ra); the cursing of the messenger who brings the news of his birth (Job 3:3b; 6-9 // Jer 20:15f, r̄ra); the establishment of or motivation for the curse (Job 3:10, yk // Jer 20:17, r̄va); and the lament over being born (Job 3:11-16, h̄m // Jer 20:18, h̄m). Indeed, the four motifs of the cursing encountered in Jer 20:14a, 15, 17 and 18 are the

1075 Idem, 55.
1076 Idem, 60.
1077 Moore, “The Integrity of Job,” 27 criticises such a developmental approach of Terrien, particularly regarding Job 10, which Moore considers as a similar to Job 3.
1079 Here we can compare Job’s description of Sheol in 10:21-22, “Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness,” which is in line with the traditional view of Sheol.
1080 Cf. the Damu Lament (Old Babylonian text, ca. 1700 BCE), annually recited in the cult of Tammuz; or Homer’s Iliad, as seen in the speech of Hector’s wife after his death, directed to the women of Troy; or the declaration of Andromache in Euripides’ The Daughters of Troy.
1081 Newsom, The Book of Job, 93. The curse of the day (Jer 20:14//Job 3:2a, 4-5), the curse of the messenger who brought news of the birth (Jer 20:15-16//Job 3:3b, 6-9), the reason for the curse (Jer 20:17//Job 3:10) and the concluding lament (Jer 20:28//Job 3:11-23). Also Gillingham, The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible, 154-155.
1082 The curse of Jer 20:14-18 is set within the context of a prophecy of Jeremiah, after he has been set free from the stocks in which he was placed by Pashur (Jer 20:2).
1083 Watson, Chaos Uncreated, 318-327. Other scholars such as Duhm, Baumgartner and Rudolph argue for the dependence of Jer 20:14-18 on Job 3. J.R. Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20 (NY: Double Day, 1999), 869 rightly points out that there is simply no way of knowing and that dependence can go either way.
1084 Cf. Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20, 874 for a discussion of Jer 20:14-18, where never being born is preferable to hard times and sorrows. At death or near death, Jeremiah’s thoughts return to his birth. Lundbom dates the text to ca. 605-604 BCE, when the tension between Jehoiakim and Jeremiah would have reached its climax.
1085 Cf. Gen 25:22; 27:24; Exod 16:3; Num 23:10; Judg 16:30; 2 Sam 19:1; 1 Kgs 19:4; Jona 4:8, which also contains a cursing of the day of birth.
substance of the inclusion formed by Job 3:3 and 10. But an important difference exists between the curses of these two texts, namely that, while the curses of Jeremiah 20:14-18 are linked to historical precedents, the curses of Job 3 operate with a “cosmological prototype.”

The curses in Jeremiah 20:14-18 constitute a prayer in extremis or a lament of last resort. That is, a last resort for attracting God’s attention that would ultimately lead to deliverance. The pragmatic intent of Job’s curse is comparable. It did draw the attention of the Deity and in the end led to Job’s restoration. The curse in Jer 20:14-18 is related to the theme of death since it is directed to the creation of an individual, but it lacks the elaboration on the theme of death as encountered in Job 3.

3.6.3.1.2 The Wisdom of Job and the Theme of Death

The question inevitably arises concerning the relation between the book of Job and the wisdom tradition of the HB and that of its Umwelt. Job’s animosity toward life is fueled by his experience of misfortune and suffering which, in terms of traditional Proverbial wisdom’s paradigm of retribution (Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang), supported by the description of Job in the prologue (1:8), is unjust. This provides a background for evaluating Job’s attitude toward creation, but also toward death, the dead and Sheol. Against this background the intensity of the imagery employed in Job 3 becomes clearer.

1086 Habel, Job, 103.
1087 Habel, Job, 103. Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13,” 151-167 argues that many ancient and tribal rituals, including incantations, are grounded in a cosmogonic myth.
1088 B. Zuckerman, Job the Silent: A study in Historical Counterpoint (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 125-126. According to this interpretation the curse of one’s day of birth signifies a distress of such a magnitude that a direct address, as is the case in a prayer of supplication, is impossible.
1089 Newsom, Job, 93. Job’s curse “has the shape of performative speech,” i.e. it wants to achieve something. And achieve it does, but not what Job was longing for.
1090 This should not lead to an interpretation of the language of Job 3 as “a tacit appeal for rescue.” Cf. Newsom, Job, 93. Job’s curse rather constitutes ein solcher in Worte gefaßter Schmerzensshrei. Cf. Westermann, Der Aufbau, 53.
1093 For Clines, Job, lix the books of Job and Ecclesiastes “introduce that needed element of sophistication and realism into the philosophy of Wisdom, calling into question as they do so the universal validity of the tenets of Proverbs.” Central to Qohelet is the question of what happens to wisdom at the event of death, i.e. what is the value or profit of wisdom. The book of Job challenges the ideology of Proverbs from a different point, focusing on the validity of the principle of retribution.
1094 Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, 163 regards the subject matter of the book of Job as the “acute crisis in the life of a single righteous man,” reflecting the laments in the Psalms.
Job’s experience of turmoil and cosmic chaos prompts him to employ the language of traditional wisdom, i.e. the language of “order” (ma’at / hqdx), to challenge the basic constructs of sapiential thinking. In this sense the book of Job dialogues with, challenges and eventually reaffirms, from an informed perspective, the basic tenets of the traditional wisdom. But the scrutinising of Proverbial wisdom’s tenets in Job (questioned by Job but affirmed by the friends) does lead to different presentations concerning the theme of creation and death. In part this is the case because wisdom’s (hmkj) ability to provide guarantees (including long life, prosperity and posterity) becomes questionable. Wisdom as such has gone astray and is nowhere to be found (Job 28), neither in the land of the living nor the dead, but only in the divine sphere (28:23), which is inaccessible to humans. In this regard the argument in Prov 9:10, namely that “The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding,” seems rather absurd since the holy remains out of reach. For this reason the profit (l[y Hi) of “fearing” the Almighty becomes questionable (21:15).

The book of Job is present wisdom in crisis, or traditional wisdom becoming critical of its own postulates. It exposes the consequences of a clash between immediate experience and the traditional understanding of the world as divinely ordered. One of the consequences of this clash is the loss of coherence, or the loss

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1096 Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 231. In his evaluation of Job’s character as presented in the book of Job he observes “By borrowing the sapiential form of speech par excellence, and by applying it to himself, he presents his own being as the living exhibit of chaos in the universe.”
1097 Through the process of question and scrutinising the basic tenets of Proverbial wisdom, it is no longer considered to be “a monolithic body of opinion, belief, or procedure,” but rather allows for a variety of viewpoints and a diversity of trends. Cf. Terrien, “Job as a Sage,” 231-232
1098 Hartley, “From Lament to Oath,” 91-92 argues that Job makes use of so-called “hypothetical thinking” in his lamenting. As a result his initial attitude towards death in Job 3 changes completely. A change of tongue is noticeable in Job’s reasoning about death, but this should not downplay the intensity and raw nature of his outcry in Job 3. Here Boorer, “A Matter of Life and Death,” 187 suggests a distinction between dualistic way of thinking for the book of Proverbs and a non-dualistic reality of the book of Job.
1099 For Clines, Job, xxxix-xlvi the narrator, as well as the different characters in Job responds in a different way to this tenet of the wisdom tradition. In evaluating the language of Job 3, the reader should keep in mind that Job is viewing the created world from the perspective of his present experience, which impacts on his understanding of reality, i.e. his Wirklichkeitsverständnis. Amidst his present experience Job complains that God has hidden the ḫrd “way” and has made it inaccessible. Cf. Brown, Character in Crisis, 62. The right “way” ḫrd is central to the wisdom, but God has made wisdom inaccessible and as a result, correct character impossible.
1100 In 11:6 Zophar argues that wisdom is “double sided.” For Burkes, God, Self and Death, 42 and P.S. Fiddes, “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Job 28 as a Riddle for Ancient and Modern Readers,” in: J. Barton and D.J. Rainer (eds.), After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason (Macon, Ga.: Meeer University Press, 1996), 179 Job 28 does not imply that wisdom is to be found in some secret place known only to God but, rather that wisdom is not to be found somewhere, “because it is the comprehending of everything.” But Job 28 does illustrate the mysterious nature of wisdom, and relates it to the fear of YHWH (28:28).
1101 Job 27:13 brings into focus the portion (q ğ j) of the wicked with God.
1102 Goldingay, Theological Diversity and Authority, 208. He argues that the book of Job moves outside the boundaries of the wisdom tradition in an order to address the problems raised in the book.
1103 R.L. Rubenstein, “Job and Auschwitz,” in: T. Linafelt (ed.), Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 233-4 argues that the perception in Jewish and Christian traditions that the status quo results from the divine will and that it could be different if the deity wishes to change the situation, underlies the worldview of the Bible in both traditions. Thus,
of a coherent worldview, and as such it could be argued that the book of Job calls for a "radical reordering of reality." Job’s self-curse sets this (literary) process of reordering in motion. It continues in the dialogues, which present creation as "ethically neutral" and as such not responsive to the actions of humanity or the intervention of the Deity. This presents a departure from the worldview of traditional wisdom, but forms the basis of Job’s theological understanding of creation (and death). As such, divine justice in creation becomes problematic and responses varied. Is there a moral order, random order or simply no order in creation? In response to this question an “ethics of maintenance” may be proposed for comprehending divine justice in creation. Instead of constituting an ontological power inherent to creation, it is more an active process involving both the creator and humanity, wrestling with chaos in order to establish and sustain the structures of life. Job remains skeptical. This motivates his assault on, rather than blessing of his creation in chapter 3.

The tension between the prose prologue and epilogue (traditional wisdom, though the Satan offers a critical voice) and the poetic dialogues (critical wisdom, though the friends propagate traditional wisdom) in the book of Job is not resolved. The divine speeches also fail to resolve this tension, though they contribute in

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hope for salvation follows from the biblical belief in creation as an act of divine will. This is closely related to the notion of divine justice. But these tenets of biblical faith are scrutinised in the book of Job.

Forstman Pettys, “Let there be Darkness,” 89. She describes the language employed in Job 3 arguing that “Job pushes against tradition, translating the ordering of creation into the disorder or his experience.”

Job 21:7 offers a description of life turned upside down in terms of traditional wisdom thinking. This is also seen in Job’s contrast of the deity’s attitude toward his “tabernacle” (1ha, 19:12; 29:4) versus that of the wicked (12:6).


M. Tsevat, “The Meaning of the book of Job.” *HUCA* 37 (1966): 73-106, at 98 denies any notion of divine justice in creation, not seeing justice (qdx) as part of the “plan” (ha, 38:2; hzm, 42:2) of creation. This view is contrasted by M.V. Fox, “Job the Pious.” *ZAW* 117 (2005): 352-3 who stresses the divine care, providence, but also the questioning of a lack of moral order.


Crenshaw, *A Whirlpool of Torment*, 74. Job’s closing words indicate that the collapse of his worldview did not leave him “in limbo.” It is more a case of an argument that has gone full circle, falling back on traditional thinking when there is no other way out. In this regard Qohelet seems to be more robust (if the double corrective remark of the epilogist is left aside).
establishing an informed view of wisdom and creation.\textsuperscript{1113} Within the parameters of such an informed view, death also achieves different shades of grey. It is wisdom rooted in personal experience that revolts against the scholastic dogma of traditional Proverbial wisdom.\textsuperscript{1114} And this revolt against scholastic dogma creates room for theological ingenuity, also concerning the theme of death. Death, freed from the confines of the Tun-\textit{Ergehen-Zusammenhang}, achieves a liberating function. Its effect is final, but at least, in terms of Job 3, it is peaceful.

3.6.3.2 Death as an Absolute End

The answer to the rhetorical question in Job 14:14a, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” is more ambiguous than a simple “no.” The book of Job reflects very little of any notion or expectation of some form of afterlife or vindication after death.\textsuperscript{1115} In the LXX translation of Job, such instances have been identified,\textsuperscript{1116} but in the MT the notion of future life is absent. In this regard Job argues, “So man lies down and does not rise, till the heavens are no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep” (14:12). Job expresses the vague hope for deliverance from Sheol after His wrath has passed (14:13). This scant hope is refuted in view of his preceding claim concerning the endurance of death (14:10-12; so also the reference in 14:14 to the “days of my appointed time”), and that the fate of the dead are sealed once they have entered the grave. In effect, all hope on deliverance from the grave is dashed (cf. 17:13-16. Here we encounter a negative view of Sheol, contra Job 3).\textsuperscript{1117} The deity’s interest is with the living and not with the dead, and subsequently He will not stretch out His hand to the grave (30:24). In death, all suffer the same fate.

Job 19:25-27 are often considered as indicative of some form of vindication after death, but these verses remain notoriously difficult to interpret. In particular the reference to the “redeemer / avenger” (ląg,\textsuperscript{1118} as well as the time (rj å, “after”) when this envisioned act of vindication will take place. The mentioning of the redeemer who will stand on the dust (rp[ l], contra 17:15-16, where rp[ l] is also used), is equally unclear. However, Job’s mentioning of seeing God in his flesh (litt. “from my flesh” yrcbm 19:26) indicates that this vindication cannot take place at some future time or event. For Spronk the parallel with 17:16 (“They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust,” in this context the question of his hope


\textsuperscript{1115} J.T. Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions.” \textit{JSJ} 36 (2005): 266 argues that the notion of life after death (e.g. 14:13) was considered in the book of Job only to be rejected. Quite differently, Habel proposes a real hope for vindication in 14:13, even if it applies only to the situation of Job, without universal implications. In view of the wider context of Job 14, this argument of Habel is problematic.

\textsuperscript{1116} D.H. Gard, “The Concept of the Future Life According to the Greek Translator of the Book of Job.” \textit{JBL} 73 (1954): 137-143. He identifies Job 5:11; 14:14 and 42:17 in the LXX as instances where afterlife is stated as a fact; Job 3:21-22; 4:20 and 7:9-10 as implied instances and Job 3:13-14; 6:10; 14:22 and 40:13 as instances where conditions in the afterlife are being described. Also Spronk, \textit{Beatific Afterlife}, 16-17.

\textsuperscript{1117} This view is expressed most clearly in Job 7; 14; 16:22; 17; and 30.

\textsuperscript{1118} In Job 16:19 Job refers to his heavenly witness (d Ł).
is brought into focus) indicates that Job is speaking of a time after his death (cf. Ps 17:15). But what 19:26 indicates is that Job did not give up hope on being justified. Given that the notion of an afterlife is absent in the book of Job, such justification could only have taken place during his lifetime. After the event of death it will be too late. In this way Job’s longing for death does not discard his longing for vindication, as is indicated in his declaration of innocence in Job 31. Indeed, the “curse” within Job 29-31 has as its purpose the achievement of a declaration of innocence from God, which was not attained by the dialogues of the friends.

Job longs for death, also for the absence of God in Sheol. The question remains whether the moment of death really presents the end of the divine-human relationship. Will Job not hear the voice of his Taskmaster, and will he be free from his Master (3:18-19)? An affirmative reply is tenable, since Job later laments the fact that he will not be found in death and that no vindication is possible once he has entered through the gates of Sheol and sleeps in dust (7:21). But here an ambiguity remains, since death in Job’s reasoning presents both a limit and a boundary, i.e. as the absolute end of life, but also marking the transition to another form of existence, which became preferable to Job.

If the book of Job indeed contains no notion of life after death or divine vindication at some future point, why does the book have such glimpses? In response to this difficult question it has been suggested that it is reflective of the intellectual climate in which the book of Job was composed or that it became a pertinent question within this intellectual climate. But within a context in which the question of life after death or future vindication (of the righteous) becomes pressing, the book of Job holds fast to the idea of death as the limit of human existence. Whatever vindication Job is hoping for, it has to be sought within the parameters of creation, during his lifetime.

1119 Spronk, *Beatific Aterlife*, 313.

1120 Job’s hope rests on his conviction of his innocence, and since Sheol “consumes” (lzg) those that have sinned (24:19), some scant hope remains that he will be vindicated before death.

1121 For Kessler, *Die Ägyptenbilder der Hebräischen Bibel*, 130 this text is similar to what is encountered in the Egyptian book of the dead. In this regard he shares the argument of Kunz that the author of Job 31 makes use of motives and representations (31:6, “Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my integrity”) that corresponds with the Egyptian conception of the *Totengericht*. Cf. A. Kunz, “Der Mensch auf der Waage. Die Vorstellung vom Gerichtshandeln Gottes im ägyptischen Totenbuch (Tb 125) und bei Hiob (Ijob 31).” *BZ NF* 45 (2001): 235. Job 7:21 sheds a different light on the expectation or lack of justice after death.

1122 C. Westermann, *What does the Old Testament Say about God?* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), 50-51 argues that since Job clings to God even in rebellion, death can no longer be regarded as the end of God’s blessing. This argument should be seen in the context of his remark that the most urgent theological problem after the Exile concerns the question of the blessing of God instead of his saving.


1124 Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death,” 267-68. This is a suggestive argument, since the apparent rejection of post-mortem existence implies that it does not form the basis of theodicy within the book of Job, as is the case in the later wisdom writings of Sirach and Wisdom.


1126 Burkes, *God, Self and Death*, 81. Job’s deliverance can also be considered as a “bringing back to life.” Cf. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife*, 283.
3.6.3.3 Reconsidering the Theme of Death in Job 3

The book of Job in general does not present a major deviation from traditional Israelite views of death, the dead and Sheol. In contrast the text of Job 3 does present a deviation. This is particularly evident in his longing to be joined with the dead in Sheol, since it is envisioned as a place of quiet (מְנַחָּה) and rest (יָשָׁנָה) (Job 3:13). In Sheol the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest (יָשָׁנָה) (Job 3:17). The prisoners rest (בְּרֵיחַ), not hearing the voice of the taskmaster (Job 3:18). Small and great are together in Sheol, and there the servant is free (יָשמַר) from his master (Job 3:19). Job longs for the quiet and rest of his vision of Sheol. He longs to be free from his Master, and to be reintegrated into Sheol’s society where class distinctions become obsolete. His existing social relations bring him only ziqqat (Job 3:26). Thus, he is yearning for a place without injustice. Job experiences his suffering as unjust, and while all changes for divine vindication is lost once he enters the land of the dead, it is preferable to the land of the living. Death will dispossess him of his yiqqam and will reduce him to a shadow, but in Job 3 this is not a concern. Neither death nor the realm of death is feared. Sheol is not a place to be rescued from, but longed for (cf. 10:18-19). It is the intermediary state of dying but not yet dead that becomes too much for Job. The transition to actual death would bring a welcome reprieve from suffering in life.

3.6.4 Conclusion

In the book of Job, the possibility of a retribution or reward after death is not accepted. God is portrayed as having power over death and the realm of death, but any clear notion concerning resurrection and afterlife, or God’s involvement with the dead lacks. Death is the natural, unavoidable end of all, but the prolongation of life by means of living according to the tenets of traditional wisdom is valued above the presumed tranquility brought about by death. In this regard Job’s reasoning portrays an inconsistency, while the friends are relentless in their argumentation, championing traditional wisdom. Ironically, in the epilogue God affirms the validity of Job’s argumentation and rebukes the friends for theirs (cf. Job 42:7), while it is actually their line of argumentation that draws the book to a close in the epilogue. The tension in the book of Job is not resolved.

Job’s experience of suffering, as a result of the divine will, turns his world upside down and initiates a vigorous debate. The tone for this debate is set in Job 3 by means of his curse and lament. The pious and accepting Job of the prologue has to make

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1128 According to J. Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture Vol III-IV (London: Milford, 1940), 478 such fear of death and Sheol is basic to Israelite religion.
1129 For Job life assumes the form of a curse, due to the collapse of the principle of retribution. Cf. Crenshaw, “The Shadow of Death,” 213. As such “length of days” does not serve as indication of divine favour, but rather as a prolongation of human misery.
1130 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 57.
1131 Job desires death, but does not succumb to the temptation to curse God. It is rather the decision to continue living that becomes the ultimate challenge for Job. Cf. H. Fisch, Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 37-38.
1132 Retribution is not at issue in Job 3, focusing rather on his personal experience. Cf. Clines, Job, 104.
room for the critical and questioning Job of the dialogues. Job throws down the gauntlet by challenging one of the most basic tenets of traditional wisdom, namely the value and beauty of life and creation. Instead, he longs for death’s embrace, and attributes a series of positive qualities to the realm of the dead, which has become preferable to the realm of the living. While this represents a qualified preference (§3.6) it does not detract from its acuteness. It is indeed Job, the epitome of a wise person (cf. Job 1:8), who “embraces death and embodies chaos.” It is however also this Job that (re-)gains life and is re-integrated into the realm of the living, i.e. re-integrated into creation with all its dimensions.

Job’s embrace of death in chapter 3 counters the dualistic worldview of Proverbs 1-9 (as pinnacle of traditional wisdom) in which life and death are mutually exclusive opposites. Life should be sought by means of avoiding death, or that which is associated with death. But in terms of the informed view of creation that the book of Job offers, life (order) and death (chaos) are integrated realities of the same divine creation. The creation theology of the book of Job does not de-polarise life and death, but brings about a change of perspective regarding this relation.

Job 3 has an important function in the context of the book of Job, and its significance within the wider Israelite religious tradition should not be overlooked. For, it is not merely life as the highest gift that is cursed in this text, but indeed the whole of Israel’s spiritual heritage is brought into the debate. A debate in which tenets of faith are challenged, sometimes pushed to the boundaries, and eventually cast in a new theological mould. The result however is a book with a polyphone character, and an assimilation of these contesting voices is neither possible nor wishful. The contrast of voices should rather be considered as inherent to the process of theological sense-making which Job has to go through - bringing him to new and informed, or at least different, theological insight. In this respect the significance of Job 3 for the process of theological sense-making in contexts of suffering should not be overlooked. Radical lament is affirmed as a legitimate response to the reality of suffering, even to the extent that one longs for the release of death. Job is not rejected on the basis of his raw rhetoric. Rather, God responds by recognising the legitimacy of his reasoning (42:7-9), and restores his fortunes (42:10f).

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1133 Maag, Hiob, 101, “Er ist vielmehr ein Verwundeter, ein seelisch Verletzter, der an seinem Schöpfer irre zu werden begriffen ist.”
1134 For Job a dead lion is better than a living dog. Contra Qoh 9:4.
1135 Job’s powerful language remains subservient to his total impotence. Cf. Fokkelman, Major Poems I, 177. His desire is acute, but ineffectual.
1139 Noort, Een Duister Duel, 12.
1140 Cf. Clines, Job’s God, 39.
1141 G. West and B. Zengele, “Reading Job ‘Positively’ in the Context of HIV / AIDS in South Africa,” in: E.J. Van Wolde (ed.), Job’s God (London: SCM, 2004), 121-122 considers Job 3 in the process of theological sense-making within a South African context of HIV/ AIDS. They try to demonstrate how Job 3, read from a HIV positive perspective, can become a liberating text. Such a ‘positive’ reading of Job 3 “now occupies that vast space between diagnosis and death, providing resources to live positively.” In the framework of such a contextual hermeneutic, epistemological privilege is given to the experiences of marginalised groups.
To some extent the book of Job offers a rehabilitation of tradition, settling for the more traditional answers to the questions that were raised. The book of Job provides a glimpse of the intellectual and theological activity of the Second Temple period. This results in the various angles from which the questions regarding creation, death, God and the relation between God and creation are approached. In spite of their dogmatic differences Job and his friends agree on the melancholy theme that “Death is the great leveler” and that all (the fortunate and misfortunate) “shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them” (cf. Job 21:26). By lamenting his birth and wishing away his own creation by invoking a curse, the imposing death wish in Job 3 serves as an outcry within a creation devoid of order, beauty and in which the ways of the creator are no longer intelligible. As such Job 3 has an important rhetorical and theological function in the book of Job as a whole. The sharp tone of its language ensures that his voice is heard (by the creator) amongst numerous competing voices. Ultimately, Job’s continuous longing for vindication within the realm of divine creation, and by implication life, overshadows the grandeur of his wish for death. In this way Job’s embracement of death did, in the end, lead to the restoration of his life.

After the epilogist brings the book of Job to a close, the reader is left with a feeling of unease. While care should be taken in attempts to trace a linear development in wisdom thinking and theology, the book of Job does constitute a significant moment. Indeed, the HB wisdom tradition never returned to its earlier optimism after the book of Job. It continued the search for order underlying human existence that gives it meaning, but this search was much more open to ambiguity and contradiction that faces all people, particularly when facing a crisis. Ecclesiastes is an example of this ongoing transformation in wisdom writing and it is to this book that we will now turn.

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1142 Burkes, God, Self and Death, 59. Qohelet “represents perhaps the farthest trajectory possible in the tradition for the ideas raised in the book of Job without the adoption of a belief in human immortality.”
1144 Hanson, “Israelite Religion in the Early Postexilic Period,” 505-506.
CHAPTER 4

QOHELET 11:7-12:8: DEATH AS IMPETUS FOR LIFE

Characterising Qohelet as ein Buch mit Stacheln is very fitting. Qohelet’s relentless questioning, combined with the elusive and at times ambiguous nature of its argumentation often leaves readers perplexed. While established as part of the HB wisdom tradition, the nature of its content remains debatable. Indeed, the diverseness of Qohelet within the HB presents a problem for biblical theology. Not surprisingly, a diversity of interpretations results from the book’s complex and enigmatic character, calling for an awareness of exegetical presuppositions and hermeneutical frameworks. In the broader discipline of biblical theology the book of Qohelet confronts the reader with existential questions, testing the boundaries of theological paradigms. The primary concern in this chapter is the creation-death relation as it takes shape in Qoh 11:7-12:8.

Firstly the delimitation of the text will be considered (§4.1), followed by a consideration of its structure (§4.2). A translation will be offered (§4.3), setting the stage for an analysis of the text (§5.4), which in turn provides the background for the thematic discussion (§4.5). Concluding remarks (§4.6) will bring the chapter to a

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1145 Here Qohelet (טִּהלֵת) is used instead of Ecclesiastes, as derived from the the LXX (ἐξοχλεῖς). See W.C. Delsman, Die Datierung des Buches Qoheleth: Eine sprachwissenschaftliche Analyse (Nijmegen: Nijmegen University Press, 2000), 14-23 for a discussion of the designation טִּהלֵת.


1148 C.J. Labuschagne, “Het Godsbeeld in Prediker,” in: J. Ridderbos (red.), Mens, durf te leven! Prediker: een postmodern denker uit de derde eeuw voor Christus (Kampen: Kok, 1996), 70 argues that the “I character” in Qohelet is a philosopher rather than a theologian. But the frequent references to God in Qohelet make its theological interest unmistakeable.

1149 W.H.U. Anderson, Qohelet and His Pessimistic Theology. Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997), 204. In particular the genre wisdom literature. Unity in terms of theme and perspective is difficult to substantiate in view of instances often regarded as editorial glosses (e.g. 3:17; 7:18; 8:12-13; 11:9b) meant to re-establish traditional views of retribution (12:9-14). Cf. Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 132.

close. This chapter attempts a text-immanent reading in order to gain better insight into the character of the creation-death relation in Qoh 11:7-12:8, within the parameters of the wisdom and worldview operative in Qohelet. This question is particularly relevant in the case of Qohelet, since the concern with death outweighs all other themes in the book. \(^{1151}\)

4.1 Delimitation of the Text

Qohelet 11:7-12:8 constitutes a literary unit, and simultaneously the closing poem to the book as a whole.\(^{1152}\) While this view is not unanimously shared,\(^{1153}\) it is maintained in this study. Difference of opinion also concerns the extent and structure of this literary unit.\(^{1154}\) Here we will consider Qoh 11:7-12:8 as a literary unit, distinct from 11:1-6 and 12:9-14. Formal criteria for this decision will be considered first, and thereafter the thematic grounds. First we will consider the relation of Qoh 11:7-12:8 with 11:1-6 and thereafter its relation to the double epilogue of 12:9-14, which is widely reckoned as stemming from a later redactional hand as a means of taming the otherwise radical voice of Qohelet. The primary formal reason for distinguishing Qoh 11:7-12:8 from 11:1-6 concerns the use of the particle \(\text{w} \) in 11:7a. While the \(\text{w} \) would normally be translated in a connecting or adversative sense, it is here considered to function in a different sense. It introduces a new line of reasoning in


\(^{1154}\) G.S. Ogdon, “Qohelet XI 7- XII 8: Qohelet’s Summons to Enjoyment and Reflection.” *VT* 34 (1984): views Qohelet 11:7-12:8 as a literary unit, though 11:1-6 should not be seen as entirely separate from 11:7-8, since the references to ‘light’, ‘darkness’ and ‘sun’ could have some link with the natural phenomenon mentioned in 11:1-6. For Ogdon, the two themes of 11:7-8 are further developed in the rest of the pericope (structural phenomenon of paired sentences in parallel form. Thus the two verbs \(\text{mrc} \) and \(\text{kz} \) establish the two themes of this pericope). Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 263 regards Qoh 12:1-7 as subunit of 11:7-12:7. Qoh 11:7-10 begins the transition into the last topic of the book, that of old age and death. Qoh 11:9-10 forshadows something terrible about to happen.
Qohelet’s argumentation (cf. 3:16; 4:4; 8:10; 12:1, 9 for comparable uses of the \( \text{w} \)). If the \( \text{w} \)s read as a connecting particle “and,” then the relation of the material of 11:1-6 with that of 11:7-12:8 is unclear. Thematic linkages concern the reference to the clouds \( (\text{µyl} \text{h}) \) in 11:3 and 4, though the context in which it is used differs from that of 12:2. In 11:4 \( \text{w} \) is used as a mere reference to “wind,” while the use of \( \text{w} \) in 11:5 is in closer proximity to that of 12:7, where the \( \text{w} \) is related to the creator God \( (\text{µyh} \text{lah}) \). In this way Qoh 11:5 provides a thematic linkage with 11:7-12:8 (12:1, 7). But the important issue in 11:5, namely the unknowable nature \( (\text{dt al}) \) of the works \( (\text{hc[m}) \) of God, is not a theme in 11:7-12:8. Thus, considering the function of the \( \text{w} \) as introducing a new line of reasoning as well as the lack of any real correspondence of theme between 11:1-6 and 11:7-12:8, the decision to read 11:7-12:8 as distinct from 11:1-6 is tenable.

In considering the relation between 11:7-12:8 and 12:9-14, similar criteria may be employed. The particle \( \text{wrtwp} \) in 12:9 also has a separating rather than a connecting function. Here a later redactor is at work, since these six verses are much more in line with the more traditional proverbial wisdom, and contrast with the general reasoning of Qohelet. The only thematic linkage between 11:7-12:8 and 12:9-12:14 concerns the use of \( \text{fpwn} \) 12:4. But as we will argue in the analysis of the text, the use of \( \text{fpwn} \) 11:9 seems rather out of place, suggesting redactional labour. Therefore the lack of clear formal and thematic correspondences supports the distinction of 11:7-12:8 from 12:9-14. The position of 12:8 should also be considered. It is mostly regarded as forming an inclusio with 1:2, providing a frame to the book as a whole by means of the recurring \( \text{lbh} \) theme. However, 12:8 also presents a fitting end to 11:7-12:7, for which reason 11:7-12:8 may be read as literary unit. This point is further explicated in the analysis of the text.

4.2 The Structure of the Text

In this section we will consider the internal structure and cohesion of Qoh 11:7-12:8. The material of this literary unit is best characterised as “artistic prose” rather than poetry.

As a literary unit, Qoh 11:7-12:8 consists of two literary sub-units, namely 11:7-10 and 12:1-8. Each has its own leading motif, namely \( \text{carpe diem} (\text{jmcm}) \) in 11:7-10 (A), and \( \text{memento mori} (\text{rkz}) \) in 12:1-18 (B). In considering the coherence of 11:7-12:8,
it is significant to note that nearly all the lexemes of 11:7-8 reoccur in 11:9-12:8, which points to an internal thematic linkage in 11:7-12:8. By means of the two sub-literary units, a tension is created within the larger literary unit of 11:7-12:8. This tension concerns the enjoyment of life (jmc) and the remembrance that life is finite and will inevitably come to an absolute end (rkz). At this point we should consider the position of 12:1a. By means of the particle w and the imperative rkz, a new line of thought is introduced in the argumentation of Qohel et. At the same time 12:a connects 11:7-10 and 12:1bf thematically.

Qoh 12:1b, commencing with al rva d, has the function of introducing a series of temporal clauses describing aging and death, which serve to bring out the urgency of the instruction given in 11:7-10.

The first literary sub-unit, Qoh 11:7-10, can further be divided in 11:7-8 and 9-10. While verse 7 (qwtm) and 9 (jmc) commence on a positive note, verse 8 and 10 close with lbh. In this way the tension of the larger literary unit is also present in this sub-unit. Further, in 11:8-9 it is evident that in v 8 jmc stands opposed to lbh, and in v 9 kmc stands opposed to fpvm. While the theme of creation as such is not immediately present in 11:7-10, a tension is created by means of contrasting the motif of joy (jmc) with that of vanity (lbh).

A different scenario is encountered in the second literary sub-unit (12:1-8). Qoh 12:1b introduces a series of temporal clauses by means of al rva d. In 12:2 (al rva d), 3 (µwb) and 6 (al rva d) the temporal clauses are followed by pronouncements. The “days of your youth” (ûytrwjb ymyb) in 12:1a are opposed with the “evil days” (h[rh ymy) introduced in 12:1b. However, such an internal verse tension is not encountered again in 12:2-8. Qoh 12:2-6 functions as an elaboration on the “evil days” (h[rh ymy introduced in 12:1a (cf. §5.4). In terms of theme 12:7 is related to the broader theme of 12:2-6, but not in terms of form, seeing the lack of a temporal clause. Similarly 12:8 has no formal connection with 12:2-6, but in terms of the lbh theme does present a fitting conclusion to 11:7-12:7. While 11:7-10 contains both a positive and a negative motif, the positive motif (hmc) is lacking in 12:1-8. For in 12:1-8 the memento mori (rkz) motif is intensified by the means of the lbh theme.

1160 Cf. rwa 12:2; bhw 11:9; yj 11:9; har 11:9, 12:3; vsw 12:2; μ̄wv 12:1; µba 12:5; jmc 11:9; rkz 12:1; ymy 11:9, 12:1; ḫ̄ 12:2, 3; lbh 11:10, 12:8, 12:6, 1bj. Cf. L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, “Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück”: Kohelet im Spannungsfeld jüdischer Weisheit und hellenistischer Philosophie. (2d ed.; HBS 2; Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 224-225. He considers 11:9-12:8 as pre-announced by 11:7-8.

1161 Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 316.


1163 This is characterised by Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 115 as “somewhat parenthetical.”

1164 J.A. Loader, Ecclesiastes: A Practical Commentary (TI; trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 129 argues for the positive and negative motif in 12:1-8, indicated by a threefold repetition, namely 12:1b-2; 3-5; 6-7. Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 114 also points to the importance of repetition within 12:1-6. Particularly the three word-pairs ñsk and bhz (silver and gold); ḫ̄ g and ḫk (bowl and pulley); ḩ̄n̄ and ḥ̄ (fountain and cistern). These word pairs have a unifying function.

1165 Loader, Polar Structures, 111. He suggests that the author makes use of the technique of contrast in units 11:7-10, 12:1-5 and 12:6-8, with jmc not merely presenting an antitheses of lbh but is rather viewed as a consequence of it. The one gives rise to the other. A slightly different view is offered by...
Further, 11:7 states the value of human life while 11:8 emphasises the value of a long life; 11:9-12:1a constitute an exhortation directed to youth, while 12:1b-7 underlie this exhortation by means of describing the bad days that are to come; 12:8 brings the literary unit to a close, and also serves as a reiteration of the book’s theme.

### 4.3 Translation of Qohelet 11:7-12:8

In this section a translation of Qoh 11:7-12:8 is offered. The language concerning the deterioration of life and eventual death entails some difficulties. This is not as result of extensive corruption in the text, but rather from ignorance concerning the precise nuances of the terminology Qohelet employs in his reasoning. This coincides with the uncertainty concerning the socio-historical context (§ 4.5.1) in which the language of Qohelet should be located. Thus, attention is required for considering what words mean, but also how they are used within a specific context. Translating Qohelet 11:7-12:8 is an attempt to penetrate the thought world of an enigmatic writer.

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Kamano, *Cosmology and Character*, 220-21 suggesting that the contrast of life and death does not constitute two distinct groups of exhortations, structured round jrz and rkz but rather a single set of exhortations “whose framework is set by the keywords ‘to enjoy’ and ‘to remember.’”


Murphy, *The Tree of Life*, 50. Also R.E. Murphy, “On Translating Ecclesiastes.” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 571-79. He observes that the text of Qohelet has been transmitted “fairly exactly” and that we have quite a “sound” text. But difficulties in translation are ample, and are often the result of prior decisions regarding the message and style of Qohelet. Also Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 333. How Qohelet employs generally known knowledge or puts it to poetical use is unclear.

A. Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to find Pleasant Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth* (OLA 41; Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 1-15 considers various theories regarding Qohelet’s language. Also Delsman, *Die Datierung* who dates it to the latter part of the 3rd century BCE.


A. Schoors, “The (Mis)use of Intertextuality in Qohelet Exegesis,” in: A. Lemaire and M. Saeb (eds.), *Congress Volume, Oslo 1998* (VTSup 80; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 45-59 argues, in reference to Qohelet, that a text or a phrase or a motif that has been borrowed receives its full meaning only from the actual context in which it has been adopted. He does emphasise the importance of trying to follow the trajectory of a borrowed text, from the source text to the final text.

Emendations of the MT to explain difficult words or *hapax legomena* are not always fruitful, nor wishful. Individual words should rather be viewed as part of conceptual or thought units, and meaning should be sought in these thought units, rather than individual words.
A
11:7 a Sweet is the light,\textsuperscript{1174} 
\hspace{1em}b and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.
11:8 a For if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, 
\hspace{1em}b and remember that the days of darkness will be many; 
\hspace{1em}c all that comes is vanity.
11:9 a Rejoice\textsuperscript{1175} young man in\textsuperscript{1176} your youth, 
\hspace{1em}b and let your heart cheer you\textsuperscript{1178} in the days of your prime; 
\hspace{1em}c and follow the ways of your heart\textsuperscript{1179} 
\hspace{1em}d and the sights\textsuperscript{1180} of your eyes,\textsuperscript{1181} 
\hspace{1em}e but know that for all this 
\hspace{1em}f God will bring you to judgment.
11:10 a Remove trouble from your heart, 
\hspace{1em}b and remove unpleasantness from your flesh, 
\hspace{1em}c for childhood and youth\textsuperscript{1182} are vanity.

B
12:1 a Remember your creator\textsuperscript{1183} in the days of your youth,\textsuperscript{1184} 
\hspace{1em}b before the days of unpleasantness come and years arrive 
\hspace{1em}c of which you will say, 
\hspace{1em}d “I have no pleasure in them;”
12:2 a before the sun darkens, and the light,\textsuperscript{1185} 
\hspace{1em}b and the moon and the stars, 
\hspace{1em}c and the clouds return after the rain; 
12:3 a in the day when\textsuperscript{1186} the keepers of the house\textsuperscript{1187} tremble,

\textsuperscript{1174} The \textit{w} is not considered as connecting particle and is not translated. In case of a translation, “moreover” is more fitting than “and.” The LXX reads \textit{kal}; but is lacking in the Peshitta.
\textsuperscript{1175} This is the only imperative of \textit{jm} in this literary unit and is combined with \textit{ryb} to address an audience.
\textsuperscript{1176} The preposition \textit{b} can be read as temporal, i.e. “while you are young,” but also as reference to the object of enjoyment, i.e. “in your youth.” We translate “in your youth,” given the parallelism with \textit{trwjb ynb} “in the days of your youth.” Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 349. The suggestion of Gordis, Koheleth, 325 “in the time of your youth” offers a good compromise.
\textsuperscript{1177} The form of \textit{ytj,jy} (\textit{ytj,jy} in some manuscripts) is uncertain, and the abstract term \textit{twly} (“childhood, youth”) occurs only in Qoh 11:9, 10 and Ps 110:3.
\textsuperscript{1178} In 11:9b \textit{ybjv} “let it cheer you” can be read as a Hi impf. of \textit{bfy} or \textit{bf} Seow, Ecclesiastes, 349 does not favour an emendation in order to read a Qal impf. \textit{bfy} Here as in Qoh 2:1-3 \textit{bf} may be read as the personified, active subject, substantiating a translation “let your heart cheer you.”
\textsuperscript{1179} Some LXX manuscripts read \textit{ymw}, i.e. “blameless,” thus qualifying the imperative, and counter any notion of hedonism. In the MT a tension remains.
\textsuperscript{1180} For the plural form \textit{ytj} (“sights”) the LXX, Peshitta and Vulgate reads a singular.
\textsuperscript{1181} The LXX reads \textit{ka}; \textit{mh ev qal mw sou}, “and not in the sight of your eyes.” Some Hebrew manuscripts read \textit{yrmw} instead of \textit{yrmw}.
\textsuperscript{1182} The translation of the hapax \textit{trw} (“blackness, dawn”) is unclear. It can refer to “dark hair” (from \textit{rj} “black”) or the “prime of youth” (from \textit{rj} i.e. “dawn”). Both imply youthfulness.
\textsuperscript{1183} Some manuscripts read a singular, offering a correction of the text. Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 351. For Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 321 the yof \textit{tr} is not an error, but rather a fuller representation of the segol. As such it is unnecessary to emend the text.
\textsuperscript{1184} Here \textit{yrmw} can also be translated “in your prime,” referring to the prime of life, which entails more that just youthfulness.
\textsuperscript{1185} Gordis, Koheleth, 132 points out that the Peshitta reads \textit{rwmw} was hendiadys, differing from the MT and LXX.
\textsuperscript{1186} For \textit{v m} the LXX reads \textit{h meva} and the Vulgate \textit{quando}, i.e. “when.”
b and the strong men convulse,
c and the grinders cease because they are few,
d and those looking through the windows grow dim;
12:4 a and the doors in the street are shut,
b and the sound of the mill becomes low,
c and the sound of the bird rises,
d and the daughters of song come down low;
12:5 a and from on high they see terror on the way
b but the almond tree blossoms,
c and the locust becomes laden,
d and the caper berry buds,
e for man is going to his eternal home,
f and the mourners walk about in the street.
12:6 a Before the silver cord is snapped,
b and the golden bowl is crushed,
c and the jar is broken at the spring,
d and the wheel is smashed at the well;
12:7 a And dust returns to the earth as it was,
b and the spirit returns to God who gave it
12:8 a Vanity of vanities, says Qohelet,
b all is vanity.

4.4 An Analysis of Qoh 11:7-12:8

Qohelet 11:7-12:8 is indeed a text filled with exegetical problems of all sorts. The range of exegetical difficulties and its importance for gaining a better understanding

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1187 The LXX reads fuvlake th oijkiva, “guards of the house.”
1188 In the HB lfb “stop” is a hapax, but also occurs in Aramaic in Ezra 4:21, 23, 24 and 5:5 with the meaning “to stop, be discontinued.” It is also attested in postbiblical Hebrew with the meaning “to cease altogether” or “to suspend activity.” Cf. Gordis, Koheleth, 332. He regards lfb as an Aramaism.
1189 The LXX reads ἀγωρά “in the market-place.”
1190 The LXX reads the active kleivosin, while the MT (Pu of ḫ) and Peshitta reads a passive form. Cf. Gordis, Koheleth, 333.
1191 Here we follow the LXX that reads oJravw “to see,” suggesting that the form ᾑ ры is from ῥατ instead of ᾑ ры. The MT is supported by the Vulgate, reading timebunt.
1192 The LXX reads ἄνθηθ “caperberry” (hνωβα).
1194 The Qere reading suggests ῥατερ “be distant, removed.” The LXX reads ἀνατραφ ἀνατρεπω i.e. “be overturned.” Gordis, Koheleth, 337 points out that the LXX, Vulgate (rumpatur) and Peshitta favour the reading ῥατη i.e. “is destroyed,” supporting the Ketib reading ῥατη Seow, Ecclesiastes, 365 does not support this reading.
1195 The Qal impf. of ῥατερ ‘crush, break’ may be taken as impersonal, without a need to emend the text, i.e. to read the verb as a Ni impf. ῥατη.
1196 The definite form ḫ th h not occurs elsewhere in the book. In some manuscripts the definite article is lacking, but ḫ th h does not have to be attributed to an editor. Cf. M.V. Fox, “Frame Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet.” HUCA 48 (1977): 83-106. He refers to Egyptian wisdom texts that are frequently framed by a third person introduction and conclusion. Contra Gordis, Koheleth, 339 who regards it as editorial insertion, like 12:9-14.

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of the text, particularly in its description of deterioration and death, will be addressed in this section.

A: Qoh 11:7-10

Significant about verse 7 is the exceedingly positive tone with which this literary unit commences. In terms of Qohelet’s argument light (רַע) is sweet (גֵּדְךָ) and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. The context in which these images are employed characterise it as a reflection on the goodness of life, with רַע and גֵּדְךָ functioning as metaphors for life. In v 7a גֵּדְךָ and בּוֹפֶּל in 7b are used synonymously. The gist of his argument is that it is good to be alive. But such one sided view is soon to be qualified in 11:8b, where the themes of darkness (ועַג) and vanity (לֹחַ) make their appearance in opposition to רַע and בּוֹפֶּל in v 7. Nevertheless, light and life are at issue in v 7. I n v 7 הָר has not merely refer to sense perception, but also contributes in qualifyin g life as good. Indeed, the infinitive form of הָר (תַּמָּל) in v 7 may be interpreted as an idiom with the meaning “to be alive,” or as a metaphor for life. In this sense the eyes (מעַיְךָ) seeing the sun...
presents a reference to the human desire to live. However, the metaphors for life employed in v 7 do not merely serve as a positive opening to this literary unit, but also sketches the background against which the negative images encountered in the following verses should be interpreted.

While the in v 7 introduces a new line of thinking in the thought of Qohelet and as such is not translated, the particle in verse 8 is regarded as connecting it to v 7, particularly in the combination ("but if"). The positive tone set in v 7 is initially continued in v 8a, where the person () who is to live many years () is exhorted to rejoice () in all (), i.e. in all the years of life. However, in v 8b we also encounter a different line of argumentation, indicated by the use of the adversative ("but, yet"), as well as the theme of v 8b. The tension is further concretised by the chiastic structure of the verse. The man that is to live many years should enjoy it in the knowledge, i.e. remembering () for they will be (). Further, the remembrance of the days of darkness coincides with the knowledge that everything () that is to come is . This presents a tension in Qohelet’s argumentation. By means of this tension, centring round the verbs () and (), the pressing nature of the call to enjoyment is illustrated. Against the backdrop of inevitable death, the emphasis on enjoyment in this life is highlighted.

Further, in tandem with in 8c functions as a metaphor for death, i.e. as a reference to the nothingness of Sheol, which would then be

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1211 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 317. Gordis, *Koheleth*, 324 indicates the comparability of this phrase with the Gilgamesh Epic, Tablet X, col. 1, line 13 which reads “Let my eyes see the sun, that I may be satished with light.” Cf. *ANET* (3d ed.; 1974), 89.

1212 For Klein, *Kohelet*, 152 this reflects the spirit of Isa 22:13. Thus, through the enjoyment of life, remembrance of the creator is actualised. For this reason the carpe diem motif is theological in its motivation. Whybray, “Qohelet, Preacher of Joy,” 91 regards the theme of 11:7-12:1a as dominating the whole of 11:7-12:7.

1213 The preposition can have a temporal function, referring to times rather than objects of enjoyment.

1214 While () is a leading verb in 11:7-12:8, it has a low frequency in Qohelet (cf. 5:19; 9:15; 11:8; 12:1). H. Eising, “rkz” in: *TDOT* (vol. 4; trans. D.E. Green; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 64-82, at 67 points out that rkzin the HB implies a remembrance of past events in order to learn from their consequences with a view on the future. As such Qohelet’s use of rkzs striking, since Qoh 1:11 states that there will be no remembrance () of former things or things to come.

1215 In Qohelet () has a low frequency. Cf. 2:13, 14; 5:16; 6:4 (x2); 11:8 as noun and 12:2, 3 as verb.

1216 In 5:7-6:9, particularly 5:19, the focus is on days past rather than the coming years. Man will not remember much () of these past days of his life.

1217 As jussives these two verbs anticipate the imperatives () and () of these past days of his life.

1218 Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 161. In light of Qoh 3:22 and 9:7-10, the reference to the days of darkness in 11:8 emphasises the call to enjoy life in the present, since everything that comes is vanity.

1219 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 348-349 observes that the phrase is never used in Qohelet in reference to death and that in 5:14-15 and 2:12 it is used in reference to people coming into existence. As such v 8 could simply refer to anything or anyone that comes into existence. For Wächter, *Der Tod im Alten Testament*, 189 () is a reference to the time after death, comparable to the condition of the dead envisioned in Job 3:13-18; 14:12.

1220 For Wächter, *Der Tod im Alten Testament*, 189 () is a reference to the time after death, comparable to the condition of the dead envisioned in Job 3:13-18; 14:12.

1221 Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 161; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 183. This view is also shared by Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 40. He argues that none of the usual meanings ascribed to () quite fit the context of v 8. Qohelet is warning not to expect more after death than what is experienced in life. Thus, () does
affirmed by the use of 1 lbh. In the context of v 8 the use of ûvj stands in contrast to the imagery of light (vûly, wûnh) in v 7 which function as metaphors for life. What is of more immediate importance is that the days of darkness (ûvj h yryâta) are not limited to the end of one’s life, but may already invade life in the present, i.e. while still alive. Here we encounter life’s counter pole. Darkness, serving as a metaphor for death, hovers over the years of life as an ever threatening cloud. In this way the years of life and the days of darkness stand in an irresolvable tension. This tension continues in vv 9 and 10. Here we can argue that the value of a long life (Qoh 6:3-6), regarded as one of the rewards of living according to the principles of proverbial wisdom, is undermined by means of balancing life’s value with its futility.

The tension of vv 7 and 8 continues in verse 9. It commences with an imperative (j nh) addressed to the young man (ryâb) to make the most of his youth (vûly y), and to let his heart (bl) cheer (bf y Hi) him in the days of his youth (ûtxûlyb yrb), and to walk (ûl h) in the ways (ûrd) of his heart (bl) and in the sights (harmâ) of his eyes. This imperative is qualified by means of a wadversative (“yet, but”), for the addressee is reminded to keep in mind (ld impv.) that on account of all this (hâA kA [ yk), i.e. the ways of the heart and the sight of the eyes, God (âuyl ah) will not refer to the eternity spent in death, for a goal is needed in order for something to be considered as lbh. Also Seow, Ecclesiastes, 348-349 for the more general use of lbh as “nothingness.”

For Gordis, Koheleth, 324 ûvj h yryâta present an instance of anticipation. I.e. anticipating the darkening of the luminaries in 12:2, which not merely points to cessation of human existence (individual and communal), but also to the end of creation as such. But this is difficult to substantiate from the text.

Here ûvj h yryâta should not be interpreted as a reference to “old age,” since there is no way of knowing that they will be many. Cf. Gordis, Koheleth, 324. Rather, ûvj can rather be interpreted as an epithet for death. See also Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 190 for whom 11:8 provides an instance where Qoheleth’s contrasts “darkness” and “life.” Cf. Job 16:22, “When a few years have passed, then I shall go the way from which I shall not return.”

Loader, Ecclesiastes, 130.

Darkness is a recurring theme in prophetic literature, e.g. Isa 5:30, 8:22, 13:9b-10; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:15; Ezek 32: 7-8. Cf. Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 339.

Here the call to remember (death) has the rhetorical function to persuade the reader to “lay hold of the pleasures that will divert our thoughts from death.” Cf. Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 317.

Krüger, Koheleth, 346.

Kamano, Cosmology and Character, 222.

A shift in tone coincides with a change of addressee. The general and abstract jdn of 11:8 is no longer used, but ryâb. Cf. Loader, Ecclesiastes, 130. Cf. also W.L. Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 36 pointing out that the word has the meaning of a “fully grown, vigorous, unmarried man.” Cf. 1 Kgs 12:21; 2 Chr 25:5. This direction of speech to the ryâb is characteristic of sapiential language, but in HB wisdom literature ryâb only occurs here and in Prov 20:29. Here yb “my son” might have been expected since it is frequently employed in Proverbs (e.g. 1:8, 10, 15).

For Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 317 the use of the plural yrm “sights” is significant, indicating the variety of pleasures to be pursued, rather than abstract “vision.”

This instruction is contra that of Num 15:39, “search not after your own heart and your own eyes.” Instead of an instruction to walk in the way (ûrd) of wisdom, the young man is instructed to walk in the way of his heart. Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 184. But some have observed that this instruction is comparable to the Egyptian Instruction of Pthah-hotep containing the phrase, “Follow your heart so long as you live.” Cf. Gordis, Koheleth, 325; Seow, Ecclesiastes, 349. See also Qoh 6:9, “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire; for this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.” At issue is enjoyment rather than the making of ethical decisions. Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 350. Cf. 5:10; 7:3.
In v 9 the tension in the instruction of Qohelet is clear. While the instruction to rejoice (jmc) and to be gladdened (bfy) relates to the jmc motif in 11:8, and the general theme of v 7, it stands in opposition to the observation in 11:10, namely that childhood and youth are lbh. That the tension in the instruction of Qohelet in v 9 poses a problem for interpreters is evident from an early stage. Some LXX manuscripts added ἀμώμομον, i.e. “blamelessly,” while others went even further, qualifying the reference to the “sight of your eyes” by means of the negative particle mh, i.e. “and not in the sight of your eyes.” In the MT a tension is retained.

In v 9f the reference to the judgment (fpvm) of God is rather out of place and its interpretation depends on the value ascribed to the particle w in v 9e. If it is interpreted as consecutive, which we do not, the implication is that God will bring into judgment those that do not enjoy all that has been given to them. But in view of God’s judgment (fpvm) over all works in 12:14a, this interpretation is contradictory. In terms of this interpretation, the reference to the judgment of God does not have to be regarded as redactional, and it brings v 9f in closer proximity with the foregoing instruction to the youth. However, instead of explaining away the tension in the text, we read the ḡ as adversative (“yet, but”). As such the reference to God’s judgment is not explained away as an editorial gloss from an orthodox redactor. Living with the knowledge of divine judgment over human works prevents a hedonistic attitude in the time of youth, but also contributes to the characterisation of this time as lbh, as seen in 11:10. The question remains why God requires humans to enjoy the time of youth, when it is judged to be lbh. This contributes to the devaluation of youth as an object of joy in Qohelet. Divine judgment also brings into focus the theme of death. For if the judgment implies punishment, does it include death, and if so, at what stage? If fpvms is to be understood in the sense of Qohelet’s sic et non style of argumentation constitutes a reaction against traditional modes of sapiential reasoning. Cf. Loader, Polar Structures, 132-33.

The HB reflects no clear consciousness of childhood as a distinct phase of life and that before Qohelet childhood is not referred to in an abstract sense as it is here in the reference to the days of youth (twdly). Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, “The Family in First Temple Israel,” in: L.G. Perdue et al., Families in Ancient Israel (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1997), 67. Cf. Isa 54:6 (µyrw[n) and in Jer 32:30 (twrw[n) for references to “youth.” Gordin, Koheleth, 235 argues differently, namely that for Qohelet “the enjoyment of life becomes the highest dictate of life.” This connection is rejected by Whybray, Ecclesiastes, 162 and defended by Kamano, Cosmology and Character, 224-225 who, following Loader, sees here a correspondence with 3:17; 9:1-2 and 2:26. But to identify here a distinction made in death between those who have enjoyed what has been given them and those who do not is claiming too much.

1232 For fpvm Qohelet, cf. 3:16; 5:7; 11:9; 12:14; 8:5, 6 (subject). In v 9 it constitutes a restrictive element in the thought of Qohelet, as in 8:6, 3:17, and 8:11. Cf. Loader, Polar Structures, 130.
1233 Gordin, Koheleth, 186, 326.
1235 Qohelet’s sic et non style of argumentation constitutes a reaction against traditional modes of sapiential reasoning. Cf. Loader, Polar Structures, 132-33.
1236 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Nicht im Menschen, 226 ascribes 11:9b to a second epilogist. Cf. also Michael, Qohelet, 166-167. Kamano, Cosmology and Character, 224, rejects the translation ‘but,’ reading ‘and.’ Thus he shares the view of Fox, Seow, Gordin, while Klein, Murphy, Whybray, Crenshaw, Lohfink, Loader, Zimmermann, Hertzberg, Zimmerli translate “but.” Yet not all who translate the ḡ as adversative “but” view the line as an editorial gloss.
1237 In 12:14a, it is stated that God will bring every work into judgment (fpvmb), but this belongs to the later redactional epilogue.
1238 The HB reflects no clear consciousness of childhood as a distinct phase of life and that before Qohelet childhood is not referred to in an abstract sense as it is here in the reference to the days of youth (twdly). Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, “The Family in First Temple Israel,” in: L.G. Perdue et al., Families in Ancient Israel (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1997), 67. Cf. Isa 54:6 (µyrw[n) and in Jer 32:30 (twrw[n) for references to “youth.”
“righteousness” (ḥaqd), then the argument of v 9b is even more out of place, seeing the questioning of the principle of retribution (Tun-Ērgehen-Zusammenhang) in Qohelet and the distrust of divine justice. Here we can refer to what Qohelet perceives as twisted divine humour, since everything has its time and place (3:1ff), but humans cannot know it (3:11).

By means of the consecutive the theme of v 9 is continued in verse 10. Particularly v 10a latches unto 11:9a-d. In v 10 the rwj addressed in v 9 (indicated by the second person masculine singular suffix) is instructed to remove (rws, Hi impv.) trouble (s[bl]1241 from his heart1242 and to rid (rb], Hi impv.)1243 his flesh1244 from evil (hr).1245 In this way v 10a-b elaborates on the call to enjoy the days of youth, and depending on the interpretation of the ṭw in v 9e, the avoidance of divine judgment. The further elaboration in 10c, constituting a motivational clause introduced by the particle ṭyk, is puzzling however. For why the call to enjoyment of youth in 10a-b, when it is subsequently described as lbh in 10c? In this sense 11:10b anticipates 12:1.1246 The admonitions of 10a-b are motivated (ṭyk) by 10c, namely that childhood (twly) and youth (twrjv)1247 are lbh. In this regard the interpretation of lbh is significant. If it is used in the sense of “vanity,” we have a negative evaluation of the time of youth, but if lbh is used in the sense of “fleeting,”1248 10c serves as motivation to make the most of youth while it lasts. Thus, depending on the interpretation of lbh, v 10 presents the complement or converse of v 9.1249 The matter is further problematised if 11:9f, as 11:10c is interpreted as editorial gloss that presents a secondary expansion on the time of youth. This presents the easier interpretation, given that 10c contrasts the admonition to rid the heart from sorrow 1241 For s[bl] in Qohelet cf. 1:18; 2:23 (noun); 5:16; 7:3, 9 (subject); 11:10 (object).

1242 For bl in Qohelet, cf. 1:16; 2:1, 3, 15(x 2), 22; 3:11, 17, 18; 5:19; 7:2, 25; 9:1, 3, 7; 11:9, 10; as subject 1:16; 2:3, 10, 23; 5:1, 7:3, 4, 22, 26; 8:5, 11; 9:3; 10:2, 3; 11:9; as object 1:13, 17, 2:10, 20; 7:7, 21; 8:9, 16. Here bl is indicative of “life.” Cf. H.W. Wolff, Anthropologie des Alten Testaments (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1973), 68ff for a discussion of the different meaning contexts for bl. Here both physical and psychological displeasure is implied by means of the use of s[bl].

1243 Here rb] (Hi) occurs as hapax in Qohelet.

1244 For rcb in Qohelet, cf. 12:12; as object 2:3; 4:5; 5:5.

1245 In 11:10b hr is antithetical to that which is said to be bl.

1246 According to Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 39 lbh should be interpreted in the light of 12:1, where the brevity of youth is the cause for urgency in making use of life’s opportunities. So it is not the time of youth, but the brevity of youth that leads to the evaluation of it being lbh. Youth is not accredited a superior value over old age, but rather emphasises the importance of enjoying life in the present, without postponing joy to an unsure future. Cf. Krüger, Kohelet, 348.

1247 The hapax twlj v refers to the “dawn of life” (from ṭ[v] “dawn”), or the “time of black hair” (from ṭ[v] “black”), i.e. as an epithet for youth. In case of the latter it presents a contrast with ḫbc “grey head” as an epithet for old age. Cf. Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 319. The problematic nature of the form ṭwlv is reflected in different textual versions. The Vulgate reads “desire” (voluptas), the LXX “lack of understanding” (a[noia), and the Peshitta “no knowledge” (l'y'd’t’). These readings support the notion that the Hebrew verb used here is related to the verb ṭ[v] “to seek, search” (e.g. Prov 1:28; 8:17). Cf. JL Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 184.

1248 Cf. Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 113, Gordis, Koheleth, 337; Fox, Qohelet and his Contradictions, 279-280.

1249 Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 318. He interprets v 10 as the complement rather than the converse of 11:9.

1250 Michel, Qohelet, 166-167 translates 11:10b as “denn Jugend und dunkles Haar sind vergänglich.”

and the flesh from evil (חֵר), but not necessarily the better interpretation. As in 11:9 we here encounter a tension in the text inherent to the argumentation of Qohelet. Youth and childhood as such are not negatively evaluated, but rather its brevity. However this also has a negative potential, since that achieved during the time of youth is short-lived and of no lasting significance. Thus, from childhood humanity is confronted with its brevity. Nevertheless, the most should be made of this time of vigour and virility, as perhaps the opening imperative of 12:1 suggests.

B: 12:1-8

The tension in 11:7-10 between the call to enjoyment (יֵרָך) and the remembrance (רֵקָא) of life’s brevity (cf. Job 9:25-26) and the futility of human endeavours lacks in 12:1-8. Qoh 12:1a does commence with an imperative to remember (רֵקָא), but an admonition to rejoice is absent. In 12:1-8 the memento mori motif is dominant. Here Qohelet is enticing a particular attitude toward aging and death, for which the stage is already set in 11:7-10. By means of an interaction between literal and symbolic types of meaning in 12:1-8, an acute awareness is created of death’s inevitability. As such the rhetorical intent of the text is important. The only occurrence in Qohelet of a direct addressee is encountered in 11:9 (יֶרֶב) and 12:1a (second person masculine singular suffix י). For this reason the final literary unit of Qohelet constitutes an instruction to youth regarding approaching death and the brevity, by implication vanity, of life.

In verse 12:1a a new line of thinking is introduced in the argument of Qohelet by means of the וThis is indicated by the imperative רֵקָא and the reference to the “days of your youth” (יַיְרוֹב יָרֵב). In 12:1a it is particularly the form יַיְרוֹב that presents exegetical difficulties. The two most likely interpretations are “your creator,” from the verb יַרְב and “your grave,” from the noun יָרֵב. This could very well be an intentional ambiguity in the text. The participle form יַרְב occurs nowhere else in

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1252. Here יִסְקַק implies “vexation” or “madness,” as in Qoh 1:18, 2:23, 7:3, 5:16. I.e. that which causes the “heart” to be troubled.
1253. Sir 30:21-25 reflects a comparable line of thinking, 21 Give not over thy mind to heaviness, and afflict not thyself in thine own counsel. 22 The gladness of the heart is the life of man, and the joyfulness of a man prolongeth his days. 23 Love thine own soul, and comfort thy heart, remove sorrow far from thee: for sorrow hath killed many, and there is no profit therein. 24 Envy and wrath shorten the life, and carefulness bringeth age before the time. 25 A cheerful and good heart will have a care of his meat and diet.” (KJV Apocrypha, 1995).
1254. As such 12:1-7 achieves a degree of independence from 11:7-10. Cf. Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 333.
1255. Fox, Qohelet and his Contradictions, 298.
1256. Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 114. In terms of form, theme and ideology Qohelet resembles the genre of didactic wisdom literature, but cannot be connected to a specific wisdom school. Cf. Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 5-6.
1257. K. Galling, Der Prediger, in: E. Würthwein et al., Die fünf Megilloth: Ruth, Das Hohelied, Esther, Der Prediger, Die Klagelieder (HAT 18; Tübingen: Mohr Paul Siebeck, 1969), 122. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 184-185 points to the interpretation of יַרְב “your well,” as implying “your wife” (Prov 5:15). But his interpretation is only sensible if Qohelet here aims at a threefold understanding, namely your creator, your grave, your wife, as encountered in the homily of Rabbi Akiba. Cf. Kamano, Cosmology and Character, 225. יָרֵב i.e. “your vigour” has also been suggested.
1258. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 351-52 allows for such ambiguity in the interpretation of יַיְרוֹב. Reference has been made to the technique of antanaclasis, i.e. were a particular word reflects two or more contrasting
the HB, and arb does not occur elsewhere in the HB wisdom literature (except Ps 104:24). The plural form of ûyarwb is explainable as an instance of the Majestätspluralis (cf. Gen 1:26; 3:22). The reading “your grave” (ûrwb) dovetails with the “days of darkness” in 11:8b and latches unto 12:6, where rwb occurs (compare Job 21:32). But this reading is also problematic since the days of darkness in 11:8b does not necessarily refer to time spent in death, and since rwb in 12:6 does not necessarily refer to the grave. The lectio difficilior is adhered to and “your creator” is read. Thematically it fits the context well and does not require an emendation of the text.

In the context of 12:1a, to “remember your creator” has the implication of remembering that you were created, which in turn calls to mind the ephemeral nature of human life. Such a constant awareness of one’s finite nature could either have a motivating function, urging to make the most of life Diesseits. Or it could have a de-motivating effect, seeing that life and its possibilities are framed by the limits set by the grave, i.e. by death. Reading ûyarwb in 12:1a as “your creator” does not nullify the call to enjoyment in 11:9a-10a, but rather qualifies it. Here the good in life, i.e. one’s share (qlj), is balanced by life’s negative side, indicated by the theme of lbh. Enjoyment and death are closely tied to the divinely established order in which created beings have to live.

and often comic scenes. Cf. Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 249. But seeing the absence of the comic, identifying here such a rhetorical technique is unfitting.

In Qohelet hcf is mostly used in reference to the works of God. Cf. Klein, *Kohelet*, 151.


For Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words*, 73 ûyarwb in 12:1 “certainly” has the meaning “your creator,” while the plural form expresses “excellence” like in ìpt a.

Cf. Loader, *Polar Structures*, 110. The perception of God as creator or giver of life’s opportunities is also reflected in the creation motif of Qoh 3:11. Michel, *Kohelet*, 167 (also Galling and Lauha) regards “your creator” as an orthodox gloss. So also Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 185, for whom the reference to the creator does not fit the context and interrupts the thought sequence from 11:10a to 12:1b. Qoh 12:1a is necessary however, since 12:1b cannot be joined directly to 11:10b as a temporal clause. Further, without 12:1a, 12:3-7 lacks a main clause. Cf. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 322.

Zimmerli, “Unveränderbare Welt oder Gott ist Gott?,” 111 argued that “Es ist ein Mißgriff, diese gewichtigste Gottesbenennung in der Aufgipfelung der ganzen Weisheitslehre des Predigers, die nur hier einmal mit dem persönlichen Suffixpronomen versehen ist…, eliminieren zu wollen.”

Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 233-234 regards ûyarwb as a reference to the womb, i.e. “remember where you come from.” As such it contrasts with 11:5, where the formation of the bones in the womb (hcf) as part of the divine works are said to be unknowable. Seeing the absence of individual creation or divine nurture in Qohelet, a reference to the womb would merely be another reference to human mortality. Remembering either the creator or the grave brings to mind the yvb vb tp as inevitable.

Krüger, *Kohelet*, 349. This “cradle to the grave” perception of life fits the context well.

In a sense, Qohelet wants his readers “to acknowledge the significance of both death and enjoyment for a lifestyle that copes with the world God has created.” (cf. 9:1-10). Cf. Kamano, *Cosmology and Character*, 226. This line of argumentation stands opposite the view of Whybray (seeing Qohelet as a ‘preacher of joy’) and more in line with the argumentation of Crenshaw (taking full cognizance of the ‘shadow of death’ in Qohelet).
This ambiguity of ūyrb also brings into focus the meaning of rkz. The most probable meaning in the context is “remember” or “think of.” But rkz could also be interpreted as “fear,” bringing 12:1a into proximity with 3:14, 5:6, 7:18, 8:12-13, and 12:13, as well as 1:11 which recalls human failure to remember. Interpreting rkz as “fear” also calls to mind the “fear of YHWH” (hwhy tary as the beginning of wisdom (cf. Prov 1:7). Remembrance is a crucial element for the actualisation of wisdom’s potential (cf. Qoh 9:13-16). In 12:1a rkz is best understood in the sense of “remember,” corresponding with the use of rkz in 11:8c. Remembering the creator already implies a sense of reverence, rendering an interpretation of “fear” as superfluous. The imperative rkz can also be linked to 11:9f, i.e. remembering µyhlah who will judge all that one does in youth. The creator occupies a central place in the orientation toward life. From the time of youth described in 11:7-10 and 12:1a, through the process of aging until the moment of death described in 12:1b-12:7.

In verse 2 the theme of light introduced in 11:7-8 is picked up again by means of the temporal clause al rva d (“before”) in 12:1b (also 2a, 6a). The creator should be remembered before the “evil days” (h[h]rh yng come, which are synonymous with the years (µyv) that draw near (g of which the addressee will say, “I have no delight in them” (µv µhb y Asa). As such the “days of your youth” (ôyrb yng of 12:1a are contrasted with the “evil days” (h[h]rh yng of 12:1b-d. The “evil days” also serve as preamble to that which is described in 12:2-6. Whether µvb refers to both the “evil days” and the “years of displeasure” is not entirely clear from the text, but in 12:1 they function synonymously. Grammatically µvb could also refer to the “days of your youth” (ôyrb yng of 12:1a, but this is unlikely. The “evil days” and “years of displeasure,” which serve as an epithet for old age or merely bad times that await the youthful addressee in the future, are the likely reference. Thus, in 12:1 we encounter a first step toward Qohelet’s vivid description of human frailty.

In 2:17-18 Qohelet claims to have hated (anc) life.
of the clouds (µyb) after the rain (µvh rj ṣ). In 11:7a light is characterised as sweet, while it is perceived as being darkened in 12:2a. In this way the admonition in 12:1a “remember your creator” applies to the time before light is darkened in 12:2a. Since light in 11:7 and 12:2 serves as epithet for life (cf. Ps 56:13),¹²⁷⁹ the admonition to remember your creator in 12:1a concerns the time “before” the light of life is extinguished, i.e. before death sets in. Indeed, the dead will never more see the light (cf. Ps 49:19b; 58:8). Therefore, in other contexts, a plea is directed toward YHWH not to take away the light of the eyes prematurely (cf. Ps 13:3; 38:10). The description of the luminaries in 12:2 differs from that in Gen 1:1-2:4a, since it is not said to be created or divinely placed. It is merely mentioned as part of creation, as in Deutero-Isaiah. In Gen 1:1-2:4a the luminaries are mentioned as part of the process of divine creation, while in Qoh 12:2 their mentioning is indicative of an undoing of creation.¹²⁸⁰ I.e. the reverse happens of what one would expect, namely the extinguishing of light leading to the return of primeval darkness.¹²⁸¹ The interpretation of 12:2 is problematic in view of 12:1b-d.¹²⁸² The extinguishing of cosmic lights is characteristic of the evil days, but as argued the “evil days” most probably refer to the approaching time of old age. If the temporal clause al rva d indicates a move to another scene in 12:2a,¹²⁸³ then the darkening of light should not be read as synonymous with the evil days. Seeing that the addressee introduced in 11:9 has now disappeared from the scene, this is a tenable interpretation. As such 12:2-6 does not merely present an elaboration on the days of unpleasantness introduced in 12:1b by means of al rva d.

The background of the imagery employed in 12:2¹²⁸⁴ is suggestive of the Palestinian winter season, of an approaching storm, or of imagery related to the day of YHWH.¹²⁸⁵ Since the imagery in 12:2 implies complete darkness,¹²⁸⁶ eschatology also

¹²⁷⁹ Barth, Die Errettung, 28. In the wider context of the HB light becomes the embodiment of good against bad, of cosmos cover against chaos, and of life in contrast to death.

¹²⁸⁰ For Krüger, Kohelet, 357 the notion of an eschatological undoing of creation is made undone by 12:1-7 as in 1:9-11. The concern in 12:1-7 is the death of of the individual. He observes that in 12:1-7, such an eschatological end of creation is not to be feared more than the natural death of the individual, and neither is more hope to be found in this event than in natural death.

¹²⁸¹ Isa 24:2 also describes the world turned upside down. Cf. Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 340-41. Isa 21:3 provides an example of the torment accompanying an approaching cataclysm. But as already stated, language employed in this literary unit should not be interpreted as eschatological too hastily.

¹²⁸² Von Rad in his Weisheit in Israel argued that eschatological thinking in the HB has its origin in the wisdom tradition rather than the prophetic tradition. But with this argument von Rad did not convince the scholarly community.

¹²⁸³ Seow, Ecclesiastes, 353.

¹²⁸⁴ No absolute meaning, be it anthropological, eschatological, or theological is ascribable to 12:2-6. Cf. Krüger, Kohelet, 354.

¹²⁸⁵ Cf. Ezek 30:3; Joel 2:10; 4:12, 15 HB; Jer 13:16; Isa 13:10; also Isa 30:26; 2 Sam 23:4.

¹²⁸⁶ For Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 235 the darkening of the light, signalling the end of the world, is a common motif in cosmological myths of reversal, prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic (e.g. Job 9:7; Jer 4:23; Amos 5:8; Hab 3:11). In terms of such a reversion the language is also comparable to that of the flood tradition (Gen 6-8 and Amos 5:8). Such language of reversion makes the admonition to remember your creator in 12:1a seem very ironic. Cf. Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 214.
comes into focus. Such an eschatological interpretation could bring 12:2 in proximity with the divine judgment mentioned in 11:9, but this view is not shared here, given the absence of eschatology in the wider context of Qohelet. However, the return of the clouds after the rain implies that there is no reason for hope of better days. The darkening of light in 12:2 presents a description of the cessation of human life. The primary concern is with individual death, given the envisioned addressee of 11:7-12:8. That Qohelet’s argument in 12:2 has cosmic implications, i.e. that the whole of creation becomes darkened, is of secondary importance. In terms of an allegorical interpretation, identifying in 12:2-6 a description of human frailty, deterioration and approaching death, 12:2 presents a reference to failing sight resulting from this process of deterioration. But instead of interpreting 12:2 as describing a stage in the process of physical deterioration, it is better interpreted as the end of this process, when eternal darkness, i.e. death, sets in.

Here it should be noted that the imagery in verses 3-6 is mostly interpreted either allegorically, i.e. as a description of the physical deterioration of the body leading to death, or metaphorically, as a description of a ruined house. According to a

Yet the creator (µyhla) who created the light and placed the luminaries in the heavens (Gen 1:3-4; 15-17) is not here responsible for its undoing.

**1287** Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 322 points to the place of clouds in eschatological contexts, e.g. Ezek 30:3, 32:7. For Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 353 Qohelet’s use of eschatological language is comparable to that found in the inscription at Tell Deir ‘Alla, containing a vision of an end brought to life by the deities.

**1288** This imagery could be suggestive of the myth of the divine warrior’s march to battle, accompanied by dark rain clouds, describing a time of doom. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 253.

**1289** The normal cycle of nature (cf. Qoh 1:5) with the sun rising and going down, is no longer at issue. The normal *Erfahrungswirklichkeit* has been overthrown. Cf. Krüger, *Kohelet*, 353. This is indicated by the use of rj ā, i.e. that the clouds return after the rain. There is no reprieve due to this reversal of the expected order. Thus it is not necessary to translate rj ā as “with.” Similarly Lohfink, *Kohelet*, 84 regards 12:2 as the beginning of Qohelet’s allegorical engagement with the *Erfahrungswelt*. Yet he regards the language employed here to be in line with apocalyptic reasoning of *Weltuntergang*, but he does not regard this as the absolute interpretation.

**1290** Sawyer, “Ruined House,” 523. The imagery in 12:2 can also be interpreted as imagery for life that has become darkened, destined for death. This is in line with the imagery employed in 11:7-12:8. Cf. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Nicht im Menschen*, 222.

**1291** As such the reference to light in 11:7 as an epithet for being alive stands in contrast with the darkening of the light as an epithet for being dead. Cf. Kamano, *Cosmology and Character*, 230.

**1292** Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 212-213 suggests such a move. He argues that 12:2-6 not merely describe aging and dying, but rather a cosmic disaster is depicted as a metaphor for the end of life. In this way the death of the individual would become part of a greater “death.” Comparable is the language of Isa 5:30, 13:10; Ezek 32:7-8; Amos 5:8, 8:9; Mic 3:6; Joel 2:10, 3:4; Job 3:9, but Qohelet’s language should not be equated with the rhetoric of prophetic eschatology describing great disaster.

**1293** If the essence of allegory is that it consists of a coherent series of metaphors forming a consistent whole, vv 2-6 should not be seen as an allegory. Cf. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 163. Also Lohfink, *Kohelet*, 84. But individual verses can still be regarded as allegorical in its meaning.

**1294** Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 185.

**1295** Such interpretations are suggestive, but care should be taken not to allegorise Qohelet in saying metaphorically something different from what it says literally. Cf. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom*, 170.

**1296** Sawyer, “Ruined House,” 521. He interprets 12:3-6 as a parable of a ruined house. In comparing 12:1-6 with Job 5:2-5 he argues that structurally 12:3-5 is more likely a parable about the failure of human efforts in general than of an allegory about old age. For Sawyer, “Ruined House,” 523-24 Qoh 12 offers a “supreme example” of nature’s uncontrollable assault upon human efforts. This contrast between passing generations and creation’s unchangeable nature is already seen in 1:4.
more literal interpretation a funerary procession is being described. Other suggestions include an approaching storm, or Palestinian winter’s day. The imagery employed in 12:3 is not singular in meaning. We will consider particularly the image of the body, ruined house and funerary procession to determine which best fits a particular image.

The darkening of light as a theme in 12:2 does not continue in verse 3, and the relation of 12:2 and v 3 is not self-evident. If 12:2 is interpreted allegorically as a stage in the process of physical deterioration, then 12:3 presents another stage in this process, establishing a connection between v 2 and v 3. But such an interpretation does not best fit v 2. As such the function of v µwyb in 12:3a is significant. If it is interpreted as another temporal clause, i.e. “on the day when,” the events described in 12:3-5 relate to that of 12:2. Such a temporal function implies that the events described in 12:3-5 is happening “on the day,” i.e. suddenly.

In 12:3a µwyb has a temporal function connecting the events described in v 3 with that of v 2. Such a connection is not that evident if we consider the imagery introduced in v 3. In 12:3a the keepers of the house (tyḥn yrmv) that tremble ([wz]) are introduced. The identity of the subject and reason for the action, i.e. as reaction or in expectation, is disputable, as evidenced by the variety of interpretation possibilities. In terms of an allegorical interpretation the “keepers of the house” can refer to the limbs of the body, trembling as a result of old age (contra Cant 5:15), while they may be regarded as actual servants, i.e. as labourers or guards of a house in the case of the “ruined house” imagery. In terms of this interpretation, and in view of the relation between the imagery of 12:2 and 12:3-5, the “trembling” could result from the darkening of the light and luminaries, coinciding with the unexpected return of the clouds after the rain (12:2).

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1297 Fox, *Qohelet and his Contradictions*, 302-3. He shares the view of C. Taylor, *The Dirge of Coheleth* (London, 1874), iii-iv, namely that 12:2-5 describes the state of a household or community on occasion of death and mourning.


1299 For Loretz, *Qohelet und der Alte Orient*, 191-192 this literary description serves as a metaphor for old age.


1301 Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 322-23. But the “remembering” of 12:1a should take place before the events of 12:3-5. Thus v µwyb elaborates on what happens when the day darkens (12:2). The use of the singular “day” contrasts with the plural “days” of 11:8 and 12:1. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 354 points to the connection between 12:2 and 12:3-5 and argues for a connection of 12:3-5 with the eschatological rhetoric of 12:2. So also Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 235 for whom 12:3-5 refers to the end of civilisation as well as the decline of nature.

1302 In v 3 we encounter a chiastically opposed listing of four classes of people, i.e. the keepers opposed to the strong men and the grinders opposed to the lookers. Cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 186. Also Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 324.

1303 The verb [wz] also occurs in Esth 5:9 and Hab 2:7 and in Biblical Aramaic in Dan 5:19, 6:27 and in the Mishnah (Abot 5:22). Here the language of Qohelet should not be equated with the eschatological language relating to the ḥāy|hāy in prophetic literature (e.g. Joel 3:4; Zeph 1:14-15).

1304 Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 355 rejects such an allegorical meaning, for in such a case ṭum instead of [wz] would have been expected. Quite differently, Loader, *Polar Structures*, 131 regards 12:3-4 as an allegory where the entire household serves as a picture for the human body.

1305 In post-biblical Hebrew ṭrmw connotes a “guard,” “watchman,” or “trustee,” while ḫrmw connotes a “guardhouse.” Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 354. This lends support for reading yrmw as a reference to guards. He also points to the Akkadian expression bitam naṣṭru, “to guard / protect the house.”
The description of the “keepers of the house” that tremble coincides with that of the “strong men” (l y h yvra) that bow (tψ, Hitp.) themselves in 12:3b. Allegorically this image also refers to the limbs that loose their capacity to keep the person upright. In terms of the ruined house metaphor the “strong men” refer to the guards of the house, possibly identified with the “keepers of the house,” but what motivates them to “bow” remains a question. They bow as a result of that which is happening, but exactly this remains disputable. Significantly even the “strong men” are overcome with fear, i.e. the opposite of what would be expected.

In 12:3c the grinders (jf, twf h fem pl) cease because (yk) they have become few (fm). In terms of an allegorical interpretation the grinders refer to the teeth which cease chewing because they have become too few as a result of the process of physical deterioration. If we consider the ruined house metaphor the imagery still pertains to persons and activities in the vicinity of the house. As such they would have become few due to the fact that the house is in a state of ruin and does not function as would be expected. I.e. activity normally associated with the house comes to an end. In this regard it has been suggested that the grinders, probably women, have become few because the rest joined in a passing funeral procession. This interpretation of 12:3-5 as a description of a funerary procession is suggestive, though this theme does not occur in the wider context of this literary unit. The imagery of 12:3c coincides with that of 12:3d, where the “lookers” through the windows are described as darkened (ûvj, Qal pf.). Here the familiar theme of darkness reappears, but within the context of unfamiliar imagery. In terms of an allegorical interpretation the “lookers” refer to the eyes that loose their ability of sight due to the process of physical deterioration. In terms of the ruined house metaphor, the lookers can refer to the indwellers of the house who no longer look outside, either as a result of what has happened or in expectation of what is coming. But in terms of the latter the interpretation of the verb ûvj is problematic in relation to the “lookers.” For this reason an allegorical interpretation in this instance offers a viable alternative to a more literal interpretation.

In 12:3a [wz can mean “convulse,” in view of the parallelism with tw (Hitp.), “to bend oneself.” Comparable is the Arabic tahinat “grinders.” The hapax lfb is comparable with the Akkadian verb baḥalu, that can refer to an interruption of work due to shortage of labour, tools etc. or the stoppage of the delivery of goods. In view of this possible philological correspondence it has been suggested in 12:3 it is the members of the house that has become few, with the result that less food needs to be produced. Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 186. The suggestion that yk here has a demonstrative force, i.e. “thus” is unnecessary. Cf. Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 324 for such a view of yk. Sawyer, “Ruined House,” 526 suggests the omission of û[fm] regarding it as an allegoriser’s gloss. Fox, Qohelet and his Contradictions, 302-3.

The events of vv 3-5, as indicative of a funeral procession, describe different reactions from people in and around the house to the passing procession. Such an interpretation is challenged by the lack of an object for the Pi, which is translatable as resultative, i.e. the grinders cease “while they are few.” Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 356. Also Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 324.

In the HB hbra “window, lattice” occurs in various contexts, e.g. Gen 7:11; 2 Kgs 7:2, 19; Mal 3:11; Isa 60:8. Cf. Gordis, Kohelet, 332.

Here the imagery concerns the inhabitants of the house rather than the house as such. Cf. Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 118.

The expression in Lam 5:17; Ps 69:24 that “the eyes grow dim” is indicative of a literary convention used to describe the dashed hope of the “lookers.” Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 356; Fox, A Time
temporal phrase \( \text{v \( \mu \) w\( \text{by} \)} \) of 12:3a, i.e. “on the day when,” implying a degree of suddenness. In this sense the effects of physical deterioration are experienced suddenly. But the meaning of v 3 is best located somewhere between metaphor and reality.\(^{1317}\)

The imagery of verse 4 is partially related to that of v 3, since it still concerns the house, but new imagery is also introduced. The continuation of the imagery of v 3 is indicated by the connecting \( \text{w\( \text{in} \)} \) v 4a. The description of the doors (\( \text{\( \mu \) y\( \text{t\( \text{ld} \)} \)} \) that are closed (\( \text{rg\( \text{s} \)} \), \( \text{Pu} \))\(^{1318}\) in the street (\( \text{qw\( \text{v} \)} \)) connects the imagery to the house of v 3, but also brings into question the location of the house, as well as the exact meaning of \( \text{tl\( \text{d} \)} \) in this context. It can refer to the doors of the house (e.g. Josh 2:19; Job 31:32) or to city gates (e.g. Deut 3:5; Jer 49:31; Josh 6:26; 1 Sam 23:7; Isa 45:1; Sir 49:13). In this regard the meaning of \( \text{qw\( \text{v} \)} \) also comes into focus, i.e. whether the reference is to a street within a town (e.g. Prov 7:8) or in a rural area. Since \( \text{qw\( \text{v} \)} \) can also be interpreted as marketplace or square (Prov 7:8; Cant 3:2), the scale might be tipped in favour of gates within a city.\(^{1319}\) In v 4b the moment of the described closing is indicated by the particle \( \text{b} \),\(^{1320}\) i.e. “when” the sound (\( \text{l \( \mu \) q\( \text{f} \)} \)) of the mill (\( \text{hn\( \text{jf} \)} \))\(^{1321}\) is low (\( \text{l \( \mu \) v\( \text{v} \)} \)).\(^{1322}\) The reference to the mill connects this imagery with the grinders in v 3. That is, if the image of a ruined house is maintained. The doors will be shut when sudden silence falls upon an otherwise busy and bustling spatial area. The implication is that activities associated with the house, or commercial activities cease within the time-frame of the described events. Here, as in vv 3 and 5 the described events may be regarded as a response to a passing funeral procession. The silence in the residential centrum is the opposite of what is usually associated with it.

In view of its place within the frame of 12:3-5, the precise meaning of the new imagery introduced in 12:4c is elusive. This applies particularly to the subject of the verb \( \text{\( \mu \) w\( \text{q} \)} \) (“rise up”) in 12:4c. In terms of the ruined house metaphor the third person masculine singular form refers to an indweller of the house or city, while in terms of an allegorical interpretation it refers to the individual caught in the process of physical deterioration. The subject “he” will rise up at the sound (\( \text{l \( \mu \) q\( \text{f} \)} \)) of the bird (\( \text{rw\( \text{px} \)} \), also 9:12). By means of this imagery a specific time is indicated. This coincides, as indicated by the \( \text{w\( \text{w} \)} \) with “all the daughters of song” (\( \text{ry\( \text{h t\( \text{w\( \text{b\( \text{A} \)} \)} \)} \))\(^{1324}\) that will be to Tear Down, 324-25. In Lam 5:17 \( \text{\( \mu \) y\( \text{v\( \text{j} \)} \) \text{\( \mu \) y\( \text{v\( \text{j} \)} \) \text{\( \mu \) y\( \text{v\( \text{j} \)} \)}} \) has the meaning “to become blind with grief.” The use of \( \text{\( \mu \) y\( \text{v\( \text{j} \)} \) instead of \( \text{\( \mu \) h\( \text{k} \)}, \) which usually indicates loss of eyesight, suggests that both a physical and emotional process is being described.

1317 Lohfink, Kohelet, 84.

1318 The use of the Pual indicates that the doors are the object of active closing, i.e. they are shut during the time-frame of the scene. Cf. Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 325.

1319 Here \( \text{qw\( \text{v} \)} \) bears similarities with the Akkadian \( \text{su\( \text{q\( \text{u} \)} \) “street,” as an important commercial centre.

1320 The preposition \( \text{b} \) in 12:4d has a temporal function and is translatable with “while,” i.e. the doors are closed in the street when the sound of the mill is low.

1321 The preposition \( \text{l} \) probably calls attention to the sound of the bird, i.e. what happens when the mill grows silent.

1322 In the HB \( \text{hn\( \text{jf} \)} \) is a hapax. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 357 points out that in Aramaic papyri from Saqqara \( \text{t\( \text{j\( \text{i} \)} \) t\( \text{f} \) refers to “commercial mills” runned by hired hands.

1323 For the figurative use of \( \text{l \( \mu \) v\( \text{v} \)} \), see Prov 16:19. A parallel exists between the word pair \( \text{l \( \mu \) v\( \text{v} \)} \) (“be low”) and \( \text{j \( \mu \) v\( \text{v} \)} \) (“be bowed”) in 12:4.

1324 A bird specie known as \( \text{hn\( \text{jf} \) t\( \text{w\( \text{b\( \text{A} \)} \)} \) does occur in the HB. Cf. Mic 1:8; Isa 13:21, 34:13, 43:20; Jer 50:39; Job 30:29. This points to a relation between the \( \text{rw\( \text{px} \)} \) and the \( \text{ry\( \text{h t\( \text{w\( \text{b\( \text{A} \)} \) \text{A}} \)} \). Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 359; Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 187.
brought low (jjv, Ni). But the thematic relation of 12:4c and d is not entirely clear. In terms of an allegorical interpretation the imagery of 4d is indicative of another symptom of the process of physical deterioration, i.e. the voice becoming high pitched like that of a bird. If this interpretation is accepted the aged person can also be considered the subject of µaq but since such an aged person has not been mentioned up to this point, it seems an unlikely interpretation. Another suggestion for the subject of µaq is rwpx (bird), but this would require reading l\(\text{aq}\) as infinitive, i.e. “the bird begins to voice.” This is an unlikely interpretation since l\(\text{aq}\) is never used in Biblical Hebrew or Aramaic as infinitive. The most probable interpretation is that someone is awakened by the sound of the bird.

In terms of the ruined house metaphor, the “sound of the birds” presents the eerie sound of e.g. birds of prey, moving into a desolate area after destruction has taken place, i.e. sensing and descending on death. In this regard the ry\(\text{tvb}\) present an euphemism for birds associated with death and mourning. Thus it is at the sound of these birds that the indweller of the ruined house awakes. This interpretation is more tenable than an allegorical interpretation. However, at this stage the possibility of a described funerary and reactions thereto is also worth considering. In this regard the “daughters of song” (ry\(\text{tvb}\) present “mourning women” or professional “wailers.” This interpretation is sensible if jjv is considered to have the meaning “come down low,” i.e. to assume a “mourning posture” by means of prostration. At issue is not the voices of the ry\(\text{tvb}\) that become silent, but rather their physical stance. But within the wider context of 12:2-6, a notion of an eerie silence is quite fitting. Here the suggestion of an approaching storm is applicable, but does not fit the wider context of 12:2-6 and for this reason is not considered. Here the rising sound of the bird amidst this eerie silence is indicative of death. Such an argument gains support in view of the imagery employed in 12:5.

The imagery in verse 5 elaborates on that of v 4, as indicated by the particle µg “also.” But the meaning of the imagery in v 5 remains elusive. In v 5a both the

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1325 The 3 masculine plural form of jjv “to bring low” poses a difficulty, while the subject tvb is feminine plural. This can be ascribed to colloquial language. Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 360.
1326 In this regard l\(\text{aq}\) l\(\text{aq}\)v, i.e. “and the sound decays” has been suggested. But the verb l\(\text{aq}\) occurs only twice in the HB (Isa 19:6; 33:9) with the probable root meaning “to be invested” rather than “to fade” or “to grow faint.” Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 358, who refers to the possible relation between the root l\(\text{aq}\) and the Ugaritic ql “to fall.” Since l\(\text{aq}\) is an unlikely subject of l\(\text{aq}\) it remains uncertain.
1327 Hertzberg, Kohelet, 212.
1328 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 357; Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 325.
1329 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 358.
1330 In v 4 l\(\text{pv}\) and \(\mu\)\(\text{aq}\) are contrasted, as well as\(\text{ri}h\) \(\text{fh} l\(\text{aq}\) and ry\(\text{tvb}\) l\(\text{aq}\). Further, the collective noun ry\(\text{tvb}\) and ry\(\text{tvb}\) “the daughters of song” form a parallelism.
1331 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 358. In Job 38:40 jjv is used of a lion crouching in preparation of attacking its prey.
1332 Gordis, Kohelet, 333 regards ry\(\text{tvb}\) as a possible epiphet for “birds.”
1333 Fox, A Time to Tear Down, 304.
1334 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 358. He points out that in some Akkadian texts the sound of birds is associated with mourning. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 187 observes the occurrence of the phrase bnt hll “daughters of praise” in some Ugaritic texts.
1335 The particle µgs is often used in Qohelet, and may here be translated with “also,” denoting addition. Cf. Schoors, The Preacher, 129. Also Loader, Ecclesiastes, 131.
The stem with the Ugaritic the carob tree whose buds remind of a locust. The Greek Allegorically the caperberry refers either to an aphrodisiac or stimulant for appetite.

The imagery of 12:5b-d is further indicative of the ruined house metaphor. This applies particularly to the image of the almond tree (דָּו) 1339 that blossoms (וְאֵּן  הִי) 1340 and the locust (בּ ג) that becomes heavy (לָס, הַיטפ), 1341 which is indicative of a neglected garden (cf. Prov 24:31). The locust that becomes heavy is a reference to the locust tree that can no longer uphold its buds. 1342 In this way a state of neglect is portrayed. In terms of an allegorical interpretation the locust that becomes heavy implies a further stage in the process of physical deterioration, i.e. that the limbs of the body lose their vitality and strength. The image of the caperberry (הַנְּוָּא) 1343 that “frustrates” (רְרָפֵּה  הִי) 1344 is difficult to place within the ruined house metaphor. Allegorically the caperberry refers either to an aphrodisiac or stimulant for appetite.

1336 The ryh twnb of 12:5 may be taken as the subject of vary if it is accepted that the ryh twnb refers to birds. In this case the text requires no emendation, for vary is the only plural in this context. The final w of vary can be interpreted as dittography, since the next word also begins with a w. Cf. Gordis, Koheleth, 334.

1337 Cf. Barton, Ecclesiastes, 189; Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 181; Fox, Qohelet and his Contradiction, 280; Hertzberg, Der Prediger, 205; Klein, Kohelet and die Weisheit Israels, 153; Krüger, Kohelet, 338; Lauhe, Kohelet, 242; Lohfink, Kohelet, 84; Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 112; Whybray, Ecclesiastes, 166.

1338 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 347 is one of only few commentators that read har.

1339 For other occurrences of دָּו see Gen 43:11; Jer 1:11; Num 17:23.

1340 An alternative reading is דָּו “to reject, despise” instead of דָּו “to blossom.” Cf. Murphy, Ecclesiastes, 113 who allows for both interpretations.

1341 The Hitpsel לָשֶׁי has the meaning “to burden oneself.” Here an alternative reading לָס “be confused” instead of לָס is not suggestive. Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 187 for this reading.

1342 Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 362; Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 222. Here בּ may refer to the carob tree whose buds remind of a locust. The Greek αὐτόν “locust” also refers to plants.

1343 In the HB הנְּוָּא is a hapax, and some interpreted it as reference to an aphrodisiac. Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 188 who refers to this interpretation in the Targum.

1344 The usual meaning of רְרָפֵּה “brake, frustrate, make ineffectual, bring to naught” is problematic in this context. To read רְפֵּה with the meaning “comes to naught” does not resolve the matter. A form of the stem הָרְפּ “to bear fruit” can also be read, but here we maintain רְרָפֵּה. Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 187 for these alternative suggestions. Another alternative reading for רְרָפֵּה is “to fall, drop off” in comparison with the Ugaritic ppr “to break, break from.” Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 363.
which no longer has the desired effect, resulting in frustration (rrp). While neither the ruined house metaphor nor an allegorical interpretation is entirely satisfactory, two images are plausible, namely the continuance of nature, i.e. the trees in the garden, amidst the downfall of human structures, but also death in the botanical realm, namely that the trees in the garden are slowly dying due to neglect. For this reason the imagery employed by Qohelet contrast the continuance of nature with humanity’s demise. The imagery of death in the botanical realm also supports the experience of death in the human realm. The imagery emphasises the theme of demise and death as central concern.

The theme of death and demise of 12:5a-d is continued in 12:5e, where a reason seems to be given for the imagery described in 12:5a-d by means of the particle yk. As such man (µda) is going (ûlh) to his eternal home (wmlw[ tybAla]), and in 12:5f the mourners (dps) are going about (bbs) in the street (qwv). The imagery of 12:5e-f recalls that of 12:3-4, where the house, mourning and street are introduced, and as such 12:2-5 is brought to a close. What is alluded to in earlier verses is made explicit in 12:5e-f. The theme of death now takes centre stage by means of this description of the march towards the grave. The µlw[ tyb is the final destination of humankind (µda), and the march toward the grave is accompanied by a band of “mourners” (µydps, Qal ptc.), announcing the dead passing through the streets. The identity of the deceased, and cause of death, is withheld by means of employing the generic term µda. While this might seem to indicate that it is not individual death at issue here, the use of the third person singular suffix in 12:5e makes matters less clear. In terms of the ruined house metaphor the deceased is probably to be associated with the house, while in terms of an allegorical interpretation 12:5e-f describes the end result of the process of physical deterioration. An eschatological interpretation, reading v 5 as suggestive of the demise of nature as such, which coincides with the death of µda, is less

1345 This imagery, where nature languishes in the face of doom, is in line with literature from the ANE. So e.g. in KTU 1:5.1.3-6 where Baal as god of nature and life is swallowed by Mot, the god of death. Cf. Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 223-224. Isa 34:4 contains another description of the death of nature in the HB. The imagery in v 5 is not indicative of the divine warriors march to battle (e.g. Nah 1:4).

1346 Saywer, “Ruined House,” 529.

1347 Here yk actually marks the culmination of a long sentence commencing with 12:2. The previously developed catastrophic scenario in 12:2-5a is now further developed by the description of the funeral of a human being and the mourning by which it is accompanied. Cf. Krüger, Kohelet, 355.

1348 This is the only occurrence of µlw[ tyb in the HB, but the expression was familiar in the context of the ANE. Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 188. He refers to Diodorus Siculus who indicated that the ancient Egyptians referred to their graves as QLQOL, QLQOL “eternal houses.” In Tob 3:6 the phrase TIP 4 lqoi “the eternal place” appears. In the Targum on Isa 14:18 the expression “house of eternity” is found. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 364 points to phrase “he will go over to the house of eternity” from a Deir ‘Alla inscription, lacking any notion of a possible return from the grave. For related instances in the MT, compare Ps 49:12 (eternal home; dwelling place); Job 17:13 (Sheol as my house), Job 30:23 (house appointed for all living). See further Isa 14:18; Gen 15:2 for the use of tyb in reference to the grave. See Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 71-79. Also Wächtler, Der Tod im Alten Testament, 77 for whom µlw[ tyb serves as an euphemism for death.

1349 In this context bbs may refer to a ritual procession.

1350 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 363. For Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 234 anthropology and cosmology entwine in this literary unit, human deterioration and death eventuates in the decline and death of the cosmos. Thus, the picture presented by the imagery is that of creation in the process of being reversed. But 12:5b refers in the first place to individual death.

1351
Such an identification of a cosmic cataclysm is difficult to substantiate. It is significant that while the µlw[tub characterises the limited nature of human life, no further mention is made of the state of nature, which implies that it continues amidst the presence of human death. In nature the hope or potential for continuance remains, while humanity has no hope for return or continuance once they enter the µlw[tub. In this way the finite nature of humanity is vividly described.

The temporal clause al grep da introduces a new sequence in the argument of Qohelet in verse 6. It relates to the theme of 12:5e-f, presenting four images depicting the end of human life. This includes the silver cord (¹skh lbj) that is snapped (qtr, Ni), the golden bowl (bhzh tlg) that is smashed (Åxr), the jar (dk) that is broken (rbv, Ni) at the well (¶wm) and the wheel (lglg) that is broken (Åxr, Ni) at the pit (rwb). It is noticeable that three consecutive imperfects are followed by a perfect. In this way the bowl broken at the pit is indicative of the final stage of death, coinciding with the “return to dust” in 12:7a (compare Ps 31:13 where death is likened to the breaking of a vessel. Also Jer 22:28). If this imagery is considered within the frame of the ruined house theme, desolation inside and outside the house is at issue, sketching a picture of gloom. In terms of an allegorical interpretation the imagery serves as references to the process of human death, i.e. that human frailty gives way to its inherent nature.

It is significant that the imagery employed in 12:6a-c is expected in the context of life rather than the context of death. As such the “silver cord” in v 6a and the “golden bowl” in v 6b are constituent parts of a lamp, presenting a vehicle of light and symbolically of life, which is destroyed. This interpretation is tenable, despite

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1352 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 364. For Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 236 the end of civilisation and the decline of nature is “occasioned by humanities (µdah) march toward their eternal home.” In Egyptian literature and post-Biblical Hebrew, “eternal home” expresses the grave.
1353 Krüger, Kohelet, 355.
1354 Krüger, Kohelet und seine Umwelt, 192. Also Seow, Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem, 224.
1355 Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 236. Gordis, Koheleth, 337 also argues for the metaphorical description of the advent of death within this verse.
1356 In HB wisdom literature lbj occurs only here and in Job 18:10 as subject. Further Job 36:8; 40:25; Prov 5:22.
1357 As reference to a basin for oil hlq also occurs in Zech 4:2-3 as reference to a golden lamp, while Prov 13:9 uses the image of an extinguished lamp for death (“the lamp of the wicked shall be put out”). Cf. Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, 188.
1358 The only two other occurrence of ¶wm “spring, fountain” in the HB occur in Isa 35:7 and 49:10.
1359 In Qohelet rwb occurs only here, and has the double meaning of grave and pit. In 9:10 lwb is used as reference to the grave.
1360 Beek, Prediker / Hooglied, 131.
1361 In Qohelet as a whole aging and death do not present major concerns. Cf. Saywer, “Ruined House,” 519-531. As such the employed imagery might relate more to metaphor of a ruined house than it does to an allegory of old age. But 11:7-12:8 is a rather independent literary unit, and aging and death cannot be ruled out altogether.
1362 This imagery is interpreted either as applying to two independent metaphors, namely “lamp” and “well,” or to a single metaphor, namely “well.” The last is preferred by Gordis, Koheleth, 338 but identifying a double metaphor is also tenable and opted for in this study.
1363 Seow, Ecclesiastes, 364.
1364 For Beek, Prediker / Hooglied, 131 the references to the vessels are symbolic of the light of life. See also 2 Sam 21:17; Job 18:6; 21:17; Prov 13:9.
1365 But no evidence from the Israelite material culture supports an interpretation that the lamp was hung by a silver cord. Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 365.
the lack of clear evidence from the ancient Israelite material culture. The “silver cord” can have the meaning “cord of life” in this context, but its relation with the “golden bowl” is not clear. If $\text{škh l bji}$ and $\text{bīzh tl gare}$ are regarded as constituent parts of a lamp, the implication is that the instrument providing light is destroyed in the same way as the instruments needed to draw water, as source of life, from the well. The source of life becomes inaccessible. The imagery used in reference to the “well / spring” ($\text{hmn}$ in 12:6c is surprising, since it is rather expected in a context of life. This also applies to $\text{r bnh}$ in 12:6d, which here refers to the well, but can also mean “grave.” Given the ambiguous nature of $\text{r bnh}$, its use here is aimed at achieving a rhetorical effect. The spring and well present the localities rather than the objects of destruction, since the jar ($\text{dk}$) for storing water and wheel ($\text{lglg}$) for drawing water are destroyed. Its application can be ascribed to the achievement of a rhetorical effect, i.e. that death still occurs in 12:6d despite the use of imagery associated with life.

In view of v 5e-f the imagery in v 6 c-d may relate to a funerary custom, but the text only partially supports this interpretation. In this way the text entails an element of surprise. The imagery employed in 12:6-7 clearly points out the prominence of the theme of death in this literary unit. In terms of a literal reading a funerary custom, related to the theme of the ruined house, provides a background for v 6c-d, and in terms of an allegorical interpretation the imagery symbolises the end result of human frailty, with $\text{mu də}$ returning to its pre-created status of dust. In both cases the theme of death stands central, and continues in 12:7.

The imagery introduced in v 6 is continued and brought to a close in verse 7. It should not be interpreted as an editorial gloss in view of Qoh 3:21. This argument

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1366 The life-giving water can no longer be drawn, implying that the end has come. Cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 188.
1367 If $\text{r bnh}$ is interpreted as grave, $\text{lglg}$ no longer fits the context. Possibly $\text{lglg}$ is related to $\text{hlg}$ This requires the pointing $\text{lglg}$ related to $\text{hl g}$ (skull), and as such is indicative of a vessel for carrying water rather than a wheel at a well. Lack of archaeological evidence for such lifting devices in Palestine lends support for such an alternative reading, though it requires an emendation of the text. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 367.
1368 In v 6d $\text{l b}$ is translated with “at” indicating location. A translation “into” implies that the wheel falls into the well. Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 231 suggests that $\text{l gl g}$ should be read as reference to a vessel and in parallel with $\text{dk}$. But reading “wheel” does fit the context.
1370 During such a funerary ritual the sherds of the crushed earthen vessels are cast into the pit, symbolising the return of the body to the ground. Cf. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 366. He also refers to archaeological evidence from the Second Temple period, and a comparable ritual amongst the Jews from North Africa and Persia, where the shattering of the earthen vessel at the burial site symbolises the end of human life. Further, as part of Egyptian mourning customs the breaking of the earthen vessel and the pouring out of water is symbolic for the release of the soul from the physical body for the journey to the underworld. Cf. Seow, “Qohelet’s Eschatological Poem,” 232.
1371 Klein, *Kohelet*, 155. He regards Qoh 12:1b-7 as a lvm and points to the parabolic quality of a lvm “der die Angesprochenen zum Überdenken ihrer Situation und zur Zustimmung zu der in ihm ausgedrückten Wahrheit zu bewegen versucht.”
1372 Here it is an ironic reference, since the earthenware is crushed at a well, which usually symbolises a place of life. Cf. Prov 5:15.
1373 Qoh 12:6 should not too easily be interpreted as another instance where nature’s perpetuation is contrasted with human ephemerality and the futility of human efforts (cf. Qoh 1:4). Cf. Krüger, *Kohelet*, 356 who follows this line of argumentation. This paves the way for an eschatological interpretation, which is not shared in this consideration of the text.
1374 Cf. Isa 29:16, 64:8; Jer 18:6; Gen 2:4b-7 as instances where YHWH is referred to as divine potter, and humans as the work of His hands.
is unnecessary, particularly if 3:21 is read in the broader context of 3:16-22. Other than the preceding verses, the theme of v 7 is quite clear. The dust (rɔf) of µda (in view of v 5e) returns (bωv, inasive) to the earth (År), and the spirit (j w) returns (bωv) to God (µjha) who gave it. A different sequence of events might have been expected in v 7, with the return to dust following from the return of the j w to God (cf. Ps 104:30). But by means of this sequence of events v 7 picks up the theme of v 6. With death, µda returns to the earthly elements as it was (hynk) before being created (cf. Gen 3:19). Thus, bereft of its j w, humankind returns to dust. Here Qohelet employs the wider occurring motif in the HB concerning the creation of humankind. Significant is the reference to the spirit that returns to God. Here God is presented as creator and source of life, with the closest parallel in the HB being Ps 104:29-30. The return to dust in 12:7 presents the climax of a central theme in 11:7-12:7, namely the ephemeral nature of humanity. This latches onto the wider theme of the passing nature of all that exists, and leads to the proclamation of l bh in 12:8.

In v 7 the divine-human relation is brought into focus, and also the relation of µjha with death. Life stems from µjha (cf. Num 16:22, “God of the spirits of all flesh”). But this implies that µjha also has the right to reclaim the j w. In view of

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1376 Cf. Michel, Qohelet, 167. Fox, Qohelet and His Contradictions, 308 regards 12:7 as constituting a contradiction with 3:21. The contradiction concerns the ascent of the j w and a belief in life after death or the rejection of such a belief.


1378 Qoh 3:20 also employs rɔf, “All go to one place, all are dust and all turn to dust again.”

1379 For j w in Qohelet, cf. 2:17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 5:15; 6:9; 7:8, 9; 8:8; 11:5; as subject 1:6; 3:19; 10:4; 12:7 and as object 3:21; 8:8; 11:4. But only seldom does it have the meaning of “life-breath.”

1380 For µjha (µjha tmvn) in Qohelet cf. 1:13; 2:24, 26; 3:10, 11, 13, 14, 18; 4:17; 5:1, 3, 5, 6, 17, 18, 19; 6:2; 7:13, 14, 18, 26, 29; 8:2, 12, 13, 15, 17; 9:1, 7; 11:5, 9; 12:7, 13, 14. The use of µjha instead of hyn in Qohelet and Job is indicative of a “distancing procedure” that keeps far from Israel’s core testimony. Cf. Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 397.

1381 In 12:7 the j w emphases that even in the face of death, Qohelet regards God as the giver of all gifts, including life. Cf. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Nicht im Menschen, 230.

1382 The creation imagery is reminiscent of the Menschenschöpfung tradition (cf. Gen 2:7; 3:19; Job 10:9; Ps 104:29-30), but it is here employed in connection with a reversal of creation. Traditional theologies of creation, providence and redemption are challenged by the absoluteness of death. Cf. Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 236.

1383 Klein, Kohelet, 156.

1384 Fox, Qohelet and His Contradictions, 308.

1385 This is indicative of Qohelet’s familiarity with the Torah. Cf. Gordis, Koheleth, 338.

1386 God as creator and source of life is not presented here as redeemer or comforter. Cf. Gordis, Koheleth, 339.


1388 Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 240.

1389 In Qoh 1:6 the wind (j w) returns to its circuits.

1390 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Nicht im Menschen, 230 interprets Qoh 12:7b as an affirmation that the God of Israel is the God of the living and not of the dead.

1391 Here j w is comparable to the µjha tmvn of Gen 2:7. Cf. Brongers, De Scheppingstradities bij de Profeten, 100. Also Seow, Ecclesiastes, 367. For Krüger, Kohelet, 356 the j w of 12:7 is representative of the unpersönliche life-breath. Given the impersonal character of God in Qohelet, this argument is tenable. If this interpretation of the j w is maintained, then human mortality for Qohelet is merely part of human creation. Cf. T. Krüger, “Leben und Tod nach Kohelet und Paulus,” in: M. Ebner et al., Leben trotz Tod (JBTh 19; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005), 199.
Qohelet’s rhetoric of God (see §4.5.2.1) this should not be interpreted positively as if it indicates trust in the creator. It indicates divine ownership, and as such "thus has a direct interest in the jw of humanity." But this divine ownership and nature of the divine interest does not resolve the question concerning the creator-creation relation, given the incomprehensible character of God in Qohelet. The recurring lbh theme, which immediately follows v 7, further points away from interpreting the theme of the return of the jw to God positively too quickly. While the return to dust should not be overinterpreted in the context of v 7, it can indicate a play on the theme of human insignificance in the face of divine omnipotence. But in the first instance the return to dust in 12:7a is a reference to the death of humans (cf. Ps 104:29 and Job 34:14f-15). For this reason an eschatological interpretation of v 7, i.e. as if the death of the whole creation would here be at issue, is not wishful. The primary concern is human death, in this context each individual death, which fits within the frame of the broader theme of the ephemeral nature of all that exist. Thus, the return of the jw to God is not indicative of Jenseits thinking, as if life somehow continues after the moment of death, i.e. when the body decays. Neither Jenseits nor dualistic thinking is operative in Qohelet. In these verses death is presented as the natural

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1393 Here the impression is created that Qohelet’s God is “completely indifferent to differentiations in the world,” i.e. as distant and apathetic. Cf. Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 395.

1394 The jw that leaves the body does not present an immortal soul, but rather the life-breath that was given by and continues to belong to the creator. Cf. I.J.J. Spangenberg, “Die Prediker se Uitsprake oor en Uitkyk op die Dood.” Scriptura 27 (1988): 31. In 12:7 it is not merely the body that decays at death while the jw lives on. Cf. Loader, Polar Structures, 132.

1395 D.R. Hillers, “Dust: Some Aspects of Old Testament Imagery,” in: J.H. Marks and R.M. Good (eds.), Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope (Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987), 105-109. In the HB rp as “dust, dirt,” with ḥa as “earth, ground” presents a metaphor for low worth. Since humans are created from rp, they remain dust under God’s feet. Their substance indicates and reminds of their status before the creator (e.g. Gen 18:27, Job 30:19). That rp indicates such status differentiation is plausible in view of Qoh 5:2 (“God is in heaven and your are on the earth”). A particular location, i.e. the underworld can also be indicated by rp. Cf. Tromp, Primitive Conceptions, 89-91. This is not the case in Qoh 12:7.

1396 The image of man returning to dust is “suggestive of, and derived from, the association of dirt and dust with death, the grave and the world of the dead.” Cf. Hillers, “Dust,” 107-109. See also Qoh 3:20; Job 10:9; Ps 103:14-15; Job 33:6; Isa 26:19; Ps 22:30; Dan 12:2; Job 20:11, 21:26; Ps 30:10; Ps 90:3; Ps 146:4. Hillers refers to the Mesopotamian expression “return to dust” (tāru ana ḫitti), i.e. to die, that was well known in wisdom texts and epic literature.

1397 Cf. Seow, Ecclesiastes, 368; Seow, “Qoheleth’s Eschatological Poem,” 234.

1398 D.L. Miller, The Development of the Concept of Immortality in the Old Testament (Ph.D. diss.; New York, 1977), 208-209 regards Qoh 12:7 as indicative of the typical ancient Near Eastern concept of immortality (e.g. Ps 16; 17; 49; 73; Job 19; Prov 12:28; 14:32.). But no positive perception of an afterlife is visible in Qohelet.

1399 Spronk, Beatific Afterlife, 272 relates the (preexilic) skepticism of Ps 88:11 concerning the ability of God to raise the dead with the apparent (postexilic) criticism of the notion of the immortality of the soul in Qoh 3:19 and 12:7.

1400 In Isa 26:14 the ypar have a shade like existence in Sheol.

1401 Humankind constitutes a body, with the jw as an addition that vivifies the body (cf. Ezek 37:8-10, Gen 2:7). Cf. Fox, Contradictions, 308. The only possible allusion to dualistic thinking is seen in Qoh 3:21.
end of humanity, but also as final and egalitarian, characterising the distinctiveness of Qohelet’s perception of death.\(^{1402}\)

In verse 8 the \(\text{l\h}\) theme reoccurs and with 1:2 forms an inclusio, enframing the whole of the book.\(^{1403}\) But, as argued in §4.1 it also provides a fitting conclusion to 11:7-12:8 as literary unit. As such 12:8 qualifies 12:7, adding a dark shade to its apparent neutral colouring. In this way the event of death described in 12:7 should be read in view of the \(\text{l\h}\) claim in 12:8. A claim that is very present in the larger context of 11:7-12:8. While \(\text{l\h}\) literally has the meaning of “air” or “vapour,” it further has the implied meaning of “vanity” or “brevity.”\(^{1404}\) In the HB \(\text{l\h}\) can also be used to express the notion of something that is ephemeral or insubstantial, and may apply to humanity, life, words, deeds, thoughts, ability and of foreign gods etc.\(^{1405}\) Further, \(\text{l\h}\) can describe that which is “incomprehensible.”\(^{1406}\) From this follows the proposed meaning of “senselessness” or “absurdity” for \(\text{l\h}\) in 12:8.\(^{1407}\) Such a translation encompasses some of the more general connotations of \(\text{l\h}\). Particularly in a topsyturvpy world,\(^{1408}\) of which the framework of its meaning giving system has collapsed, resulting in the impossibility of sure knowledge.\(^{1409}\) Thus, within the framework of wisdom, everything is absurd.\(^{1410}\) This notion of “absurdity” fits the wider context of the book of Qohelet (cf. 1:2), yet here the notion of “vanity” is maintained, given that it is the fleeting nature of life that is at issue in 11:7-12:8, with humanity “hurrying” toward the grave. The notion of “absurdity” (1:2) and “vanity” (12:8) serves as a guide for comprehending other uses of \(\text{l\h}\) in Qohelet.\(^{1411}\) In Qohelet, \(\text{l\h}\) is not used of God or the world in general, but specifically in reference to human existence and

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\(^{1402}\) Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 162 identifies no negative tone, seeing this presentation of death as the mere cessation of life.

\(^{1403}\) Of the 73 occurrences of \(\text{l\h}\) in the HB, 38 are found in Qohelet. It is a *Leitmotif* in Qohelet. Cf. Michel, *Untersuchungen*, 42. The \(\text{l\h}\) theme introduced in 1:2 is further elaborated in the rest of the book, culminating in 12:8. Cf. D.B. Miller, “Qohelet’s Symbolic use of \(\text{l\h}\)” *JBL* 117 (1998): 437.

\(^{1404}\) G.S. Ogden, ““Vanity” it certainly is Not.” *BT* 38 (1987): 301-307. He translates \(\text{l\h}\) in Qohelet as “enigma” or “mystery.” Such a translation does not exclude notions pertaining to “breath / air,” since everything is as breath, i.e. fleeting. Ogden regards the use of \(\text{l\h}\) in Qohelet as descriptive of enigmatic situations where the working out of divine justice (\(\text{qdx}\)) is incomprehensible. The absence of justice in a world created by \(\text{yhl}\) renders everything \(\text{l\h}\).

\(^{1405}\) Michel, *Untersuchungen*, 41-42.

\(^{1406}\) Murphy, *On Translating Ecclesiastes*, 573. Yet he translates \(\text{bh}\) as “vanity” in his commentary. Cf. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 112. He suggests that Fox’s categories of “irrational / rational” does not fit within Qohelet’s thought, and suggests that the nuance of \(\text{l\h}\) lies in the categories “know / not know.”

\(^{1407}\) Michel, *Untersuchungen*, 51, 280; Also M.V. Fox, “The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet.” *JBL* 105 (1986): 409. Both draw from the work of Camus concerning the “absurd,” which is related in Qohelet with the notion of the irrational.

\(^{1408}\) The experience of the world as a volatile place, leading to the notion of the brevity of life, is also encountered in *Ludlul Bêl Nêmegi* Tablet 2 where we read, “He who was alive yesterday is dead today: One moment he is worried, the next he is boisterous. One moment he is singing a joyful song. A moment later he wails like a professional mourner” (*ANET*, 3d ed.; 597)


\(^{1410}\) Miller, “Qohelet’s Symbolic use of \(\text{l\h}\)” 443 regards \(\text{l\h}\) in Qohelet as “a symbol by which to represent the entirety of human experience.”

\(^{1411}\) Idem, 440.
human experience of earthly realities. This also applies to \( \text{lbh} \) in 12:8. In this way \( \text{lbh} \) is related more to Qohelet’s anthropology than his cosmology. Significant in 12:8b is the qualification of \( \text{lbh} \) by \( \text{lk} \) (“all”). I.e., everything related to human existence and human effort is characterised as \( \text{lbh} \). The certainty and finality of death contributes to the \( \text{µylbh \ lbh} \) declaration of 12:8a. In 12:8b \( \text{lk} \) includes the \( \text{jw} \) of 12:7b, which returns to \( \text{µyhlah} \) at the moment of death. The further implications will be considered in the next section.

4.5 Thematic Discussion

In this section the function and relation of creation and death as theological themes in Qoh 11:7-12:8 is considered more closely, in order to determine to what extent the creation theology operative in Qohelet offers a paradigm for interpreting the theme of death.

4.5.1 The Context of Qohelet

Due to the lack of any concrete historical references within the book of Qohelet, arguments concerning its historical context and social setting are for the most part adduced from silence. But Qohelet is not übergeschichtlich and its interpretation requires a context. Most scholars argue that Qohelet should be dated to the postexilic period. In this regard 200 BCE seems a reasonable terminus ante quem, given Ben Sirah’s familiarity with the Qohelet material, the Qohelet fragments found in cave IV at Qumran, and the absence of any clear reference to the events surrounding the Maccabean revolt of 164 BCE. The two most likely contexts for Qohelet are the Persian or Ptolemaic periods. Arguments in favour of a Persian context includes the occurrence of Persian loanwords (cf. \( \text{sdsp} \), 2:5 and \( \text{µgp} \), 8:11; also Esth 1:20), some Aramaisms, its distinct grammar and the economic language of the book.

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1412 Lohfink, *Kohelet*, 201-216. Also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 102. Three referents of \( \text{lbh} \) in Qohelet have been identified, namely “insubstantiality” (expectation vs. reality), “transience” (things that are transient and pass away quickly) and “foulness” (an evaluative term for things that in his experience is fundamentally foul). Cf. Miller, “Qohelet’s symbolic use of \( \text{lbh} \)” 443-452. Thus, \( \text{lbh} \) as “vapour” holds together a set of meanings that cannot be adequately expressed by any single meaning.

1413 N. Lohfink, “Ist Qohelets \( \text{lbh} \)-Aussage erkenntnistheoretisch gemeint?,” in: A. Schoors (ed.), *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom* (BETL 136; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988) 41-59 regards the \( \text{lbh} \) statements in Qohelet as anthropological in their focus.

1414 Here \( \text{lk} \) might anticipate \( \text{µyhlah \ lbh} \) implying that human efforts in particular are \( \text{lbh} \) and not everything known to humanity. But here \( \text{lbh} \) has a general application.

1415 In 12:8 \( \text{lbh} \) further indicates that everything comes to an end with death and that the return of the \( \text{jw} \) to God does not point to an immortal soul. Cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 189.

1416 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, xix.


1418 Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, xxii. Thus, the Seleucid period (ca. 201-142 BCE) seems too late.

1419 Delsman, *Die Datierung*, 169-174. 298 discusses possible Aramaisms in the book and dates Qohelet to the Ptolemaic period.
Linguistic evidence in search of a context for Qohelet is ambiguous. Analysis of Qohelet’s language may also support a setting in the Ptolemaic period (ca 301-198 BCE). This period, particularly the second half of the third century BCE, has become a preferred historical setting for Qohelet. This also applies to the argument based on the use of economic language, since the Ptolemaic period witnessed Palestine’s incorporation into the cosmopolitan world, which introduced new methods of production and stimulated international trade and commerce.

It is perhaps remarkable that Qohelet is not indicative of an apparent polemic against foreign deities or religious influence. Confronted with a changing socio-political environment, the opposite could have been expected, seeing the inevitable exposure to Hellenistic religious and philosophical ideas. But this could be indicative of Qohelet’s audience and social location, e.g. whether he was writing from within a plebeian or aristocratic circle. The absence of such indications points out that.

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1420 E.g. the qotelet vocal pattern in the name ŭl hpq, which is also seen in names occurring in other texts from the Persian period, e.g. trpš (Ezra 2:55, Neh 7:57) and trkp (Ezra 2:57, Neh 7:59). Cf. C.L. Seow, “Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet.” *JBL* 115 (1996): 665.
1422 Delsman, *Die Datierung*, 80. On the basis of his linguistic study of Qohelet, he draws the conclusion that there are no convincing hints in the book that allows for a certain dating or socio-historical placement. For Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, 9-11, 15 the language of Qohelet should not be used as a “barometer” for determining its origin.
1423 Delsman, *Die Datierung*, 298.
1424 Krüger, *Kohelet*, 39, 44. In such a setting Qohelet indicates, “wie Traditionen und Konzepte der israelitisch-jüdischen Kultur in Anbetracht neuer Erfahrungen und nach Maßgabe neuer Fragestellungen und Deutungsperspektiven in hellenistischer Zeit rezipiert und transformiert werden konnten.” For this dating see also Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 50, given Qohelet’s attitude toward rulers; For T. Frydrych, *Living under the Sun*: *Examinations of Proverbs and Qoheleth* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 211 the world of Qohelet is that of “large empires” in which only the rich benefit from the produce of the land. Cf. also Gordis, *Koheleth*, 68, 77; Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 3; Michel, *Qohelet*, 114; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, xx. Others such as Lauha, *Kohelet*, 3 and Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 15-22 refer to a late postexilic though pre-Maccabean dating.
1425 Given the continuance of the Persian Satrapial system (to which Qoh 8 might refer) by Alexander the Great and his successors, Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 59 dated Qohelet to the late third, early second century BCE.
1426 Cf. Whybray, “The Social World,” 243. Seow, “Theology when Everything is out of Control,” 241 employs a similar argument but in favour of the Persian period with its lively economic environment and the monetary change that it brought about. Comparable is the fifth century BCE Jerusalem under the administration of Nehemia (3:15-16), and the volitility of the economy and the vulnerability of ordinary citizens (Neh 5:3-5) brought about by Persian taxation. Qoh 4:12-13 might reflect some of the realities of the Persian period, accounting for the argument of Qoh 9:11-12 that there are no guarantees in life.
1427 Seow, “Theology when Everything is out of Control,” 238-239.
1429 Qohelet’s strict monotheism, as well as the lack of any polemic against competing views, is indicative of Qohelet’s perception of his audience’s monotheistic perspective. Cf. Frydrych, *Living Under the Sun*, 108.
1430 For Finkelstein, *The Pharisees*, 235-237 the thought and style of Qohelet reflects the ideals of the sceptical and cynical plebeian school (in his view also Job). But Finkelstein seems to contradict himself, arguing that “The writer’s weariness and his contempt for affluence are in fact characteristic
exposure does not have to be equated to direct influence or the integration of Jewish and Hellenistic ideas. For in Qohelet Proverbial wisdom is set within a new context, functioning differently and attributed new meaning. For this reason a correspondence in themes and rhetorical styles should not too easily be equated with assimilation. In this regard Qohelet is very much a work of Jewish origin that evolved within a Hellenistic environment.

4.5.2 Creation as a Theological Theme in Qohelet 11:7-12:8

In this section the place and function of creation as a theological theme in Qoh 11:7-12:8 is considered. This will be done within the broader parameters of Qohelet’s rhetoric of the deity (§4.5.3.1), the deity as creator (§4.5.3.1.1) and creation (§4.5.3.2).

4.5.2.1 The Rhetoric of God in Qohelet

The centrality of the deity in Qohelet’s reasoning is explicated by the numerous occurrences of µyhλα. But how the designations of God in Qohelet are to be understood, and whether they convey a special understanding within their contexts is debatable. Particularly in view of the persistent impersonal designation of the deity as µyhλα i.e. “the God.” Indeed, the deity is never addressed directly in not of the aging rich, but rather of the philosopher’s vision of them.” (236). Patrician and pietist outlooks are critisised by Qohelet. For Whybray, “The Social World,” 242 Qohelet and its readership belong to the privileged class of society (cf. 7:21), given that Qohelet takes for granted the possession of wealth and the possibility of a leisureed existence. Also Barton, Ecclesiastes, 62-65 for whom Qohelet is part of the “wealthy skeptical aristocracy” out of which the Sadducees eventually developed. Further Gordis, Koheleth, 68, 77. For Crisemann, Die unveränderbare Welt, 55-57 Qohelet reflects the alienation of the elite, functioning as agents of foreign overlords, from the rest of the people.

E.g. the absense of a clear body / soul dualism. Qoh 12:7 is not indicative of an immortality soul verses the mortality of the flesh. The return of the j w to µyhλα implies that it ceases to exist.

The only divine name in Qohelet is µyhλα, with no occurrence of hwhy. This is significant for Qohelet’s theology, but the use of the more generic µyhλα in later texts is not uncommon. Throughout
Qohelet. This raises questions concerning the perceived creator-creation relation. The impersonal nature of the rhetoric of God has led to the argument that this deity is not the same God encountered in the wider context of the HB. But such an argument for the “otherness” of God in Qohelet’s rhetoric is not sufficient reason to argue for His “foreignness.” For most of Qohelet’s postulates concerning God are not foreign to the HB. This includes the postulate of God as creator, i.e. as giver and possessor of all life, which is concretised particularly in Qoh 11:7-12:8. In this literary unit the deity is referred to as creator (12:1a), and the possessor of the jw, to whom it will return at the moment of death (12:7b). Qoh 11:9b is reflective of the deity’s concern and involvement with creation, as stipulated by a reference to the judgment of God over human activity. Further, in Qoh 11:7-12:8 youth and old age are weighed against each other, and God is ascribed a central place in both phases of existence.

The depiction of the deity as creator in Qoh 11:7-12:8 is peculiar within the broader parameters of the book, in which God remains the Deus absconditus, the maker of a problematic world. The divine works are incomprehensible as the deity (cf. Qoh 3:11; 8:17; 11:5). This perception of God as remote and unknowable, and

the LXX translates with qĕô - / 0  qĕô -, and the Vulgate reads Deus. The Peshitta translates the 39 occurrences of with mārāyā’ (x 16) and ’ālāhā’ (x 23). Cf. R.B. Salters, “The Word for God in the Peshitta of Koheleth.” VT 21 (1971): 251-54. In his view mārāyā’ could be attributed to a later editor, conscious of the absence of the tetragrammaton. In the Targum of Qohelet, is consistently (but for two exceptions) rendered hwhy since it has become a “too remote and general term for Judaism.” Th persistent use of as universal deity, since his was not required by his theological environment.

Burkes, God, Self and Death, 82. God is present only on the fringes of Qohelet’s rational argument. Cf. Backhaus, Zeit und Zufall, 382; Schoors, “Theodicy in Qohelet,” 407.

Worthy, “Qohelet as a Theologian,” 246-247. This view is explicated in the argument of Lauha. Kohelet, 17 for whom Qohelet’s God “ist nicht der Gott des israelitischen Glaubens: das Verhältnis des Menschen zu Gott ist bei ihm anders als allgemein im Alten Testament. Es ist der Gott, von den jw nicht…” For Schubert, Schöpfungstheologie, 82-83 the God of Qohelet “…ist ein aus freier, selbstgewählter und niemand zur Rechenschaft verpflichteter Entscheidung handelnder Gott.”

For Frydrych, Living Under the Sun, 108-109 the use of hwhy indicates that Qohelet’s main objective was not to determine who the deity is, but what the deity is like. Qohelet did not promote hwhy as universal deity, since his was not required by his theological environment.

R.E. Murphy, “The sage in Ecclesiastes and Qoheleth the sage,” in J.G. Gammie and L.G. Perdue (eds.), The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 263-271 at 269. In particular three affirmations of God as creator in Proverbial wisdom also occur in Qohelet, namely 1) God governs long term (Qoh 3:14-15, 5:2, 12:7); 2) It is this God that judges all (Qoh 2:26, 3:17, 5:6, 7:26, 8:13-14, 11, 12:14); 3) God gives and is the sole provider (Qoh 2:24, 5:18-20, 6:2, 8:15, 9:7). Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 393-394, ascribes these affirmations to Israel’s “core testimony.” The affirmation of divine judgment is problematic in Qohelet. It has to be eventuated in this life, but Qohelet does not perceive any justice under the sun.


Seow, Ecclesiastes, 54, 59 identifies a “theology from below” in Qohelet, i.e. when Qohelet is referring to humanity he is indeed speaking about God.


J.L. Crenshaw, A Whirlpool of Torment: Israelite Traditions of God as an Oppressive Presence (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 75. Qohelet no longer seeks to establish any kind of dialogue with the deity, who is distant and not to be found in human experience.
the envisioned distance between God and humanity (5:2), does not result in a designation of God as “terrible.” But the deity is to be feared. This notion relates to the imperative of 12:1a to “remember (rkz) your creator,” which could carry the connotation of “fear” rather than “reverence” (hwhy tary cf. Prov 1:7) for the deity. The implication is that humanity should remain aware of its ambiguous relation with the creator, as suggested in Qoh 5:2. In a very real sense Qohelet perceives μνὴλα as mysterium tremendum et fascinans. As such, a neglect to fear God is folly, despite the fact that it offers no guarantees (Qoh 8:11-14). Thus, the call to “remember” / “fear” the creator is motivated by the incomprehensibility of the deity rather than the causality principle.

While God is persistently portrayed as incomprehensible, the deity is also consistently perceived as the God of life. As such the origin and destination the jw is ascribed to μνὴλά (12:7b). This implies that God is present in life’s moments of origin and cessation. However, during the course of life the divine presence and activity remains ambiguous, if not impossible to comprehend (3:11). This also brings into question the continued relation of the jw and μνὴλά. Qohelet’s rhetoric of the deity leads to a complex and at time contradictory profile sketch. But the deity is not excluded from life’s moments of creation and death.

4.5.2.1.1 Creation Theology in Qohelet

The book of Qohelet represents a creation theology “at its most formal and formidable,” depicting God as the creator whose sovereignty cannot be challenged. It simultaneously lacks traditional creation theology, since no divine acts of

1448 God is never called “terrible” (arwn cf. Exod 15:11; Deut 7:21; Neh 1:5), but at times Qohelet seems to be aiming at this, depicting God as sovereign despot, accountable to no-one. Cf. Frydrych, Living Under the Sun, 110-111.
1449 In Qohelet the phrase hwhy tary is not employed, but the notion of “fearing God” is identifiable in Qoh 3:14, 5:6, 7:18 and 8:12-13; 12:13. Cf. also Frydrych, Living Under the Sun, 110-111. Unlike Prov 18:10 the “name of YHWH” (hwhy µν) is not perceived as a stronghold for the righteous (qώδx).
1450 Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 234. For Boström, The God of the Sages, 187 this notion of “fear” in Qohelet implies a correct attitude. Also Seow, Ecclesiastes, 57-59 who argues that in Qohelet, the one who fears is the one who is aware of the distance between God and humanity. Humanity must live with an awareness of its place in relation to God.
1452 For Schmid, “Himmelsgott, Weltgott und Schöpfer,” 124 Qoh 5:2 stresses the incomprehensible nature of God, but also the divine power, which is another reason why God should be feared.
1453 Schubert, Schöpfungstheologie, 82-83.
1455 For Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 393 this is part of Qohelet’s “counter-testimony.”
creation or sustenance are explicitly mentioned.\textsuperscript{1457} Yet the notion of God as creator provides an invariable in Qohelet.\textsuperscript{1458}

Explicit references to divine acts of creation are absent in Qohelet,\textsuperscript{1459} but it does contain various references to the works (\textit{hc[\textit{mv}} \textit{hc[\textit{nih}}) of God (cf. 3:11; 7:13; 11:5; also Ps 19:2; Job 10:3-11; 34:19).\textsuperscript{1460} Indeed, \textit{µyh} \textit{a} is depicted as the one who makes all (\textit{lhAa hc[y} 11:5). For this reason a sparsity of references to divine acts of creation is not indicative of creation’s insignificance as theological theme in Qohelet.\textsuperscript{1461} While traditional creation theology is lacking in Qohelet, he does utilise imagery and motifs encountered in earlier creation traditions of the HB, but with a different theological intent,\textsuperscript{1462} suiting his rhetorical purpose. Earlier creation traditions are re-evaluated and re-interpreted to fit within the framework of his epistemology, resulting in his distinct theology. This includes a strictly monotheistic view of the deity, which provides the basis for his rhetoric of God as creator. It is not unique, but is peculiar to Qohelet. The creation rhetoric of Qohelet includes no reference to God “speaking” (\textit{µyh} \textit{a mnA[y ciw} creation into being as in Gen 1:1-2:4a, nor any reference to God “interacting” with humanity as in Gen 2:4b-3:24 (3:9).\textsuperscript{1463} In this sense the creator God in Qohelet, present at life’s moments of creation and death, remains a very distant God (\textit{µyh} \textit{lhA}).

Also absent in Qohelet’s creation theology is the notion of humanity being created in the image of God (\textit{µyh} \textit{a µlxb wmlxb), cf. Gen 1:26-27).\textsuperscript{1464} While this notion is specific to Genesis 1-11, its absence in Qohelet is pertinent. In 7:29 Qohelet does affirm that \textit{µyh} \textit{a} made humankind (\textit{µdah}) upright (\textit{rvy}). But humans, rather than the creator, are to be blamed for their corrupt nature, seeking many “inventions” (\textit{twnbvj}). Qohelet’s creation theology also lacks the divine imperative that humans should have dominion (\textit{hdc}) over, or to subdue (\textit{vbk}) creation (cf. Gen 1:28).\textsuperscript{1465} This is indicative of Qohelet’s low estimation of humanity\textsuperscript{1466} and reflects his perception of the divine-human relation, further affirming the distance between creator and creation. Qohelet

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1458} In the HB wisdom tradition the acknowledgement of God as creator serves as the orientation point for a well-lived life within the world ordered by God, but in Qohelet this acknowledgement does not have the desired effect. Cf. Brueggemann, \textit{Theology of the Old Testament}, 397.
\item \textsuperscript{1459} The verbs \textit{hc[} and \textit{frtnare} employed in reference to God’s actions, but never in reference to a particular act of creation. Cf. Schubert, \textit{Schöpfungstheologie}, 84-105.
\item \textsuperscript{1460} In Qohelet \textit{hc[} \textit{mlso} refers to human work. Cf. Qoh 2:11; 3:22; 4:4; 8:9, 11, 14 (x2). Further 2:17; 9:10 (subject) and 1:14; 2:4; 4:3; 5:5; 8:17; 9:7: 12:14 (object).
\item \textsuperscript{1461} The reference to God as creator in 12:1a emphasises creation as an ever present theological theme in Qohelet. Cf. Schubert, \textit{Schöpfungstheologie}, 98.
\item \textsuperscript{1462} Imagery from Gen 1:1-2:4a and Gen 2:4b-24, and to a lesser extent the prophetic tradition is reflected in Qohelet. In this regard the term “familiarity” is preferred above “dependence.”
\item \textsuperscript{1463} Given the distance between God and creation in Qohelet, God cannot be considered as redeemer. Cf. Perdue, \textit{Wisdom and Creation}, 234. The addresse of 12:1a should remember his creator, without certainty that the creator will remember His creation.
\item \textsuperscript{1464} Contra Gen 1:26 “let us make man in our image” (\textit{umxb µda hc[}). Qoh 7:29 states that God made man (\textit{µdah} \textit{upright (rvy}), but this qualification is given a negative twist, since humanity seeks many “inventions” (\textit{twnbvj}) that brings their “upright” created state into question.
\item \textsuperscript{1465} Humanity’s elevated status in creation is also challenged in Job 38-41.
\item \textsuperscript{1466} Cf. Qohelet’s equation of humanity and beasts (3:19), their basic status as dust (3:20; 12:7) and the hierarchical relation between God and humanity (5:2).
\end{itemize}
affirms that God made everything beautiful (hpy in its time (wfb) in 3:11, but creation does not enjoy the blessing of the creator (urb, Gen 1:31). This positive note in Qohelet’s creation rhetoric is immediately qualified in 3:11, since this time (t[) cannot be known. As such the beauty of the divine works becomes useless in terms of Qohelet’s epistemology. While Qoh 3:2-8 seems to support the notion of creation as divinely ordered, as exemplified in Gen 1:1-2:4a with God “separating” (lydbh), this created order looses its beneficence since it is inaccessible to human reason (3:11). For this reason humanity has no profit (wyty) from the knowledge that God is responsible for creation and that He has established an order in it. For Qohelet, God is the creator of a problematic world, in which no certainty other than death is to be found. While Qohelet’s rhetoric of God as creator cannot be judged as positive he never disputes God as creator. With death, it presents the only other certainty in the book of Qohelet.

It is particularly striking that no connection is made in Qohelet between wisdom (hnj) and divine creation, at least not in the sense of Prov 8:22-23, where wisdom is present with God at the beginning (tyvar), even before creation (“from everlasting,” µliprm). An identification of wisdom with the divine works and the positive evaluation of such a connection between divine works and wisdom as in Ps 104:24 (tyc, hnj b µlk, “in wisdom you have made them all”) is also absent in Qohelet. This disjunction of wisdom and divine creation in Qohelet should be evaluated in terms of his general debunking of wisdom’s value. Nevertheless, God as creator remains a leading motif in Qohelet’s rhetoric. A ramification of Qohelet’s view of wisdom as depotentiated is that God, as creator, has become inaccessible to human reason. The divine designs for the world are irrevocable and inscrutable. God remains the controlling entity in human life situations. This presents a vexing aspect of Qohelet’s

Creation’s beauty or appropriateness receives an aesthetic value rather than moral judgment in Qohelet. This aesthetic value is limited by the qualification wfb “in its time” (3:11). Cf. Crenshaw, A Whirlpool of Torment, 82. The beauty in creation is further qualified in Qoh 7:20, 29 stating that creation is spoiled on account of humanity. Dearman, Religion and Culture, 224 sees a connection with the prayer of Solomon in his dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8:46).

Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 239, 241. As such it is no longer possible to live in harmony with the divinely established created order.

The observation of creation’s beauty results from wisdom’s failure as epistemological tool. Wisdom provides no absolute insight into the works of the creator. Other than the book of Job, wisdom’s worth is not restored in Qohelet by means of divine intervention (Job 38-41). Rather, divine silence persists, as does Qohelet’s questioning.


The observation of God’s works in Qoh 7:13 leads to the awareness that what God has made ‘crooked’ (tψ) cannot be made straight or corrected (çf) by humanity.


In Job the relation between wisdom and divine creation is also scrutinised, but wisdom’s value is affirmed (Job 28).

Humanity cannot “discover” (nrm) God’s works (Qoh 3:11), but at least they can know that all creation is the work of the same God (Qoh 7:13; 12:1, 7). Compare Isa 45:9 that states the unquestionable nature of the divine works.
perception of God as creator, and the world which operates according to divine decree.

Qohelet’s argument concerning the failure of wisdom has ramifications for the perceived divine-human relation. No means remain for securing one’s place in creation, or one’s place in relation to the creator, and as a result the world has become a volatile place. For this reason the admonishment in 5:2 is not surprising. Indeed, the location of God in heaven (µymvb, i.e. “almighty, elevated, intransitory”) and humanity on earth (ÅrahÅ, i.e. “dependant, insignificant, transitory”) does not merely point to a spatial distance (i.e. two cosmological extremes), but also to a differentiation of status. As such the divine-human relation in Qohelet gains a hierarchical quality. While not explicitly stated, the trustworthiness of the creator becomes questionable. Humanity must live with an awareness of the distance between God and creation. It is part of their “share” (qlj) in life. Unlike the book of Job, Qohelet contains no theophany to underscore the importance of the divine-human relationship, as is the case in the divine speeches in the book of Job (38-41). God remains disturbingly absent in the world as perceived by Qohelet. This distance cannot be breached by means of human activity. While Qohelet severely scrutinises this distance, the notion of divine involvement in creation is not entirely rejected. As already stated, glimpses of such divine “involvement” are located in life’s moments of creation and death, and judgment, as demonstrated in Qoh 11:7-12:8.

4.5.2.1.2 Creator and Creation in Qoh 11:7-12:8

Creation is an important theological theme in Qoh 11:7-12:8, despite the fact that the text does not abound with creation terminology. The importance of creation as a theological theme is indicated by the clustering of ideas relating to creation. This includes the contrast of light and darkness; the reference to God (µynål) within the context of judgment (11:9); the reference to God as creator (12:1a), and God as giver and possessor of the jwr (12:7). Indeed, in 11:7 life is characterised in positive terms, since light (rwa) is sweet and it is good for the eyes to see the sun (vmv). This positive affirmation of life continues in 11:8a, since many years of life should serve as a reason for joy (jmč), particularly since the days of darkness will be many (11:8b), and

1476 Boström, The God of the Sages, 178.
1477 Both wisdom and cult looses its potential to provide security in Qohelet. For Qohelet it is no longer certain that wisdom leads to life (contra Prov 12:28; 13:14; 14:27; 11:30), or that the cult offers a means for safeguarding life. Cf. Clements, Wisdom in Theology, 80.
1478 Two fundamental assumptions of traditional wisdom, namely that God is moral and the world trustworthy, become obsolete. Cf. Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 125.
1479 Houtman, Der Himmel, 231. Job 2:12-13 also reflects this divine-human differentiation, where the friends sprinkle dust (rpł) on their heads “toward heaven” (hryn) v 12 and sit down with Job “on the ground” (Åral v 13). Cf. also 2 Chron 20:6; Dan 2:28, 18, 47; Ps 123:1; Lam 3:41 where God is qualified as “almighty” by means of µynål. This qualitative location calls to mind the Babylonian sun god Šamaš, who by means of his daily journey through the heavens saw all injustice and maintained the social and moral equilibrium on earth. Cf. ANET (3d ed.; 1969), 387-389.
1480 The divine-human differentiation is further explicated by the contrast of the infinite nature of God and His works with the finite nature of humanity and their works.
1481 Frydrych, Living Under the Sun, 125.
1482 Dearman, Religion and Culture, 223.
1483 Whybray, “Qohelet as a Theologian,” 246. The notion of God as sole creator, but also as the one who reduces his creation to dust, is rather unique in Qohelet’s Umwelt.
all that comes is $lbh$ (11:8c). In 11:9a-d the $rwjb$ is advised to make the most of life, keeping in mind God’s judgment (11:9e-f). The enjoyment of life is also advocated in 11:10a-b, seeing that the time of youth is fleeting. In 11:7-10 “life” is advocated as opportunity, but the fleeting nature of youthful life is contrasted with the duration of life in the process of deterioration. No value judgment is attributed to creation as such, but rather to different moments in life. Further, Qohelet is here addressing an individual ($rwjb$, 11:9a; also 12:1a, with the second singular masculine suffix), though the interest in the book is primarily on humanity in general. The reference to divine judgement ($fpvm$ in 11:9 is detached from the wider context of the imagery, but here applies to the $rwjb$. As such it points to divine interest in creation, even if it is from a distance. Thus the dominant view of divine apathy momentarily allows for a notion of divine concern.

The elusive nature of the deity in 11:7-12:8 is indicated by the use of the impersonal $\mu\gamma\lambda\alpha$ (11:9f; 12:7b). As such “your creator” ($\up\gamma\nu\nu\nu\lambda\alpha$, ptc. of $arb$) in 12:1a is all the more significant. It presents a unique case in the HB wisdom literature. Here it emphasises the importance of the God as creator theme in Qohelet. It has been suggested that the reference to “your creator” indicates an attempt at bridging the gap between the creator and humanity, establishing a more personal relation. But this argument looses ground in view of Qoh 11:5, where such a personal relation between creator and (individual) creation is thwarted. Life’s origin remains a mystery. The argument also looses ground in view of the tension concerning $rkz$ in 12:1a (see below). The creator remains elusive, and as such knowledge of the creator does not provide any basic security for humanity. While the use of $\up\gamma\nu\nu\nu\lambda\alpha$ is most probably intentional, it does not establish a more personal divine-human relation.

The creator must be remembered ($rkz$) in the prime of life, given that this moment in life is fleeting. The emphasis on remembering the creator in life is in part due to the knowledge that the possibility for communion with the creator is limited to the time of life. When death sets in, the change has passed. For this reason the argument that the $jw$ returns to $\mu\gamma\lambda\alpha$ who gave it (12:7b) offers no certainty, or reason for hope on

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1484 This is a typical formulation in wisdom literature, but presents a shift of focus in Qohelet.
1485 This is evidenced by the abundant use of $\mu\nu\lambda\alpha$ (x 49) and the scant use of $\nu\nu\nu$ (x 10). Cf. Schoors, “Words Typical of Qohelet,” 17. Also R. Gordis, “Was Kohelet a Phoenician? Some Observations on Methods of Research.” JBL 74 (1955): 112. In this regard Frydrych, Living under the Sun, 161 oberserves that humanity in Qohelet is not thought of in absolute individualistic terms, but is rather seen as “a single, continuous flow of generations and it is precisely the character of this collective flow that determines the nature of individual human existence.”
1486 Qohelet is primarily concerned with how God relates to humanity and not vice versa. Cf. Frydrych, Living under the Sun, 199.
1487 In the exilic-postexilic period $arb$ became a terminus technicus for referring to divine acts of creation. Cf. Schmidt, Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift, 164-167. This is pertinent in the P creation account (Gen 1:1, 21, 27) and Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40:26, 28; 41:20; 42:5; 43:1, 7, 15; 45:7, 8, 12, 18; 54:16), but in these traditions God is never referred to as creator.
1488 Schubert, Schöpfungstheologie, 98.
1490 Perdue, Wisdom and Creation, 231-232. This tradition is also reflected in Job 10:8-12 and Ps 139:13-16. Also Seow, Ecclesiastes, 59 who shares this view.
1491 Van der Wal, “Qoheleth 12:1a,” 418 argues for the notion of a “basic security.”
something more after death. In Qoh 11:7-12:8 the theme of God as creator is very
clear, but within the broader context of Qohelet, God’s works remain precarious
within the capacity of human knowledge (היה), and as such do not provide any
security. For this reason the imperative in Qoh 12:1a should not be interpreted as
an indication of Qohelet being a so-called preacher of joy. An awareness of God as
creator does not serve to relativise the intense awareness of personal mortality
proclaimed in the book of Qohelet. It should be noted that the return of the י to
םה in 12:7b makes clear that life remains the divine prerogative, despite the event
of death. But in view of the absolute nature of death, this knowledge offers little
reason for joy.

While the creation theology of Qohelet contains no description of a process of divine
creation, 11:7-12:8 does contain a description of the process of physical deterioration
of the individual created being. This is particularly the case in 12:3-6. The unnatural
flow of events in 12:2 is of rhetorical significance because it is unexpected (contra
Gen 1:16-17). All the luminaries (sun, moon, stars) and light (רה) as such are
darkened (12:2a-b), and clouds return immediately after the rain (12:2c). Such an
unexpected turn of events contributes to a perception of creation as volatile. This
notion of unexpectedness is absent in 12:3-6, and the rhetorical effect of these verses
is that the described events are identifiable. At issue is ruin and deterioration, and it
applies to the life of each created being. Within the realm of life, the inevitability of
death cannot be escaped. In the process of deterioration the creator is quite absent.

This results from the perception of deterioration and death as an inherent part of
creation, finding its place within the wider frame of Qohelet’s creation theology,
particularly in the framework of 11:7-12:8, in which God is present.

The description of ruin and deterioration culminates with the description of the death
of the individual, which returns to dust (רָדע, 12:7a). In this regard Qohelet shares a
wider occurring theme in the HB (e.g. Gen 3:19; Ps 104:29). In 12:7a dust is said to
return to the earth (ארץ) as it was, indicating the inherent nature of individual beings.
Qohelet is recycling a familiar theological motif, but as already stated, also affirms a
perceived status differentiation. Unlike 3:20-21, the individual is in focus in 12:7,
with no reference to the beast (המב). But the notion is shared that the basic substance
of all created beings is dust, and that all share the same fate, namely death. What is
doubtful in 3:21 is presented as certain in 12:7b. But both texts are set within a
broader context in which God is presented as creator.

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1493 In the world turned upside down of Qohelet, God, reality and the place of humanity in creation had
to be re-thought. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 238 refers to a “new worldview” operative in Qohelet,
and argues that it is by entering into the boundaries of this world, i.e. of creation, that one is offered an
alternative way of existence. In this worldview humanity is removed from the centre of creation.
1494 Reading 12:1a and 12:7b together supports the argument that life belongs to the creator, but offers
no reason for a positive interpretation. Humanity is powerless in matters of life and death (Qoh 8:8).
1495 In view of Qohelet’s cyclical worldview (cf. Qoh 1:4-11), death brings the cycle of life to an
inevitable close, i.e. back to naught. As such Qohelet’s questioning of humanity’s מְוָי and כֹּל is
understandable, and the claim that all is comprehensible.
1496 This notion of deterioration contrasts with Qoh 3:14, that argues for the eternal endurance (׀וֹלֵל) of
that which God has made ({|}).
According to Qohelet’s creation theology, life is one’s God given “share” (נֵצָה), and carries the imperative (ள) that life’s moments should be utilised, though in a qualified manner (וֹדֵל). This qualification is particularly significant, given the elusive nature of the deity and the potentially volatile character of creation. But it is within this creation that life, with its moments of joy and remembrance, has to be lived.

4.5.3 Death as a Theological Theme in Qoh 11:7-12:8

While life is to be lived within the context of divine creation and in relation with the creator, the question remains how this life is to be lived in view of the certainty of death. Death for Qohelet presents the distant, though absolute end and the וֹדֵל will do well to keep it in mind. Life is the occasion for joy (גֵּד), but also the time to remember (וֹדֵל), i.e. to consider the character of ones createdness, the relation with the creator, and one’s place within creation. The imperatives גֵּד and וֹדֵל present a tension that is not resolved within the context of 11:7-12:8. But this tension is characteristic of Qohelet’s rhetoric, and does not need to be resolved. It is clear however that גֵּד is the leading theme in 11:7-10, while וֹדֵל is the leading theme in 12:1-8. As a result of this tension, a moment of uncertainty is always present in Qohelet’s argumentation, also concerning the theme of death.

In this regard Barth raised the question whether death in Qohelet is “eine Art Naturgesetz, eine vom Schöpfer aus guten Gründen gesetzte, unabänderliche Ordnung? Oder ist er ein irrationales Schicksal, dem wir uns gern oder ungern zu unterwerfen haben?” But in terms of Qohelet’s argumentation and the nature of the imagery employed, death is perceivable as the divinely determined natural end of all life, and also as the incomprehensible fate of all, over which neither the wise nor the fool has any control. For this reason Qohelet’s rhetoric of death, particularly in Qoh 11:7-12:8, will now be considered.

4.5.3.1 The Wisdom of Qohelet and the Theme of Death

Qohelet seriously scrutinises the basic tenets of proverbial wisdom and in the process debunks the value of wisdom (חכמה), as demonstrated in Qoh 7:15. Indeed, through personal experience and empiric observation (1:13), Qohelet is aware that

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1497 Clements, Wisdom in Theology, 91.
1498 E.P. Lee, The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet’s Theological Rhetoric (BZAW 353; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005).
1499 For Barth, Die Errettung, 159 these two perspectives should be separated, though both are present in the HB.
1500 The critical spirit of Qohelet also occurs in Sirach and Wisdom, though these two texts reaffirm some of the wisdom tenets that Qohelet disputes, particularly the principle of retribution. Qohelet’s critical reasoning was well received by the Sadducees, while Sirach and Wisdom’s reasoning found further expression in thoughts of the Pharisees. For M.V. Fox, “Wisdom in Qohelet,” in: L.G. Perdue et al., In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), 122 Qohelet’s wisdom is foreign to the context of the ANE, but at home in Qohelet’s Hellenistic environment.
1501 That the righteous (مِ) dies in righteousness and that the wicked (לֹא) prolongs life in wickedness presents the ultimate reversal of proverbial wisdom, and this is what Qohelet “observes” (וֹדֵל).
ultimate wisdom is a chimera and can never be attained (6:11f). This has implications for his perception and evaluation of death. From the opening chapter of Qohelet, the different take on wisdom’s worth is evident. Solomon as the epitome of a wise person is put to word (1:1), only to debunk the value of wisdom (1:17). For Qohelet this implies wisdom as a rigid, dogmatic system. As such to “seek” (vrd) and “search out” (rwr) understanding by means of wisdom is a profitless venture, characterised as lhb (1:13, 17). For indeed much wisdom and knowledge merely brings grief and sorrow (1:18). For Qohelet wisdom lost its ability to “steer” or “guide” (twrj t, cf. Prov 1:5; 11:14; 12:5; 20:18; 24:6; Job 37:12) the wise through life. As such Qohelet is critical of proverbial wisdom, but does not reject it altogether (2:13; 7:18-19; 8:12). He rather re-thinks its basic postulates and reframes it in terms of his experience.

In this way the Tun-Ergebn-Zusammenhang is also re-evaluated. This principle is also scrutinised in the book of Job, but Qohelet contains no reaffirmation of its validity as does the book of Job (Job 42:10-17). As such Qohelet verges on the brink of rejecting it. But he does not, and maintains the notion of a divinely established order in creation (3:1-8). However, this order as perceived by Qohelet no longer serves as a means of securing one’s place in creation, due to wisdom’s incapacity to comprehend it (3:11), loosing its beneficial quality. For

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1503 According to F.J. Backhaus, “Denn Zeit und Zufall trifft sie alle”: Studien zur Komposition und zum Gottesbild im Buch Qohelet (BBB 83; Frankfurt: Anton Hain, 1993), 392 death in Qohelet as the fate of all does not present an existential crisis, but rather a crisis concerning the principles of wisdom.
1504 Von Rad, Wisdom in Israel, 70 argued that conflict within wisdom arises when insights considered at one stage as correct become ‘dogmatically’ hardened. That is, when “experience no longer continues to liberate that which is known and where that which is known is not being constantly re-examined.” Or as Schmid, Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung, 165 formulates it, “Sprache und Wirklichkeit decken sich nicht mehr.” The result is knowledge that conflicts with the evidence of reality. In this regard Loader, Polar Structures, 3, 123 refers to the context bound nature of wisdom sayings, and that these should be brought back to reality, i.e. made applicable for present situations in order to prevent it from becoming a fixed dogmatic system, no longer in touch with reality. The tension between “doctrine” and “protest” is never resolved in Qohelet.
1505 Central to the reasoning of Qohelet is the admittance that knowledge is fragmentary. Cf. Crenshaw, A Whirlpool of Torment, 79-80. Qohelet rarely uses terms besides hrqj and t[d employed as a pendant to hrqj and should not be distinguished. The knowledge Qohelet acquires is labelled hrqj and t[d though he also uses wrv “skill” and wvj “calculation.” Cf. Fox, “Wisdom in Qohelet,” 117.
1506 Qohelet’s response to the questions that he poses to life, distinguish his reasoning from traditional sages. Cf. W. Zimmerli, Die Weisheit des Predigers Salomo (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1936), 14. The critical potential of traditional wisdom comes to bloom in Qohelet.
1507 Experience is Qohelet’s primary epistemological source. Cf. M.V. Fox, “Qohelet’s Epistemology,” HUCA 58 (1987): 137-155. Also Frydych, Living Under the Sun, 69 who regards personal experience as primary modus operandi for Qohelet, as is indicated by the frequent use of hr (“to see”), [d (“to know”) and ḥmr (“to find”). Also Murphy, “The Sage,” 268.
1508 Schubert, Schöpfungsteologie, 83.
1509 In Qoh 4:1-2 the observation of oppression in life, leads to the dead being valued above the living.
1510 Zimmerli, Die Weisheit des Predigers Salomo, 14. Wisdom is perceived as better than folly in Qoh 2:13, but this does not imply that wisdom has any profit (cf. 2:14-15).
1511 Qohelet perceives the world as cyclical and consistent (1:4-7), to the point of being static and unchanging. But change can also occur rapidly. Cf. Frydych, Living Under the Sun, 69, 70-71.
1512 For Schmid, Gerechtigkeit, 164 this order is signified by the root qdh in Israel’s wisdom literature.
1513 In Qohelet’s view knowledge is fragmentary and the understanding of reality only partial. Cf. Crenshaw, A Whirlpool of Torment, 79-80. Qohelet’s advice in 5:2 that people’s words should be few
this reason one’s place in creation can no longer be secured by means of the causality principle.\textsuperscript{1515} This leaves humanity standing helpless in the face of death (8:8), which transcends the bounds of the principle of retribution.\textsuperscript{1516} I.e., death does not discriminate.\textsuperscript{1517} For Qohelet no retribution is expected in the present, and even less after the moment of death.\textsuperscript{1518} In this way the nature of the deity becomes questionable, since the divine character cannot be evaluated in terms of the principle of retribution. This contributes to the theological crisis encountered in Qohelet, particularly in view of the individual’s position in relation to the deity.

As a result of this “paradigm shift” regarding wisdom’s value, death acquires a different characteristic in Qohelet.\textsuperscript{1519} The creation-death relation becomes debatable,\textsuperscript{1520} since death can no longer be “thwarted” by means of wisdom.\textsuperscript{1521} Death rather marks the end of the wise and fool alike.\textsuperscript{1522} This perception of death necessarily has implications for Qohelet’s evaluation of life’s profit.\textsuperscript{1523} Indeed, Qohelet proclaims his hatred of life (2:17), motivated by his observations.\textsuperscript{1524} As such the creation-death relation is characterised by a tension, with no attempt at resolving it. Despite the crisis of wisdom in Qohelet, the two invariables are maintained, namely God as creator and the certainty of death. A tension is also noticeable in the creator-death relation.\textsuperscript{1525} While death presents the natural end of all life and an inherent part

undermines the central means of divine-human communication, particularly at a sanctuary. Qohelet does not engage in an argument with God, but directs his arguments to his fellow \textit{homo sapiens}. See also A. Schellenberg, \textit{Erkenntnis als Problem: Qohelet und die alttestamentliche Diskussion um das menschliche Erkennen} (OBO 188; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 2002).

\textsuperscript{1514} For Reventlow, “Tod und Leben,” 17 “Die unterschiedlose Todesgrenze bringt jedes Begreifen einer gerechten Ordnung in der Welt zum Scheitern.”

\textsuperscript{1515} According to Schubert, \textit{Schöpfungstheologie}, 83 \textit{hkrj} in Qohelet does not express an absolute \textit{Erkenntnisprinzip}, but rather a human attribute and ability, by means of which some knowledge of the world is possible, but does not provide any guarantees. As such wisdom is frustrated in its task. Cf. M.V. Fox, “The Inner-Structure of Qohelet’s Thought,” in: A. Schoors (ed.), \textit{Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom} (BETL 136; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 228.

\textsuperscript{1516} Qohelet departs from proverbial wisdom that evaluates death exclusively in the framework of the \textit{Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang}. Cf. Backhaus, \textit{Denn Zeit und Zufall}, 391.

\textsuperscript{1517} The lack of wisdom’s distinction, particularly between the wise and the fool, is also seen in Qoh 2:16, 3:9, 18-22; 5:14f; 6:3-6; 8:8; 9:3-6.


\textsuperscript{1519} Reventlow, “Tod und Leben,” 17. It is the \textit{unausweichliche Todesgeschick} that characterises all considerations of justice and wisdom as vain (cf. Qoh 9:2a).

\textsuperscript{1520} Due to the disintegration of the \textit{Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang} humanity faces death passively and powerless. Cf. Schubert, \textit{Schöpfungstheologie}, 164. For Qohelet, humanity finds itself in a world over which mortals have no control. Cf. Seow, \textit{Ecclesiastes}, 55.

\textsuperscript{1521} In contrast to Prov 9:10-11, wisdom is no more a guarantee for longevity and Qohelet does not consider wisdom as a “tree of life” (\textit{µyyjÅÄ}, Prov 3:18). Death is certain, and foolish living will however result in an early death (cf. 7:17; also 3:2).

\textsuperscript{1522} Wisdom can no longer secure individual or community existence. Cf. Crenshaw, \textit{Old Testament Wisdom}, 121.

\textsuperscript{1523} Fox, “Wisdom in Qohelet,” 125.

\textsuperscript{1524} Such hatred of life is also seen in Job 3, but Job’s perception of death is ambivalent since he both longs for it and recoils in horror at its prospect. Cf. D.L. Smith, “The Concept of Death in Job and Ecclesiastes.” \textit{Didaskalia} 4 (1992): 2-14 at 2.

\textsuperscript{1525} In search of meaning in creation Qohelet is constantly confronted with the realisation that “life itself is unfair, that human wisdom is woefully insufficient and that death continually laughed in his face.” Cf. B.C. Davis, “Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 – Death, an Impetus for Life.” \textit{BS} 148 (1991): 298.
of divine creation,\textsuperscript{1526} it also becomes incompatible with divine creation as a result of the failure of wisdom to secure life.\textsuperscript{1527} In this sense the certainty of death fills the void left by the collapse of the causality principle in Qohelet.\textsuperscript{1528} For this reason the wise person will do well to remain aware of this certainty within the context of life.\textsuperscript{1529}

\textbf{4.5.3.2 The Rhetoric of Death in Qohelet}

While death in Qohelet offers a hermeneutical key for making sense of life in the present, the actual nature of Qohelet’s rhetoric of death remains disputable.\textsuperscript{1530} The centrality of death as a theological theme in Qohelet might seem exaggerated if the frequency of terms relating to death is considered,\textsuperscript{1531} since it does not point to an obsession with death. But Qohelet’s rhetoric of death is not limited to the use of the root \textit{twm}.

Qohelet 3 provides insight into the world as perceived by the Preacher. In a rather rhythmic fashion this text (3:1) proclaims the divinely appointed time for everything under the heaven (\textit{Åpj} \textit{A}kd \textit{twm} \textit{wz} \textit{kd}),\textsuperscript{1533} including the time of birth (\textit{dy} and time of death (\textit{twm}), which are put on par in a factual way in 3:2. In this text death is not placed in a specific category, i.e. in opposition to divine creation or as a threat to creation.\textsuperscript{1534} Both moments fit within the frame of divine creation. But while the “time to die” (\textit{twm} \textit{tf})\textsuperscript{1535} is stated in a factual manner (3:2), the fate of the spirit (\textit{jwr}) at the moment of death remains uncertain ([\textit{dy} \textit{yn} 3:21; contra 12:7 where the fate of the \textit{jw})

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1526} Backhaus, \textit{Denn Zeit und Zufall}, 391 points to the perception of death in later wisdom as \textit{geschöpfliche Tod}, i.e. as part of the natural order of creation, while earlier proverbial wisdom perceived death as \textit{selbstverschuldeten Tod}, i.e. as the result of foolish living. But this distinction is not as clear cut.
\item \textsuperscript{1527} The devaluation of wisdom implies that the boundary of death can no longer be influenced (e.g. Prov 10:27, where an early death is avoidable by means of wise living). Cf. Schubert, \textit{Schöpfungstheologie}, 167.
\item \textsuperscript{1528} Backhaus, \textit{Denn Zeit und Zufall}, 393. He argues that in Qohelet death replaces the \textit{Ordnungsstrukturen} of traditional wisdom and becomes “der zentrale anthropologischen Konstante.” This leads to a different understanding of life under the sun as exemplified in 9:11. The same “time and chance” ([\textit{gw}\textit{t}]) happens to all. As such death presents a hermeneutical key for comprehending reality. Also Klein, \textit{Kohelet}, 158; Burkes, \textit{God, Self and Death}, 76.
\item \textsuperscript{1529} Given the experienced-based nature of Qohelet’s wisdom, birth and death constitute the basic boundaries in which Qohelet’s wisdom applies. Cf. Frydrych, \textit{Living under the Sun}, 48. For this reason Qohelet’s disinterest in that which falls outside these boundaries, such as the fate of the dead, is comprehensible. The ideal to achieve a lasting benefit from life that extends beyond the point of death becomes obsolete.
\item \textsuperscript{1530} For Backhaus, \textit{Denn Zeit und Zufall}, 390-398 the theme of death in Qohelet provides a hermeneutical key for its interpretation.
\item \textsuperscript{1531} As verb \textit{twm} occurs in 2:16; 3:2; 19; 4:2; 7:17; 9:4; 5 and as noun in 7:1, 26; 8:8; 10:1.
\item \textsuperscript{1532} Murphy, “The Sage,” 268. Qohelet’s dealing with death and Sheol presents one of the clearest examples of how he agrees and disagrees with traditional religious ideas.
\item \textsuperscript{1533} Here \textit{\textit{gw}t} refers to a specific time, while \textit{\textit{tf}l} indicates a more general time, though it is specified by \textit{Åpj} “purpose, bussiness” and elaborated in 3:2-8, with the theme recurring in 3:17.
\item \textsuperscript{1534} Death for Qohelet is an inevitable consequence of what humans, indeed all created beings are, and not judged as something coming from without, i.e. as unnatural.
\item \textsuperscript{1535} In Qoh 3:1-8 “death / dying” (\textit{twm} is the only event or action not under human control (compared with e.g. “a time to build up” and “a time to tear down” etc.).
\end{itemize}
is quite certain). What is certain is that the “sons of man” (םדאהוּין) share the same fate (חרם) as the “beasts” (תרם), namely death (cf. Ps 49:13, MT), since they have the same breath (יָוֵר, 3:19). Here death as such is not presented as a problem, but rather the fate of the יָוֵר. What is also particular to this text is the indiscriminate nature of death, seeing that humanity has no “advantage” (רטנ), over beasts. Humankind cannot even be considered as a rational animal. All created beings go to one place (חרם 3:20), at the moment of death (cf. 6:6, referring to humans only), returning to dust (רע). Here death is also thought of in spatial terms, as part of divine creation. In Qoh 3:19-21 the יָוֵר is not directly related tohoc, other than 12:7. But the “upward” (הל) and “downward” (דר) movement of the יָוֵר points to a spatial awareness, with God above (i.e. the heavens) and the dead below (אֱרָא, here as a reference to Sheol). The argument concerning the fate of the יָוֵר introduces a new line of thinking into an already existing tradition. Significantly, no negative evaluation of death is encountered in this context. Death is rather viewed in terms of the failure of wisdom and the limited nature of human knowledge.

In other contexts in Qohelet death does receive a qualitative evaluation. In 5:15 death is attributed an annihilating function, bringing an end to all human labour and efforts, while in 9:5 death wipes out the memory of the deceased (contra 7:1a, for a good name is useless without remembrance), with no possibility of a continued shade-like existence in Sheol. This indiscriminate characteristic of death, annihilating the distinction between the wise and the fool, stands in contrast with the tenets of proverbial wisdom. According to proverbial wisdom the memory of the wise (רֵחד) will continue to live (litt. “be blessed,” הָרָכָל), while the name of the fool (רה) will be wiped out (litt “rot,” בך). Cf. Prov 10:7; Ps 112:6). But this failure of the living to remember is lamented in Qohelet (cf. 2:16; 9:4-5, 10). Death brings an absolute end to the wise and the fool alike (Qoh 2:16a; 1:11). Despite moments in Qohelet where life is valued above death (cf. 9:4-5, “a living dog is better than a dead lion”), the finality of death still overshadows the value of life (cf. 2:17; 4:1-3; 6:3-9).

1536 Only in 2:14f; 3:19 and 9:2f isחרם used with the meaning “fate” or “fortune.” In Ps 49: 12, 20 humanity is also compared with beasts, sharing the same fate, namely death.
1537 Here יאכ, occurring only in Qoh 9:10, is implied in view of the “return to dust” (רע). Qohelet shares a basic tripartite worldview, including the spheres of the divine, the living and the dead. Cf. Frydrych, Living Under the Sun, 107. The sphere of the living is Qohelet’s primary focus, with God located in the heavens (5:2). In 9:10 יאכ does not merely indicate location, but also has a poetic function, describing Sheol as a place of non-existence. Cf. Frydrych, Living Under the Sun, 113. For Qohelet, Sheol becomes the epitome of non-life. Cf. Murphy, “The Sage,” 268.
1538 Unlike the J and P creation accounts, humanity in Qohelet does not enjoy a distinguished position in creation. The “return to dust” theme does agree with J creation theology (cf. Gen 3:19).
1539 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Nicht im Menschen, 198 regards the presentation of death in Qoh 9:5-6 as a radical interruption of earthly existence. But death is not so much an interruption as it is final.
1541 The lack of remembrance is another departure from proverbial wisdom. According to J.G. Gammie, “Stoicism and Anti-Stoicism in Qoheleth.” HAK 9 (1985): 169-87 Qohelet is here in a dialogue with Stoicism and his denial of remembrance after death is made in opposition to Stoic optimism.
1542 Indiscriminate death is the final injustice for Qohelet. Cf. Burkes, Death in Qohelet and the Egyptian Biographies, 80; Burkes, God, Self and Death, 80. Also Spangenberg, “Die Prediker se Uitspraak,” 34.
1543 But what kind of life is a dog’s life, and what is the profit of knowing that you will die? Cf. Spangenberg, “Die Prediker se Uitspraak,” 35.
4; 7:1b, judging the day of death better than the day of birth).\footnote{1544} As such these positive moments should not be interpreted as an attempt to qualify Qohelet’s argument concerning the finality of death.

In 9:10 the nothingness associated with וְיוֹנֵשׁ is described. In Qoh 4:2 death is viewed as redemptive or liberating (Qoh 4:2), while in Qoh 6:3 death is evaluated as both a positive (natural end of a long life) and negative (no proper burial) event.\footnote{1545} Such variety in Qohelet’s evaluation of death complicates attempts at grasping the Preachers rhetoric.\footnote{1546} A consequence of this at times contradicting variation is that it becomes impossible to distinguish between a “good” and a “bad” death. This is primarily related to the devaluation of wisdom’s value, and the nature of the creator-creation relation. As such humanity is subjected to death’s indiscriminate dealings. Qohelet’s varied rhetoric also prevents a perception of death as erratic event, since it is located within the parameters of divine creation (Qoh 3:2-8). This brings into focus the creator-death relation, which will be considered in §4.5.3.3.

While death is certain and absolute, some scholars regard Qohelet as entertaining a positive notion of the afterlife.\footnote{1547} However, it has rightly been pointed out that “non-life” in Qohelet should not be equated with “afterlife.”\footnote{1548} Death for Qohelet brings only non-life, with no possibility of an afterlife. In Qohelet all paths of reasoning resolutely lead to the conclusion that death is final and that all distinctions in life fail in the event of death. Qohelet’s pondering on life’s brevity and death’s absoluteness concerns the present and speculation over that which is unknowable, including that which lies beyond the grave, is not a concern of Qohelet (3:22, 6:12, 8:7).\footnote{1549} For this reason the notion of judgement or vindication after death is lacking in Qohelet.\footnote{1550} What matters is life in the present and the impact of death in this life.

\footnote{1544} By means of the return to the earth, “death restores the initial status quo and closes the profitless circle of existence.” Cf. Frydrych, \textit{Living under the Sun}, 149, 160. Death closes the cycle of birth and as such Qohelet’s circular perception of life differs from the linear view of proverbial wisdom. In Qohelet death brings all forms of continuity to an absolute end. Cf. Burkes, \textit{God, Self and Death}, 82.

\footnote{1545} Frydrych, \textit{Living under the Sun}, 122.

\footnote{1546} Ambiguities in Qohelet’s reasoning result from Qohelet’s observation of ambiguities in creation and are not necessarily indicative of Qohelet contradicting himself. Cf. Fox, \textit{A Time to Tear Down}, 3. The argument of Frydrych, \textit{Living under the Sun}, 155 is suggestive, namely that Qohelet argues on two levels. The first is more abstract and all-encompassing posing general existential questions, while the second is more concrete, dealing with the here and now. On the first level life is regarded as a process of dying without any profit, and on the second level life is characterised by its better and worse moments. The better moments should be exploited, despite its lack of lasting worth. See also H.P. Müller, “Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition,” in: J.W. Van Henten and A. Houtepen (eds.), \textit{Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition: Papers Read at a Noster Conference in Soesterberg} (Assen: van Gorcum, 2001), 156-168 at 165. He proposes that Qohelet employs a “conceptual interpretation of reality,” presenting the beginning of Jewish philosophy.\footnote{1547} Cf. G.S. Ogden, \textit{Qoheleth} (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 15, 25; D.A. Garrett, \textit{Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs} (NAC 14; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 304-305.

\footnote{1548} Murphy, “Death and Afterlife in the Wisdom Literature,” 109.

\footnote{1549} Murphy, “The Sage,” 269. Qohelet’s disinterest with that which follows the grave may be considered in terms of his socio-historical context, given that he wrote in a pre-persecution period.\footnote{1550} Qoh 11:9f and 3:17 refers to divine judgment, but this is expected in life. It is contrasts with human justice (חיה הורמ) that has become corrupt (cf. 3:16).

\footnote{1551} Possible references to post-mortem vindication in Qoh 8:12-14; 11:9b; 12:14 are mostly attributed to redactional labour and do not provide a sufficient textual basis for postulating some kind of eschatological expectation in Qohelet.
4.5.3.3 God and Qohelet’s Rhetoric of Death

In Qohelet death is final and absolute, but this does not necessarily imply that life as such is absolutely meaningless. Rather, the greatest foolishness of all for Qohelet is to waste life (9:7f). For life under the sun is humanity’s divinely allotted share (5:18; also 8:15; 9:9). But in view of Qoh 1:3 or 6:12 the exact nature of this “share” is unsure. In part the perceived creator-death relation contributes to the comprehension of humankind’s share in life. In Qohelet the divine-human relation is typified in 5:2, stressing the distance between God and humankind. The addressee must remain aware of this distance, since it is also indicative of a status differentiation, with God ruling from his heavenly abode and humankind little more than dust. As such God can destroy human works (5:5, HB). The sovereignty of God over human life is further demonstrated in 12:7, where He is described as the giver and re-possessor of life. Qohelet stresses God’s sovereignty over life, but leaves the nature of the divine-death relation open for debate. While God is responsible for an ordered creation that includes the time to die (3:2), God is never explicitly accredited with causing death. Since death fits within the frame of divine creation and given that life remains in possession of a death in relation to the deity should not be evaluated as a random event. Death annihilates, it brings to nought, and interrupts life, but it does not fall outside the divine reach. In this regard the divine-death relation is contrasted with the human-death relation. This is exemplified in 8:8, stating that humanity has no mastery over the jwr, and that they cannot retain (a) it, and neither do they have power on the day of death (twmh µwyb). They also have no power over their ‘appointed time’ (Qoh 9:11-12). These statements of Qohelet reaffirm the notion of human incapacity in the face of death but also reaffirm the distinction between God and humanity in matters concerning life and death. That death falls under divine jurisdiction is a different way of stating that it fits within the parameters of divine creation, pointing to the intricate connection between God and death.

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1552 Qohelet never expresses a wish to die as in Job 3, and never considers suicide as in the Egyptian Dispute over Suicide from the Middle Kingdom (end 3d millennium BCE), where the lamenter is in dialogue with his own soul, pondering on the merit of suicide. Cf. ANET (3d ed.; 1969), 405-407. J. Blenkinsopp, “Ecclesiastes 3:1-15: Another Interpretation.” JSOT 66 (1995): 57 suggests translating the infinitive twmh in 3:2 as “take one’s own life,” i.e. to put a timely end to ones life. He suggests this translation in view of the Stoic notion of “timely action” (eukairia). He also associates 7:1 with popular Hellenistic philosophy. But such a reading of twmh is too speculative and not required by its context.

1553 Levine, “Qohelet’s Fool,” 292.

1554 In Job 9:22 God is accredited with bringing both the wicked and the righteous to the same end, namely “destruction” (hlk). Death is the fate of the wise and fool in Qohelet, but it is not directly related to God.

1555 Death might result from God’s judging (fpv) the righteous and the wicked (3:17).

1556 In the Second Temple period, death became associated with complete disappearance. Cf. Sacchi, The History of the Second Temple Period, 428. As such “Sheol becomes the literary synonym for death and the idea of the nothingness of death becomes more and more clear, reaching Qohelet’s lucid meditations on death.”

1557 As already stated, the HB remains silent on the origin of death, with God nowhere explicitly said to have made it. But those instances where God is accredited with bringing about death indicate divine jurisdiction over death.
For Qohelet יָהָּא reigns supreme in matters concerning life and death, but the relation of the deity with the dead and Sheol is less clear. Indeed, Qohelet remains strikingly silent on this matter. This results from the fact that for Qohelet death marks the absolute end of life, without any hope of a shade-like continuance after death or future life. Whatever life there is to be lived must be lived Diesseits, for in Lev there is nothing (9:10). As such a concern with what happens after death, or the relation of God and the dead is unnecessary, or at least out of place within the framework of Qohelet’s rhetoric. While God is not accredited with bringing about death, it remains a question to what extent God punishes the wicked or the perverter of justice (3:17; 5:8; 8:11). While this is hinted at, the implication is that it has to take place within the context of this life. In terms of Qohelet’s observation this is ambiguous, given that all share the same fate, the wise dying as the fool (2:16).

Human life is characterised by madness (תֹּקְלָח), from which death follows without judgment (9:3). But for this God is not held responsible (7:29). God’s relation with the dead is very vague in Qohelet, but death is not excluded from Qohelet’s experience of God or creation, it is coloured by it.

### 4.5.3.4 Death as a Theological Theme in Qohelet 11:7-12:8

The theme of death permeates the book of Qohelet in various ways, and finds its most acute expression in 11:7-12:8. In this literary unit life and death are theologically weighed against each other within the context of creation. As such the life-death relation is characterised by a tension, with no attempt to resolve it. As stated in §4.2, this tension revolves around the imperatives “rejoice” (יְהַעֲרָא, 7:8a, 9) and “remember” (רָכָז 7:8b, 12:1a).

In the analysis of the text (§4.4) the imperative רָכָז (“to remember”) was considered, and the question was raised in how far it functions as a Totengedenken. Here it is argued that a connection can indeed be established between רָכָז and the theme of death. The imperative רָכָז in 11:8b relates to the “days of darkness” (ועְיַהַמְיְתָא) which will be many, while in 12:1a it relates to “your creator” (ועָיָרֵב), who must be remembered before the “evil days” (הַרְחֵל יַיְי come. In these two contexts “days of darkness” and “evil days” have a similar ambiguous function, indicating either the time spend in death, or the days of physical deterioration on the way toward death. The “days of darkness” in 11:8 are qualified, for they will be many (וַיִּשְׂרָא). In view of Qohelet’s otherwise careful statements, this definite qualification is

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1558 Life under the sun is already perceived by Qohelet as a “shadow” (לֵא, 6:11). In 8:13 this description of life is limited to the wicked person, who does not fear (אָרְיָה God. See also Ps 90:3-10 for this notion of the fleeting nature of human existence.


1560 Schubert, Schöpfungstheologie, 98.

1561 Cf. Loader, Polar Structures, 1. Also Whybray, “Qohelet as a Theologian,” 247. This tension does not have to be explained away by means of a psychological explanation of Qohelet’s argumentation. Cf. F. Zimmermann, The Inner World of Qohelet (New York: KTAV, 1973); Anderson, Qohelet and His Pessimistic Theology, 73.

1562 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Nicht im Menschen, 199 identifies such a use of רָכָז For רָכָז as verb cf. 5:19, 9:15, 11:8 and 12:1 and 9:5 as noun (“remembrance”).

1563 Death in Qohelet implies annilation (9:10) and a process of weakening (12:1-6).
significant. If it refers to many days of physical deterioration on the way towards death, such certainty is impossible in terms of Qohelet’s reasoning. If it applies to the time spent in death, it contradicts Qohelet’s general disinterest in that which lies beyond the grave. But this reference to the “days of darkness” that will be many might be another way of stating death’s absoluteness, from which there is no return. In this way rkz in 11:8 is related to the theme of death. Here the “days of darkness” gain a negative connotation, providing a background for the call to rejoice (jm) in the many years of life.

In case of 12:1a rkz is related to the theme of death in two ways. Remembrance of one’s creator implies remembrance of one’s status as being created and by implication being mortal. Thus, remembering your creator implies remembering that you must die. This remembrance should take place in life Diesseits, since no remembrance is possible in Sheol (9:5). Secondly, the “evil days” of 12:1b refer to that which follows after death. But this interpretation is less likely, since the “evil days,” in tandem with the years (µynv) in which the addressee (rwjb) of 11:9 is said to have no pleasure in 12:1f (Åpj µhb y Åp), refer to the process of deterioration so vividly described in 12:3-6. While more indirect, rkz in this way relates to the theme of death. The time of life, youth and vigour should be informed by the certainty of death, which reaches into the sphere of life, as evidenced by the process of physical deterioration.

While the status of 12:2 in the context of 11:7-12:8 is rather vague, it relates to the theme of death, depicting a reversal (compared with Gen 1:1-2:4a). It concerns a reversal in the cosmic (vmv, rva, jry µyb, µyb) rather than the human sphere. In this way it presents a prelude to the description of deterioration and destruction in 12:3-6. That which is associated with light and life is darkened (ûvj), and clouds which are usually received positively, are a cause for vexation due to its sudden return (12:2c), blocking out light. But 12:2 can also be regarded as a continuation of the theme of the “days of darkness” in 11:8 and the “evil days” in 12:1b. This furthers the notion that death brings order and existence to an absolute end. Death is indeed characterised by a reversal of that experienced or at least expected in life. For this reason 12:2 is to be interpreted within the context of approaching death, rather than an eschatological event, given that eschatology is not a theme in Qohelet.

The imagery in 12:3-6 can be interpreted as literal (“ruined house”) or allegorical (“human body”), and in both instances the themes of deterioration and ruin, as a result of destruction or aging, is at issue. Death is at issue in these verses, as is clearly reflected in 12:5e-f, with man (µda) going to his eternal home (µlw[tyb, see also Ps 49:11) and the mourners (µyps) going about in the streets. It is very likely that a funeral procession is being described. In 12:6 that which is normally considered as light (“lamp,” 12:6a-b) or life (“well,” 12:6c-d) giving is presented in the context

1564 In the Egyptian Instruction of Ptah-Hotep the setting in of old age is also lamented, and we read, “What old age does to men is evil in every respect.” ANET (3d ed.; 1969), 412.
1565 The “days of darkness” in 11:8 are opposed to the light (rva) of 11:7, indicative of life.
1566 This description reflects a mourning custom, but the going about of the mourners in the street also suggests the loss of hope brought about by death (Qoh 9:4; Prov 25:2). Cf. Crenshaw, “The Shadow of Death,” 209-211.
1567 Fox, Qohelet and His Contradictions, 302.
1568 In this respect Sacchi, The History of the Second Temple Period, 429 identifies a parallel between Qohelet’s view of death and that of the Book of Watchers, in which death is no longer considered part

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of destruction. The theme of death is further highlighted by the use of רְבֶּק in 12:6d, which can also refer to the “grave.” Here preference is given to a reading of רְבֶּק as part of the imagery of destruction, in the sense that the well no longer serves as a life-giving source.

The inevitable end of such deterioration already touched upon in 12:5e-f, is described in clear terms in 12:7. With death the dust (תֶּבַע) returns to the earth (אר, 12:7a). This implies that humans return to the basic substance from which they were created (cf. Gen 2:7; 3:19; Ps 104:29). Indeed, this “being dust” characterises humans in life. Further, the spirit (יָדוֹ) returns to God (יהוה) who gave it (12:7b). Life remains the possession of God. The return to dust could however point in the direction of a separation that takes place at the moment of death. Death separates from God, since nothing remains after death. That the יָדוֹ returns to God does not indicate continued existence, but rather the divine sovereignty over life. In this return of the יָדוֹ to God, the deity is not said to have an active role in bringing about this return. God is not the instigator of this return, but rather the rightful recipient. Death as such is here dealt with in a matter of fact way, but the peculiar imagery employed prevents any hopeful interpretation. In this context the return of the יָדוֹ to God offers no reason to hope for something more after death. It rather contributes to Qohelet’s cry in 12:8, that all is לָבֶן. Since death brings all hope to an end, Qohelet looks on life with despair, if not at times disgust. Indeed, death robs life of its significance. Since death is certain, it is also lamentable.

One should remain aware that Qohelet has a specific addressee in mind in 11:7-12:8, namely the רְבֶּק (11:9a; 12:1a; the more general נדֶח is employed in Qoh 11:8). This presents a rhetorical convention, and for this reason a loosening of the individual from the larger community should not be identified in 11:7-12:8. The individual still finds its place within the larger contexts of creation. But within this larger context the individual becomes nullified as a result of the general process of degeneration that brings all life to an end. In addressing the רְבֶּק, Qohelet is contrasting two phases of natural process, but rather as an extraneous force to human nature, which is derived from a distortion of the cosmos order. Sacchi regards Qohelet’s polemical stance as an indication that the ideas in the Book of Watchers were spreading and that by the 3rd century BCE the problem of death existed.

This is the only occurrence of רְבֶּק in Qohelet, and here presents an intentional ambiguity. Here אר and Sheol should not be equated too easily. An identification of Sheol does not add to the argument of Qohelet, which rather stresses the absolute end of life announced by the moment of death. The return of the dust to the earth “as it was” (הָיָה) supports the notion that death nullifies all human efforts, rendering their profit (වַיֵּי) and share (דָּיִן) in life incomprehensible.

As such 12:7 does not contradict 3:19-21.

In Job 9:18 God refuses to “take away” (תַּעַנַּן) Job’s יָדוֹ and instead fills him with “bitterness” (יַרְרוּ). In view of death’s certainty, life’s uncertainties becomes clear. Cf. Krüger, Kohelet, 345.

For Michel, Untersuchungen, 126-183 Qohelet presents a polemic against an early Jewish apocalyptic stream. It there is nothing beyond death, no justice, no resurrection, what hope could such apocalyptic thinking possibly provide? Quite differently Seow, Ecclesiastes, 56 argues for a connection between eschatology and death in Qohelet. Carny, “Theodicy in the Book of Qohelet,” 79. Death’s finality in Qohelet motivates the call for enjoyment (יְרוּ), while death in the later wisdom of Sirach serves as a motivation to keep God’s commandments. Cf. Backhaus, Denn Zeit und Zufall, 396.

In terms of Qohelet’s rhetoric of death, distinctions that contribute to individual significance also become obsolete. Cf. Fox, “Wisdom in Qohelet,” 125. Also Whybray, “Qohelet as a Theologian,” 252; Crenshaw, Old Testament Wisdom, 119.

Schubert, Schöpfungstheologie, 163.
in life. Significantly the time of youth, despite being characterised as \( \text{lbh} \) in 11:10, is preferred to the time of old age. As such Qohelet’s argument presents an antithesis to proverbial wisdom, in which the time of old age is ascribed a positive value.\(^{1577}\) For Qohelet the time of youth is fleeting, while the time of old age is not wishful. As a result, life in all its phases is characterised as \( \text{lbh} \). As such death in 11:7-12:8 gains a negative connotation.\(^{1578}\) While an inherent aspect of divine creation and human life, it is also a meaningless event.\(^{1579}\) Death presents a threat to the meaningfulness of life. For this reason death comes to stand in opposition to life. In this oppositional relation, death serves as motivation for ceasing the opportunity of life.\(^{1580}\)

4.6 Conclusion

The realistic awareness of death’s finality shapes the content and course of Qohelet’s rhetoric, finding its most acute formulation in 11:7-12:8. For Qohelet, death presents the point of departure and motivation for his counsel to enjoy life (\( \text{hmc} \)).\(^{1581}\) In terms of Qohelet’s considerations of life and death in the context of creation, it does present a distinct theological voice in the HB.\(^{1582}\) It is not distinct due to its detachment from Israelite religious tradition, but rather due to the way it engages with this religious tradition and its reapplication thereof in a new way. It is not so much the phenomenon of death that presents a theological problem for Qohelet, but rather its relation to life and its place within divine creation. Death detracts from life, robbing human efforts of its profit (\( \text{÷wrty} \)).\(^{1583}\) In view of the devaluation of wisdom, this question concerning the profit of \( \text{µda} \) becomes acute, but so also humanity’s place in creation and relation with the creator. This leads to the perception that death does not distinguish, that it separates and that it marks the absolute end of life. As such Qohelet contains no root of immortality, or a notion that life, even an enfeebled form of life in Sheol, continues to exist after death.

Leaving aside the double epilogue of Qoh 12:9-14,\(^{1584}\) certainly resulting from a later redactional hand, Qohelet’s argument ends with a cry of dismay in 12:8, namely that

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\(^{1577}\) Murphy, “Death and Afterlife in Wisdom Literature,” 103-104. In Proverbs a negative view of the afterlife occurs and is related to the foolish and wicked. This is absent in Qohelet.

\(^{1578}\) Day, “The Development of Life After Death in Ancient Israel,” 251. Qohelet’s negativity exceeds that of Job.

\(^{1579}\) E. Levine, The Aramaic Version of Qohelet (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1978), 81-82 points to the Targum of Qohelet that contradicts this view concerning the finality and uselessness of death, since death is valued as providing an opportunity for moral recompose. The Targum of Qohelet did not attempt to refute Qohelet’s experiential observations, but rather followed Pharasaic Rabbincic Theology according to which the world is morally governed, with the possibility of justice after death. Pharisaic Judaism could not accept Qohelet’s view of death and the absurdity of life without the necessary qualification.

\(^{1580}\) In contrast to Proverbs and Job, “Qohelet’s view is not that life is lived out as part of the order of creation, as part of a larger theological and philosophical system based on creation and the hopefulness that comes from discerning that order. Rather, Qohelet’s views are predicated on the fundamental reality of death and the idea that, wise or foolish, death comes to all; therefore life must begin from an awareness and acceptance of that reality. Death is the beginning of life in Qohelet, and it is death and not creation or providence, that frames and founds reality.” Cf. George, “Death as the Beginning of Life,” 282.

\(^{1581}\) George, “Death as the Beginning of Life,” 290.

\(^{1582}\) Carny, “Theodicy in the Book of Qohelet,” 79. Qohelet is the only book in the HB that “unmistakably states the finiteness of man and postulates it as an axiom.”

\(^{1583}\) What profit (\( \text{÷wrty} \) there is should be found in this life, which is humity’s share (\( \text{çj} \)).

\(^{1584}\) Qoh 12:9-14 is an attempt at stifling Qohelet’s critical voice and reestablishing wisdom’s worth.
all is vanity (lbh lh). This is the dominant tone of the book, but Qohelet does recognise life’s better moments (Qoh 3:4), which are part of humanity’s share (qj). But as we have argued, the positive statements in Qohelet stressing the value of life should be interpreted against the background of Qohelet’s rhetoric of death and not vice versa. Life is defined in terms of death’s certainty. It is the certainty of death that prompts Qohelet’s calls to enjoyment (jnx) of life. This is not the central theme of the book, or of 11:7-12:8. Death overshadows even the fleeting moments of joy experienced in life.

Qohelet argues against a life that does not take death serious, i.e. that secretly tries to lengthen existence ins Jenseits and in the process devalues earthly Dasein. It is this life that matters and one should profit from one’s share (qj) in this life, for nothing more is to be expected after death. As such Qohelet does not allow a flight from the realities of this life into a next. Procrastination with the hope of something better to come is thoroughly rejected. Such a perception of life and death is characteristic of Qohelet, but also presents a legitimate voice in the HB. The emphasis Qohelet places on life in the present implies that it stands in opposition to biblical material with a theology based on eschatology. Ultimately, life under the sun, for Qohelet, implies living in the shadow of death.

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1585 Murphy, “The Sage,” 271. The imperatives to enjoy life (2:24-25, 3:12-13, 22, 5:17-19, 8:15, 9:7-10, 11:9) should be considered in its immediate context, since the theme of enjoyment is modified by Qohelet’s view death and the incomprehensible nature of the divine will. Also Whybray, “Qohelet, Preacher of Joy,” 87, 92-93. In his view the instances in Qohelet stating the woes and vanities of life (Qoh 1:12-2:26, 3:1-15, 3:16-22, 5:9-19, 8:10-15, 9:1-10, 11:7-12:7) provide support for Qohelet’s positive (jnx) sayings (Qoh 2:24a, 3:12, 3:22a, 5:17, 8:15a, 9:7-9a, 11:7-12:1a). The negative sayings provide a background against which the calls to enjoyment should be read, at time ironically.

1586 Murphy, The Tree of Life, 54. Life’s positive moments are continuously qualified in light of the negative moments. This emphasises that life is to be lived to the fullest before absolute inertia sets in with death.

1587 Contra Gordis, Koheleth, 121-22., That Qohelet was read in the synagogue on the Feast of Tabernacles as well as the Season of Rejoicing indicates for Gordis how the book was understood by early Jewish religious authorities. “Joy” is a central theme in Qohelet in as far as he continuously sought for it, but without success. In lamenting his ignorance, the negative tones are dominant.

1588 In view of 3:21 (no worthwile afterlife) and 9:10 (state of the dead in Sheol), Qohelet’s argument corresponds to the basic teaching of the HB. Cf. Whybray, “Qoheleth as a Theologian,” 246. Yet, Qohelet gives existing tradition a critical and at times negative evaluation.

1589 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, Nicht im Menschen, 199.

1590 In Qoh 11:7-12:8 the notion of one’s qj as limited to this life fits in the parameters of the jnx admonition, and it is against this background that the r1k2admonition should be understood.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: RECONSIDERING DEATH AS A THEOLOGICAL THEME WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THEOLOGIES OF CREATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE HEBREW BIBLE WISDOM TRADITION

In chapter 1 it was stated that creation and death, as theological themes, present some of the clearest instances of theological disparity in the HB. The analysis of Ps 104, Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8 illustrated this theological disparity in the wisdom tradition. Each text portrays a distinct perspective, but the analysis of the texts also attempted to indicate their relatedness with theological traditions operative in the HB. By means of the analysis of the texts emphasis is placed on the necessary exegetical care required for establishing how these texts utilise existing theological traditions in presenting their distinct theological arguments. The task remains to determine to what extent these distinct theological voices can be held together in a constructive dialogue, without one subjugating the other. This requires more than just a passive observation, since theologians are also active participants in the ongoing theological dialogue operative in the HB. The diverse and dialogical nature of the HB contributes to its theological potency, allowing for alternative routes of theological exploration. This not only enriches theological reflection, but also prevents it from becoming obsolete. Engaging with this diversity keeps theological discourse honest.

In §5.1 the theological centrality of creation in the wisdom tradition is reconsidered and in §5.2 the significance of the theological construct God as creator. The significance of death in the wisdom tradition is considered in §5.3, while the creation-death relation comes into focus in §5.4. The theological potential of the wisdom tradition’s diversity and its implications for theological discourse is reconsidered in §5.5.

5.1 The Theological Centrality of Creation in the Hebrew Bible Wisdom Tradition

The creation orientation of the wisdom tradition is exemplified in the analyses of Ps 104, Job 3, and Qoh 11:7-12:8, in which creation constitutes a central theological theme. The creation theologies of these texts are particular to the literary and

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1591 In line with his argument that the Bible is already an interpreted document, M.A. Fishbane, “Inner-Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel, in: The Garments of the Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992), 3–4, 12 describes the Bible as “an imagination which responds to and is deeply dependent upon received traditions; an imagination whose creativity is never entirely a new creation, but one founded upon older and authoritative words and images.”

1592 Goldingay, Theological Diversity and Authority, 239.

1593 Rendtorff, “Creation as a Topic,” 207. He argues that creation as a theological theme was not understood as one theme among many by the final authors of the HB. Rather, creation was considered as the starting point, since “everything human beings can think and say about God and his relation to the world and to humankind depends on the fact that he created all this. Therefore not only does he rule the whole of creation, but he is also finally responsible for what happens within the world he created.” Cf. e.g. Isa 45:6–7.
theological contexts in which they are embedded.\textsuperscript{1594} In the broader context of the wisdom tradition these texts present disparate, but also complementary theologies. Each text presents a necessary nuance to the discourse concerning creation, death and the creation-death relation.

In Ps 104 creation is the dominant theological theme. It steers the course of the psalm, which is characterised by a relentless doxological tone. The description and praise of divine creation coincides with the theme of divine wisdom (Ps 104:24), affirming the perception that creation is firmly established and well ordered. Indeed, the beneficence of order in creation is perceivable, thus qualifying creation as good and trustworthy (comparable with Job 38-41). Therefore the psalmist can also express trust and hope in the creator by means of the appeal in v 35a (cf. Prov 2:21-22; 10:30). It is not a hope based on an eschatological expectation, but is rather directed to immediate lived experience. In Job 3 the rhetoric of creation and creator functions differently. The deconstruction of creation is the objective of Job’s self-curse and lament. Ironically it leads to the eventual restoration of his being (Job 42:10-17). Job 3 lacks Ps 104’s doxology of creation and creator. The pious Job of the prologue (1:21; 2:10) now perceives a detachment from the creator. As such Job 3 questions the status of divine creation and the value of wisdom for success in life (contra e.g. Prov 3:33; 10:2-3, 29; 12:2, 7; 12:13, 21; 14:10; 15:6). In a different way, creation is also central to the preacher’s rhetoric in Qoh 11:7-12:8. But similar to Job, Qohelet questions the status of creation and the value of wisdom for offering certainty and success in life (contra e.g. Prov 2:6-9; 10:27-28; 11:31; 12:26; 13:9, 25; 14:32; 15:29; 24:20; 29:12, 16). For this reason a tension is maintained between the imperatives to rejoice and to remember. In these texts creation is the arena of divine activity.\textsuperscript{1595} The perception thereof leads to doxology in Ps 104, to hopeless despair in Job 3, and to a relentless questioning in Qohelet that reaches a climax with 11:7-12:8.

Basic to the shape of these texts’ creation theologies is their particular perception of reality,\textsuperscript{1596} which constitutes the empirical basis of the wisdom tradition (e.g. Prov 2:2-3).\textsuperscript{1597} For this perception of reality, the causality principle or Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang (e.g. Prov 11:18-19; 12:28; 13:6; 15:9; 21:21) serves as a paradigm for evaluating events and experience in the present, and regulating conduct and behaviour (particularly the הֶֽפֶץ / הֶֽוְרִיד dichotomy). To live in accordance with the tenets of wisdom implies a concern for the present. This concern also applies to the

\textsuperscript{1594} Gerstenberger, \textit{Theologies}, 224 argues that “The exilic and post-exilic community of Israel shaped its situation-conditioned theology in the light of the depressing political changes, the new social structures and the ambivalent experience of history.” If exilic-postexilic theology is considered as situation-conditioned, the theological diversity encountered in the literature from this period is not unexpected.

\textsuperscript{1595} In the HB God discloses His nature and purpose above all through His creation. Cf. B.S. Childs, \textit{Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context} (London: SCM Press, 1985), 30-31. While God reveals Himself through creation, this does not imply that God is known through nature. Rather, divine acts of creation serve as an indication of God’s nature and will.

\textsuperscript{1596} In reference to the word of Martin Buber, M.A. Fishbane, “The Biblical Dialogue of Martin Buber,” in: \textit{The Garments of the Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics} (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992), 81-90, at 85 argues that “The words of the Bible, as events of spokenness, thus instruct us in the dialogical character of reality.” As such the information offered in texts instruct us regarding the author’s experience(s) of the world in which he / she is embedded.

\textsuperscript{1597} Von Rad, \textit{Weisheit in Israel} characterised wisdom as the sapiential understanding of reality. See also Burkes, \textit{God, Self and Death}, 1 for the notion of wisdom as an empirical investigation of reality through experience. This experience remains tied to the present.
“fear of YHWH” (חַשֵּׁר יְהֹウェָה, Prov 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26-27; 15:33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17) which is central to the wisdom tradition.\(^{1598}\) It is in the present that YHWH should be feared, since the dead no longer experience anything (cf. Ps 6:5), i.e. no more sense perception, no more reasoning and no more wisdom (cf. Job 28:14, 22). In the framework of the creation theology of Ps 104 creation is perceived to be well ordered, beneficial, knowable and his place therein secure. This description of creation serves the rhetorical intent of the psalmist, namely doxology, but it also reflects the psalmist’s experience of the world and God, as attested in v 35a. It does not present a utopian picture of creation, but recognises its dark edges. But because order in creation is perceivable as beneficial and the works of the creator experienced as good (vv 24, 31), creation is experienced positively. The curse and lament of Job 3 also have a rhetorical intent. They result from Job’s inability to perceive continuing goodness and order in creation (which is countered by the display of order and goodness in creation in chs. 38-41). In a world seemingly devoid of divine justice, creation can no longer be trusted as the realm of divine beneficence. Unjust suffering is not Qohelet’s main concern (cf. however 4:1-2), but the inability to comprehend the created order (cf. Qoh 3:11; 8:17) does lead to an irresolvable tension (e.g. 7:15). This, supported by the acute awareness of death’s finality, renders divine creation volatile. Wisdom no longer safeguards the place of the wise in creation (cf. Job 9:22). The intricate relation of perceptions of the creator and experiences of creation in Ps 104, Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8 contribute to the evaluation of death in creation (cf. §5.3).

The analysed texts contain aspects characteristic of both the tradition concerning the creation of the world (e.g. Gen 1:1-2:4a) and the creation of humanity (e.g. Gen 2:4b-3:24). Such a categorisation is not problem-free, given that some of these aspects do overlap at times. However, it is useful for interpreting the creation theologies of the selected texts and to see where they overlap or differ. Here the argument of Westermann and Albertz should be noted, namely that Weltschöpfung presents the younger of the two creation traditions.\(^{1599}\) According to their argument the tradition concerning the creation of humanity functioned in such a way as to indicate the distance between God and humanity. This seems to be affirmed by e.g. Job 3, 10, Qoh 11:5, but in other instances, e.g. Ps 8:4-6, Gen 1:26-28, Isa 64:8 it is not as clear. It is also significant that these references to human creation occur in texts with a late date. The tradition concerning the creation of the world was employed to establish the trustworthy character of God.\(^{1600}\) This is affirmed by e.g. Ps 104, Gen 1, Job 38-41, Isa 65:17-18. The merging of these two traditions in the exilic-postexilic period\(^{1601}\) is exemplified in the wisdom writings from this context, characterised by their more universalisic background and perspective.\(^{1602}\)

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\(^{1599}\) Westermann, Schöpfung, 100-102 judges the Menschenschöpfung tradition older than the Weltschöpfung tradition because “die Frage nach dem Sein (Existieren)” is older than “die Frage nach dem Seienden.”

\(^{1600}\) Albertz, Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung, 171.

\(^{1601}\) Westermann, Schöpfung, 100-102.

\(^{1602}\) Gerstenberger, Theologies, 243. This is indicated by the absence of election, covenant and salvation history. By implication the creation theology of these wisdom texts is also predominantly universal in
In Ps 104 the *Weltschöpfung* tradition dominates, as in Gen 1:1-2:4a and Job 38-41, and lacks a reference to the creation of humanity (contra Ps 8). This is significant, given that Ps 104 draws from earlier creation motifs as encountered in Gen 2:4b-3:24. The primary concern of Job 3 is Job’s personal creation and predicament, but both creation traditions occur in the wider context of the book, as exemplified by the divine speeches (chs. 38-41). Qoh 11:7-12:8 is suggestive of the theme of individual creation, considering the singular addressee of Qoh 11:9 and 12:1 (also 11:5), but combines aspects indicative of both creation traditions (e.g. 12:2). In Ps 104 individual creation appears within the frame of *Weltschöpfung*. In Job 3 the perception of personal creation, juxtaposed with immediate experience, provides the framework for the interpretation of the created world. In Qohelet 11:7-12:8 it is the perception of the created world and immediate lived experience in creation that provides the hermeneutical framework in terms of which individual creation is interpreted. The creation theologies of the analysed texts lack any notion of a *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather perceive creation as an ongoing process (*creatio continua*), of which the God of Israel is the initiator and perpetuator. The creation of the individual fits within the boundaries of the broader concept of the creation of the world. This has implications for evaluating death within the framework of these theologies of creation.

5.2 The Theological Construct “God as creator” in the Hebrew Bible Wisdom Tradition

In Ps 104, Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8 the predominant appellative for God is that of creator. As such it dovetails the broader perception of God as creator and preserver of the natural order, which colours the Israelite view of the world and physical phenomena. God as creator presents the “pivotal point” of the Israelite worldview. The diversified ways in which God is perceived in different contexts impacts on the experience and evaluation of the created world. The exile served as a catalyst for scrutinising this basic tenet concerning the deity, which becomes problematic in the wisdom of Job and Qohelet. According to the argument of proverbial wisdom YHWH, as creator and maintainer of the beneficial order in creation (Prov 8:22-29), is also the worker of retribution (e.g. Prov 10:3, 30). The creator is responsible for establishing the world and an inherent beneficial order, while wisdom serves as guide for living in harmony with this order. This “truth” about God and creation, which Ps 104 also proclaims, is debated in Job and Qohelet. In Job...

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nature. This coincides with a tendency in wisdom writing to depersonalise the creator. The universalism of creation is matched by the remoteness of the creator, particularly evident in Qohelet and at times in Job.

Stadelman, *The Hebrew Conception of the World*, 177. Also T.J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 177 who refers to the Yahwism that became normative as centred round the Deity who was the creator and sole ruler of the cosmos, who alone controls the destiny of humankind and requires exclusive worship.


From his discussion of Neh 9 and Ps 139 Rendtorff, *Creation as Topic*, 212 argues that creation, in the postexilic Israelite context, could be made the most important point from where to start reflecting on one’s own present situation and God’s ability to change it. If the God of election and liberation is really God the creator, then he should also be able to bring about a change in the Israel’s situation resulting from the events of the exile.

Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, 137. He argues that the crisis of wisdom in Israel coincides with the decimation of the state. Schultz, Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology?, 288 does not share this view, since he is not in favour of identifying a crisis in Israelite wisdom.
the justice of the creator and creation is disputed, while the creator becomes the Deus absconditus in Qohelet, and the divine works equally unknowable. Even in the overtly doxological context of Ps 104, the presence of sin and wickedness in creation is not denied (v 35). Thus, while the appellative for God as creator is maintained, the status of the creator becomes debatable in the wisdom tradition. It is significant that such diverse perspectives of God as creator were maintained and allowed to function simultaneously in the wisdom tradition. God may be praised and trusted as beneficent creator (Ps 104), but also challenged as obscurer of justice in creation (Job 3), or debated as if apathetic toward creation (Qohelet). These perceptions of the creator are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. They bring into discussion various aspects of different views concerning God, keeping theological discourse honest. Sensitivity for different circumstances creates the possibility to comprehend such different views, and to regard them as complementary. This diversity is also indicative of the critical spirit characterising theological discourse during the exilic-postexilic period.

5.3 The Significance of Death in the Hebrew Bible Wisdom Tradition

Death is a significant theme in the wisdom tradition, despite the fact that it does not constitute the centre of Israelite theology or culture. The wisdom tradition is diverse in its theology, but at the same time consistent in portraying divinely established life as limited and death as certain. The analysed texts reflect a progression or an intensification of perceptions concerning the nature of death. These texts retain the basic notion of death as final, but experiences thereof differ markedly. These experiences of death are closely tied up with perceptions of the creator and creation. According to the wisdom of Proverbs, death is more than just biological cessation, since it also denotes a mode of living apart from YHWH (Prov 2:18; 5:5; 7:27; 8:36; 11:19; 14:12; 16:25). As a prolongation of the wise/fool dichotomy, life and death stand in a binary relation and are mutually exclusive. In the wisdom orientated Ps 104 neither death nor the limited nature of life is perceived as problematic, and finds a natural place within the framework of a doxology of creation. Ps 104 perceives death as natural and biological, though it is directly related to YHWH, who is described by means of mythological language. Yet such imagery is not employed in relation to death. In Ps 104, the realm of life does not exclude death. The event of death does not detract from the celebration of an abundance of life. Individual death is engulfed by the divine perpetuation and regeneration of creation as a whole (cf. 104:29-30). Instead of swallowing up death (cf. Isa 25:8), YHWH continually renews creation.

1607 Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult*, 138. Also Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 153. He points to the general characterisation of God as transcended and remote in the HB wisdom tradition. In Proverbs this is mitigated by the personification of wisdom, in Job by divine revelation, and in the psalms by expressions of trust and faith. Qohelet contains no such moderation of divine remoteness.


In Job 3 the experience of unjust suffering culminates in Job’s questioning the value of life and pondering on the virtue of death. Due to his experience of suffering and being rejected by the creator, Job is already experiencing a state of deadliness in life (Job 10:1; also Ps 88:3; 107:18). In his opening soliloquy, he desires a rapid transition into Sheol. Job wishes to die immediately, i.e. unnaturally and not at the end of a long life (contra Job 42:17). His experience of suffering and death dehumanises, and this intensifies the bitter nature of Job’s embrace of death. He longs for the tranquillity of Sheol (contra Job 10:21-22; Isa 14:9-11), in order to escape the tyranny of the creator in life. However, Job expects divine justice and restitution in this life (cf. 19:25-27), not in an afterlife. While already standing with one foot in the grave, his focus ultimately remains on the realm of life, where he wishes to encounter his creator. Through his experience of suffering, weighing of wisdom and life’s value and his rhetorical flirtation with Sheol, but also by the divine speeches, Job comes to a deeper understanding of his creator and his place in creation. The depiction of death and the underworld in Job 3 serves a rhetorical intent and does not carry any value judgement in itself. It does however cast a momentary shadow over every meaningful interpretation of life.

In Qohelet death presents the central theological theme. In view of his ambiguous experience divine creation, and his perception of the creator as aloof, death gains a negative quality, particularly due to its absoluteness. Qohelet laments the egalitarian nature of death. It does not discriminate (cf. 2:16; 3:19), it disrupts the wise / fool dischotomy, and due to creation becoming devoid of justice, Qohelet fails to ascertain the value of life, reaching a climax in Qohelet 11:7-12:8. The imagery in this pericope, whether interpreted metaphorically or allegorically, denotes deterioration and destruction. Death detracts from the value of life. Death is the inevitable end of all, but due to its impact in life it is not just perceived in biological terms, but also metaphorically as that which dehumanises, emptying life of meaning. Whatever profit there might be for humanity is limited to this life. Yet, given that life is characterised by endemic uncertainty, it is ultimately lbh. Due to wisdom’s inability to assure success in life, death remains the only certainty in life. In Ps 104 and Job hope is expressed for divine intervention in the present, but in Qohelet the border between faith and apostacy is very vague. Despite the late dating of these texts, they do not reflect hope in an afterlife, but stay focussed on this life. As such, the fate of the living is sealed with death, with no possibility of resurrection or future judgment.

The perception of God as creator and of creation as continuous, impacts on the perception of death in Ps 104, Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8. The place of death within the

1610 Keel, The Symbolism, 64. In Ps 88:4, death presents the extremity of powerlessness.
1612 Segal, Life after Death, 249.
1613 Death also marks a boundary for knowledge. See here A. Schellenberg, Erkenntnis als Problem: Qohelet und die alttestamentliche Diskussion um das menschliche Erkennen (OBO 188; Fribourgh: Universitätsverlag, 2002), 99. Also Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death,” 268.
1614 Later works such as Sirach, Judith, Tobit, Baruch or 1 Maccabees takes no account of resurrection, but rather continues the line of thinking of Ecclesiastes and other wisdom writings. It was only after events such as the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans, marking the end of the priestly aristocracy, that the doctrine of bodily resurrection became fundamental to the teachings of Judaism. Cf. Martin-Achard, From Death to Life, 223.
framework of their creation theologies, and how death finds a place in the ongoing process of divine creation and recreation is significant. This is particularly the case in view of the challenges posed to perceptions of creation as trustworthy and beneficent, and to the creator as omnipotent and just in the exilic-postexilic period. In wisdom’s reasoning and rhetoric the creator orchestrates and governs the process of creation (e.g. Prov 3:19; 8:28-29; Job 38:1-11). The questioning of the divinely established order in creation also brings into doubt the status of one’s own place within that framework. In the wisdom of Job and Qohelet, this question is fuelled by the distrust of the principle of retribution. Their searching takes them as far as the grave, recognising its limits, with the implication that whatever justice and retribution one can hope for is to be experienced in this life, i.e. in history. In the HB wisdom tradition hope for divine justice and retribution is not based on an eschatological expectation (contra Isa 26:14, 19; Ezek 37:1-14; Dan 12:2-3; 2 Macc 7). This is also asserted in Sirach, which continues Qohelet’s scepticism and denial of a worthwhile afterlife.

The primary concern of the wisdom tradition is with life in the present. This includes the prolongation of life in the present (Prov 3:1-2; 10:16; 15:24), by avoiding death as the result of foolish living (Prov 12:28; 13:14; 14:27; 15:10; 19:16). The significance of life in the present finds acute expression in Job and Qohelet. The occasional theological foreignness of these two books challenges readers to ask different questions in view of existing traditions such as Ps 104. This also pertains to the perceived inability of הַיָּדוּ בָּא to assure יְהֹוָה in life. Wisdom is supposed to constitute and contribute to the quality of life Diesseits. When it is no longer perceived to do so, death is experienced as infringing the borders of life. In Job and Qohelet the inability of wisdom contributes to the perception of death emptying life of meaning and significance. In Qohelet, death is presented as a threatening shadow permanently hanging over life, while in the context of Job 3 he longs for his life to be covered by the shadow of death. In Ps 104 death is merely presented as part of the “shadow side” of the good creation. It is the inevitable fate of all forms of life. The maintenance of a diversity of responses to the phenomenon of death indicates the absence of any normative response. The three perspectives encountered in the focus texts have their own literary and theological context, but also inform one other.

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1615 In this regard Deutero-Isaiah is among the first biblical writers to appropriate and expand the creation theologies of Gen 1:1-3:24, in addressing an exilic audience, overcome by the experience of devastation, which put a question mark behind their convictions of God and world.

1616 Contra Prov 10:2, “Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness (קדש) delivers from death (תומ).” Also Prov 10:27, “The fear of YHWH prolongs days: but the years of the wicked will be shortened.” This tenet reaches its zenith in Prov 10:30, “The righteous (קדש) shall never be removed (Ni of תומ wordplay on תומ but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.”

1617 In Ps. Ezek (4Q385 and 4Q386) the bones are also brought back to life, and the result is that those brought to life will bless YHWH Zebaoth. Here YHWH is the one who brings back to life. Cf. F. García Martínez. The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated. (trans. G.E. Watson; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 286-287.

1618 Some consensus does exist that Qohelet is responding to a notion present within his cultural milieu. Cf. Sanders, “Wisdom, Theodicy, Death,” 270.


1620 Martin-Achard, From Death to Life, 16.
5.4 The Creation-Death Relation in the Hebrew Bible Wisdom Tradition

As stated, the exile served as catalyst for theological innovation, including perceptions of the creation-death relation.\textsuperscript{1621} In the analysed texts, death is not excluded from the realm of creation.\textsuperscript{1622} Life and death are two sides of the same cosmological coin, i.e. constitutive parts of the same reality.\textsuperscript{1623} This is significant, given wisdom’s orientation toward life in the present. To be “alive” (חי) in the HB encompasses more than just “to be.” To be alive is to be created,\textsuperscript{1624} and to stand in a relation with the creator.\textsuperscript{1625} As such, life in creation should be defined in terms of its various manifestations, including the event of death. For this reason a consideration of humanity as created necessarily implies a consideration of its limitations induced by suffering and death.\textsuperscript{1626} In Ps 104 death is not perceived as standing in opposition to creation and neither does it empty life of meaning. Death is certain and part of creation, but life stemming from the hand of YHWH may still be celebrated. In Job 3, and Qoh 11:7-12:8 creation and death do constitute a binary relation. Death detracts from life’s significance and separates from the creator. This indicates a real threat of death, given that the creator is operative in the context of life.\textsuperscript{1627} In this way the creation-death relation in these texts is dynamic, since it fluctuates depending on particular experience of creation and creator.

In Ps 104 the positive portrayal of the creator contributes to the neutral evaluation of the phenomenon of death. Since creator and creation are trustworthy, the psalmist perceives his place in creation as secure, despite the inevitability of death. The divine works encompass both creation and death and for this reason their relation is presented in neutral terms.

In Job 3 the nature of God as creator is scrutinised, and also the relation of the creator toward creation. As a result Job experiences his place in creation as uncertain and his own creation as a crisis. This is exemplified by the reversal of values ascribed to life and death. In Job 3 the creator is accredited with bringing Job into life (cf. Job 10:8-13), but in effect also held responsible for his present state of misery (cf. Job 10:2-3, 16-17). However, Job does not call upon the creator to bring an end to his life. For this purpose he focuses his attention in a different direction. This positive envisioning of Sheol and the dead is particular and limited to Job 3. While death separates from the realm of life, it does not stand in opposition to creation.

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\textsuperscript{1621} Gerstenberger, Theologies, 207. In the exilic-postexilic period theological insights there were “brought together, reinterpreted and above all largely recreated.”

\textsuperscript{1622} This contrasts with Priestly and Deuteronomistic theology in terms of which death could have no place in the realm of life. Cf. I. Willi-Plein, Opfer und Kult im altestamentlichen Israel: Textbefragungen und Zwischenergebnisse (SBS 153; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1993), 56-57. Also Reventlow, “Tod und Leben,” 15 who refers to death as “taboo zone.”


\textsuperscript{1624} Martin-Achard, From Death to Life, 5. Also Pola, “Was ist Leben im Alten Testament.” 251-252. Life is seen as that which is in movement, whereas that which is static e.g. plants, were not considered to be “alive.”

\textsuperscript{1625} Keel, The Symbolism, 68.

\textsuperscript{1626} Westermann, Schöpfung, 141.

\textsuperscript{1627} Feldman, Biblical and Post-biblical Defilement and Mourning, 18. This fear for separation from the presence of the deity distinguishes Israelite religious thought from that of its Umwelt. In the HB God even has a “book of life” (cf. Exod 32:32; Ps 69:28; Isa 4:3; Mal 3:16).
Being created and being mortal are intricately connected in Qoh 11:7-12:8. But the elusive nature of the creator leads to Qohelet’s experience of uncertainty concerning his place and share in creation. As in the case of Job, the uncertainty concerning the nature of the creator opens the way for death to threaten the boundaries of life. If the creator cannot be known or trusted, humanity stands helpless in the face of certain death. The focus of Qoh 11:7-12:8 is on death in life, since death detracts from and presents the ultimate, indiscriminating fate of all living beings. It does not stand in opposition to creation, but is an inherent part thereof. While death is not explicitly said to be created in the HB, both life and death are intricately related to the creator, and in this regard the creation-death relation is best evaluated in terms of the theological construction of God as creator. Life stems from the creator, who is also responsible for setting its limit, and reclaiming the gift bestowed on mortals (e.g. Ps 104:29; Job 10:9; Qoh 11:7).

5.5 Creation, Death and the Hebrew Bible Wisdom Tradition: Reconsidering the Nature and Potential of its Diversity

From the analysis of Ps 104, Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8 no normative view concerning the creation-death relation can be distilled. Each text contains a distinct perception of this relation, but as argued, they are not unrelated. When these texts are read in dialogue, they function as a theological sounding board for each other. By means of a serious engagement with the contextual nature (historical, literary and theological) of each text, theological relativism is avoidable. The analysis of Ps 104, Job 3 and Qoh 11:7-12:8 contributed in determining the distinct theological perspective of each text in its immediate context, but also suggests how they relate to the greater theological tradition in which they are embedded. The analysed texts do not contradict each other in terms of their argument concerning God as creator, or the certainty of death. They do however contradict each other in terms of their perceptions of creation and creator and their reaction in view of the certainty of death. Such contradiction does not imply a theological inconsistency in the wisdom tradition, but rather illustrates the ability of the wisdom tradition to encapsulate disparate theological arguments, which certainly result from diverse experiences of immediate lived reality. Instead of championing one theological argument in a dogmatic fashion, the wisdom tradition contributes to the search for meaning by allowing different theological voices to speak simultaneously. The result of such theological tolerance is a response to the challenges of experience and reality that is much more open ended. The value hereof lies in the fact that it provides an alternative to contemporary theological discourse that is still very much governed by a modernist quest for absoluteness. The wisdom tradition refrains from enforcing any single theological argument as absolute and final. The construction of theological realities encompasses diverse experiences of and responses to life in the present.

\[1628\] In Isa 45:7 YHWH declares that He forms (רְצוֹן) light and creates (אָרֶב) darkness. Here light and darkness should not be equated directly with life and death, but it does contain a qualitative value, i.e. light as positive and darkness as negative.

\[1629\] Gerstenberger, Theologies, 280 is correct in arguing, “because every situation and every human social grouping is mainly responsible for its faith, and because no human formation is completely homogenous, but always carries around within itself its own internal contradictions, the statements of faith made in a particular era are contradictory, and each has to be taken seriously on its own terms.”
Psalm 104 provides a near ideal depiction of creator and creation, but it does not turn a blind eye concerning creation’s dark edges (cf. 35a). In Job these dark edges are a central theme, and Job’s personal experience is responsible for the perception of creation and death encountered in Job 3. This does not disqualify the positive portrayal of creation and creator or the neutral perception of death in Ps 104. Rather, it is informed by a contesting theological perspective of Job 3. These dark edges are also present in Qohelet, but here wisdom’s worth and humanity’s share in life, rather than theodicy are the main concern. In Qohelet God is neither the immanent and active creator of Ps 104, nor the bargaining and responsive God of Job. Qohelet perceives the creator as omnipotent (5:2) and creation as beautiful (3:11a), but his experience of the creator’s absence, coinciding with the unknowable nature of the divine works, renders the creator as terrifying and humanity’s place in creation as uncertain. The lack of theological normativity in these texts does not imply theological relativity. Each text presents a legitimate voicing of experienced realities in a particular context. In the same way the context(s) of the readers of these texts ultimately determines which voice is heard clearest.

In the wisdom tradition, both immediate lived experience and perceptions of the creator contribute to the evaluation of the creation-death relation. The diversity of responses encountered in the HB is significant since its incorporation in the canon implies that it received theological legitimation from the religious communities responsible for its transmission and preservation. Indeed, the HB reflects the existence of divergent religious practices operating side by side, but also conflicts between different “currents of faith.” Given that the Jewish community of the sixth to second century BCE was not a uniform entity, such uniformity should not be expected in terms of theology, politics and worldview reflected in the literature stemming from this period. This contributed to the lack of normativity in the wisdom tradition. It also allows for and contributes to the ongoing process of constructing theological realities. That is, theological realities that are experienced based, informed by tradition, but also open ended in terms of its willingness to engage with differing theological perspectives. Taking into consideration such coexistence of diverse theological arguments, the meaningfulness of trying to determine a linear development is less clear. Of more immediate importance is the synchronic shape of its theology.

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1630 Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 17. He argued that “…it is theologically important to understand the Old Testament’s witness in its own right in regard to its coherence, variety and unresolved tensions.”


1632 Gerstenberger, *Theologies*, 215. Also P.R. Davies, “Scenes from the Early History of Judaism,” in: D.V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 145ff who discusses the insufficiencies of the notion of “normative” or common Judaism(s) within the second temple period, and argues that it is a period in which diverse and conflicting forms of Judaism were operative.

1633 R.E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1978), 20. The very nature of theology is “to concern itself with living faith, rather than with the history of ideas…the latter is certainly important for theology…but it lacks the evaluative role of theology...We are therefore, in seeking an Old Testament theology, concerned with the theological significance which this literature possesses in the modern world, which points us to an openness to its role in Judaism and Christianity.”
In present day faith communities, creation theologies can assist in imagining the world differently, which in turn can impact on the perceptions of death.\textsuperscript{1634} The wisdom tradition’s primary concern for life in the present, i.e. life as such, constitutes a challenge to present day theological discourses to reconsider the value of life \textit{Diesseits} as the primary mode of existence. This includes individual and communal life. The \textit{Diesseits} orientation of the wisdom tradition presents an imperative for faith communities to embrace and value life on this side of the grave. Furthermore to contribute to the establishment of conditions that would allow for living a meaningful life. The ethical thrust hereof is quite clear. By implication this calls for a reconsideration of making sense of life in the face of death. Since death fits within the framework of creation, a proper theological response is called for. From the diverse perceptions of the creation-death relation operative in the analysed texts, it is clear that death should not be considered as something that happens to created beings, as a lower biological order of existence, but rather accepted as an inherent part of what it means to be created. The reality of death does not have to be denied or wished away,\textsuperscript{1635} and as such death does not have to be removed from the world of experience.\textsuperscript{1636} But due to the knowledge of death’s certainty and finality, i.e. that meaning should be sought in this life, death also comes to present a challenge to life. The wisdom tradition addresses this challenge without merely reverting to orthodoxy and without venturing beyond the grave. Rather, it continually redirects the focus to life in the present, allowing for the full scope of its complexities, which includes the reality of death. The search for God, justice, meaning and beauty in creation is also directed toward life \textit{Diesseits}, and is guided by the discernment of God as creator. This perception is unaltered in the wisdom tradition, even when wisdom becomes frustrated in its task.

An implication of such a perspective is that an eschatological basis is not a prerequisite for a theology of hope. That is, maintaining hope or finding meaning in life does not depend on the expectation of an eschatological event, such as resurrection and judgement. Rather, the realities of the present are faced head on and in this regard the wisdom tradition takes life dead serious. It does not allow a flight from the present, but challenges to seriously engage with it. Life might be experienced as covered by the shadow of death, or death might be perceived as preferable to life, but this is never the sum total of what is to be experienced under the sun. In this regard the dialogical nature of wisdom’s theology serves a facilitating purpose. In view hereof, theological labour should be directed at finding meaning within life, rather than challenging the boundaries of death. The task remains for biblical theology to take up this challenge.

\textsuperscript{1634} W. Brueggemann, \textit{Texts under Negotiation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 17. Imagination is significant for interpreting biblical texts. Constructing theological realities is a perpetual and creative task, calling on the resources of the imagination, and an implication is that texts become relative and their meaning subject to change. But as in the case of the early Jewish community, it is an audience that ultimately decides which reality, including the perceptions of creation and death, is more suitable in a particular context.

\textsuperscript{1635} Modern western attitudes toward death are often characterised by a “denial” of death in the sense that it becomes secularised, institutionalised and professionalised. Cf. Anderson, \textit{Theology, Death, and Dying}, 16.

\textsuperscript{1636} Other than in western culture where death becomes an event separated from family and public life, and as a result death has no place in the contemporary person’s worldview. Cf. Anderson, \textit{Theology, Death and Dying}, 20.
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In deze dissertatie wordt onderzocht hoe de thema’s schepping en dood zich theologisch verhouden binnen de wijsheidstradities van de Hebreeuwse Bijbel. Daarbij ligt de focus op een selectie van bijzondere teksten, te weten Psalm 104, Job 3 en Prediker 11:7-12:8. De crux van het onderzoek zit in de verbinding tussen de verschillende teksten en bijbehorende posities ten aanzien van schepping, dood, de verhouding van God en mens en hoe die diversiteit betekenisvol tot uitdrukking kan komen in een Bijbelse theologie die een dialoog over de geldigheid van Bijbelse teksten stimuleert. Pogingen om de diverse theologische posities binnen de wijsheidstradities binnen één kader te integreren worden daarom van de hand gewezen. De these van het proefschrift luidt dat de theologische potentie van de Hebreeuwse Bijbel (HB) juist gelegen is in de theologische diversiteit ervan.

De probleemstelling valt uiteen in twee delen. In het eerste deel wordt bestudeerd welke rol de dood speelt binnen de schepping en tegenover God als schepper in Psalm 104, Job en Prediker (Qohelet). Dit wordt uitgewerkt door middel van een detaillexegese en thematische besprekingen. Hieruit komen verschillende theologische houdingen ten opzichte van de dood binnen het kader van de schepping en tegenover God als schepper naar voren. In het tweede deel wordt beargumenteerd dat de verschillende theologische posities zoals die in het eerste deel naar voren zijn gekomen niet op één lijn kunnen en moeten worden gebracht, maar dat de diversiteit juist moet prevaleren. Het tweede deel van de probleemstelling wordt opgenomen in het concluderende hoofdstuk, waar de thema’s schepping, schepper, dood en de verhouding tussen schepping en dood serieel worden behandeld en de belangrijkste punten uit de posities van de drie teksten naar voren worden gehaald.

In hoofdstuk één worden de probleemstelling, hypothese en modus operandi van het onderzoek in kaart gebracht. De theologische diversiteit van de HB stelt Bijbelwetenschappers vaak voor een uitdaging. Dat is met name het geval wanneer de vooronderstelling is dat de diverse theologische stemmen gelijktijdig recht gedaan zouden moeten worden en niet binnen een allesomvattend raamwerk moeten worden geïncorporeerd. Schepping en dood zijn twee theologische thema’s en voorbeelden van deze diversiteit. Niet alleen tussen verschillende tradities, maar ook binnen dezelfde theologische stromingen, zoals de wijsheidstraditie.

Het theologische karakter van de HB is geen vanzelfsprekendheid. Sommige Bijbelwetenschappers ontkennen de mogelijkheid de HB theologisch te Hoewel het problematisch is te spreken over de theologie van de HB, wordt de HB in dit onderzoek wel als een theologisch werk beschouwd. Met Erhard Gerstenberger kan men beter spreken over theologieën in de HB. Zo zijn er verschillende scheppingstheologieën en theologische opvattingen over de dood in de HB. Vooral binnen de wijsheidstradities zijn schepping en dood belangrijke theologische thema’s. Maar hoe de dood in verhouding staat tot het leven en hoe ze beiden in relatie tot God als schepper staan, wordt in de wijsheidstraditie niet op een eenduidige wijze voorgesteld.

In dit onderzoek wordt gevraagd naar de wijze waarop de dood een rol speelt in het zoeken naar zingeving (Job 3; Prediker 11:7-12:3), alsook in het vieren van de vitaliteit van het leven (Psalm 104). De dood wordt daarbij niet onderzocht als een op zichzelf staand thema. In de analyse van de teksten staat de perceptie van de relatie tussen leven en dood binnen elke tekst voorop, alsook de theologische respons op deze perceptie. Binnen de context van de bestudeerde teksten zijn het vooral...
percepties van de schepping en schepper die bepalend zijn voor de evaluatie van de relatie tussen leven en dood.

In de HB is het leven (µyyj, vmp) in het tegenwoordige, biologische of fysieke bestaan van groot belang. Toch heeft de Israëliïtische religie, en daarbinnen de wijsheidstraditie, ook naar kwaliteiten van verhouding met de godheid, in het bijzonder als Schepper, gekeken ten einde de betekenis en zinvolheid van het leven uit te drukken (Psalm 63:3; zie ook Psalm 1:3; 36:9; 67:1; 31:16; 13:3) en vervolgens ook de relatie van het leven tot de dood (Jesaja 9:3). Psalm 104, Job 3 en Prediker 11:7-12:8 zijn onderzocht met het oog op de voorstelling van de relatie tussen schepper en schepping. In deze teksten is de waargenomen kwaliteit van de verhouding met de schepper en de perceptie van de plaats van de mens binnen de schepping heel belangrijk voor de evaluatie van de dood. De teksten laten een specifiek retorisch patroon zien waardoor de schepping-dood relatie een literaire vorm krijgt. Een analyse van die retorische aspecten vraagt om een focus op zowel de microliteraire context (de plaats binnen het boek, vorm, structuur, taal, stijl) alsook de macroliteraire context (de plaats binnen de HB en relatie tot andere teksten en theologische tradities) van elke tekst.

De bredere sociaal-culturele en sociaal-religieuze context, in zoverre die achterhaald kan worden, wordt niet buiten beschouwing gelaten. Dit heeft implicaties voor het bepalen van de verwantschap van diverse opvattingen over God, schepping en de dood tijdens de Babylonische ballingschap (6de eeuw v. Chr.) en de vroege Tweede Tempelperiode (5de-3de eeuw v. Chr.). Door de confrontaties met Babylonische, Perzische en Hellenistische religieuze ideeën werden nieuwe theologische strategieën bedacht ten einde nieuwe betekenis te geven aan het idee van de schepping; niet alleen op het persoonlijke vlak van het individu, maar ook op het gemeenschappelijke vlak van een universele schepping. En daarmee werd ook nieuwe betekenis gegeven aan de dood en de relatie ervan tot de verschillende ideeën over schepping.

In hoofdstuk twee staat Psalm 104 centraal. De keuze voor deze Psalm is niet vanzelfsprekend vanwege de vraag naar het genre van dit lied. Kan Psalm 104 als wijsheidspsalm geclassificeerd worden of niet? Kan er gesproken worden over een apart genre “wijsheidspsalm”? Er wordt gekozen voor het uitgangspunt dat Psalm 104 een wijsheidsoriëntatie heeft, gezien de nadruk op de wijsheid (hmkkj) van YHWHs scheppend handelen (v. 24). Psalm 104 is een hymne (vv. 1, 35b) over de schepper en de schepping en een mengeling van een theologie van de wijsheid en van de cultus. Dit blijkt uit de wijsheidsoriëntatie van de psalm en de theologische affiniteiten met Genesis 1:1-2:4a. Deze fusie van verschillende theologische tradities compliceert de diachrone en synchrone analyse. Psalm 104 is daarnaast ook ingebed in het religieuze en literaire erfgoed van het Oude Nabije Oosten, met name in relatie tot voorstellingen van de Kanaänitische stormgod en de Egyptische Atonhymne. In dit onderzoek ligt de nadruk vooral op de uiteindelijke vorm van Psalm 104.

De schepping en schepper nemen de centrale plaats in binnen deze doxologische psalm. De dood, hoewel aanwezig in de psalm, is daarbij geen zelfstandig theologisch thema. Een overvloed aan leven impliceert niet de afwezigheid van de dood. De perceptie van de schepper-schepping relatie, die uitermate positief is, draagt bij tot de theologische evaluatie van de dood. De negatieve noot in v. 35 is een aanwijzing voor een verwachting en een hoop die gericht zijn op de tegenwoordige werkelijkheid, een verwachting en hoop die gegrond zijn in het vertrouwen op de goedheid van de schepper. De stelling van Christoph Barth, dat ervaringen van de dood in de HB altijd ervaringen van God zijn, is daarom relevant. Zelfs in de dood vallen geschapen
wezens niet buiten het kader van de goddelijke schepping en Gods betrokkenheid met de schepping. Het individu is deel van de grotere schepping en als zodanig stelt de dood van het individu niet een bedreiging voor, maar de voortzetten van de schepping (v. 30). De positieve perceptie van de schepper en de schepping en het vertrouwen in de schepper zijn redenen waarom de dood in Psalm 104 niet wordt beschouwd als een ontnemen van het leven of verantwoordelijk wordt gehouden voor een scheiding van het geschapene van de schepper. De dood staat niet in oppositie tot de goddelijke gevestigde schepping en wordt niet ervaren als een bedreiging van de inherente orde ervan.

In zoverre als de dood wordt voorgesteld als het eind van het individuele leven correspondeert Psalm 104 met vroegere (bijvoorbeeld Genesis 2:4a-3:24) en latere (Job en Prediker) theologische tradities. Vanwege de positieve nadruk in Psalm 104 op de goddelijke almacht en de goedheid van de schepping, net als in het Priesterlijke scheppingsverhaal van Genesis 1:1-2:4a, staat de psalm in streng contrast tot Job 3 en Prediker 11:7-12:8. In de laatstgenoemde teksten worden de positieve theologische bevestigingen van Psalm 104 problematisch gemaakt. Ook de notie in Psalm 104 van de afhankelijkheid van de gehele schepping van de schepper wordt geproblematiseerd in latere theologische tradities zoals Job en Prediker. Dit alles draagt bij tot het specifieke beeld van de dood dat in Psalm 104 op de voorgrond treedt. De dood wordt gedefinieerd in termen van de ervaringen met de schepper en de schepping, alsook de schepper-schepping relatie.

De Psalmen bieden verschillende visies op en beelden van schepping en dood. Psalm 104 is een getuige van een van deze visies en beelden. De theologie van schepping en schepper in Psalm 104 is bepalend voor het beeld van de dood in deze psalm. Dit beeld is dat de dood een natuurlijke, hoewel marginale plaats heeft binnen de schepping. Hoewel de afwezigheid van de dood geen vereiste is voor doxologie is het belangrijk op te merken dat loprijsing in Psalm 104 plaats vindt in dit leven. Psalm 104 is dièsesis georiënteerd. De hoop verwoord in v. 35 is daarom niet afhankelijk van een gelooven in een of andere vorm van leven na de dood. In Psalm 104 impliceert de terugkeer tot stof (v. 29) geen schimachtig bestaan in het dodenrijk (zoals geldt voor de יָהָי in Psalm 88:11; Jesaja 14:9; 26:19; Spreuken 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Job 26:5, of 1 Samuël 28:13 waar יָאִי wordt gebruikt). De dood wordt niet gezien als een minderwaardig of verzwakte vorm van het leven, die in een of andere vorm voortduurt in de onderwereld. De dood is finaal. Dit impliceert echter niet dat de dood van het individu in oppositie staat tot de continuering van de schepping (v. 30), i.e. van het leven. Wat Psalm 104 zegt over schepping en dood betreft dit leven. De dièsesis-oriëntatie van Psalm 104 sluit aan bij de perceptie van de schepper als actief en onmiddellijk “tegenwoordig” in de schepping. Men komt de schepper tegen binnen de context van de schepping (v. 31). In Psalm 104 is orde in de schepping waarneembaar en daarom wordt de schepping ervaren als goed en betrouwbaar.

In hoofdstuk 3 word de tekst van Job 3 besproken. Het betreft een tekst die lijnrecht staat tegenover de doxologie van Psalm 104. De extreme aard van Jobs tegenspoed, beschreven in de narratieve proloog (Job 1-2), wordt vervolgd door een gelijkwaardig gedicht over Jobs rampspoed in Job 3. In dit gedicht zijn schepping en dood twee nau verwante theologische thema’s. Job is tot het licht (d.w.z. leven) gebracht door de schepper (v. 20), maar nu wenst Job bedekt te worden door de schaduw van de dood (vv. 4-5) ten einde de onderdrukkende alomtegenwoordigheid van de schepper te ontsnappen. Doordat Job bijna alle reden voor hoop in dit leven heeft verloren, richt hij zijn aandacht en hoop tot de dood (vv. 17-19). Zijn perceptie van de dood in
hoofdstuk 3 is gedefinieerd in termen van zijn ervaring met de schepper, de schepping en de relatie tussen die twee. De basale aard van de dood in Job 3 komt overeen met die van de grotere context van het boek Job, maar de wijze waarop de dood wordt waargenomen verschilt aanzienlijk. De omarming van de dood en de positieve beschouwing van de sfeer van de doden in Job 3 is een uniek scenario in de HB. Het is ook uniek in het boek Job en laat daarmee de theologische en retorische functie van Job 3 zien binnen het gehele boek Job, maar vooral in verhouding tot de Godsspraken (Job 38-41), die vaak worden beschouwd als een tegenwicht voor Jobs wens dat zijn schepping ongedaan moet worden gemaakt.

De Godsredes bieden weliswaar tegenwicht aan Jobs aantijgingen, maar een direct antwoord is niet de onmiddellijke intentie ervan. Niettemin, uiteindelijk geeft Job toe en roept dat hij God heeft “gezien” (42:5). Zo wordt de Job van de epiloog in nauwe verwantschap gebracht met de Job van de proloog (1:22; 2:10). Een dergelijke ontwikkeling van de figuur Job in het boek doet echter niets af aan de scherpte van Jobs uitroep in hoofdstuk 3. Het is belangrijk dat Job er aanspraak op maakt dat hij God, zijn schepper, heeft gezien in de context van de goddelijke schepping, zoals voorgesteld in de Godsredes. Het suggereert namelijk dat hoop te vinden is binnen het kader van de goddelijke schepping, m.a.w. binnen de sfeer van het leven en niet in de sfeer van de dood. Gedeeltelijk dient dit als verklaring voor de onmekaar van Jobs aanvankelijke hoogachting van de dood en de sfeer van de doden. Een verandering in Jobs retoriek vindt dan ook plaats voordat het daadwerkelijke herstel van zijn welzijn inzet.

De scheppingstheologie in de grotere context van het boek Job is uiteindelijk bepalend voor de rehabilitatie van Jobs verlangen naar de dood. In het boek Job vindt de dood een theologische plaats binnen het raamwerk van de schepping en om deze reden vertegenwoordigt Jobs aanvankelijke omarming van de dood een poging om zijn schepping, d.w.z zijn leven, te herstellen. Uiteindelijk leidt Jobs ervaring van lijden tot een nieuw en dieper verstaan van God als schepper. Het is Jobs negatieve ervaring van schepper en schepping en de schepper-schepping relatie, alsook de ervaring van het onvermogen van de wijsheid dit alles te doorgronden, die leiden tot zijn herdefinieëring van de traditionele kwaliteiten van de dood in Job 3. Jobs omarming van de dood in Job 3 staat in contrast tot het dualistische wereldbeeld van Spreuken 1-9 (beschouwd als het late hoogtepunt van traditionele wijsheid), waarin leven en dood elkaar uitsluitende grootheden zijn. Het leven moet gezocht worden door de dood te vermijden. Maar in Job zijn leven (orde) en dood (chaos) geïntegreerde realiteiten van dezelfde goddelijke schepping. De scheppingstheologie van het boek Job depolariseert niet het leven en de dood, maar brengt eerder een verandering van perspectief tot stand met betrekking tot deze relatie.

wijisheid hier van weinig nut. De godheid is inderdaad een groot raadsel voor Prediker en zijn retoriek over de dood dient als achtergrond waartegen zijn positieve uitspraken over het leven geïnterpreteerd moeten worden.

Doord analyse van Prediker 11:7-12:8 wordt de relatie van schepping en dood, opgevat als theologische thema’s, onderzocht, vooral met het oog op de perceptie van de godheid. De retoriek van Prediker is soms dubbelzinnig, maar bevestigt dat de dood een impact heeft op en een uitdaging biedt voor het leven. Met Psalm 104 en Job 3 bevestigt Prediker 11:7-12:8 de dood als het natuurlijke en onvermijdelijke einde van een ieder. Toch benadrukt deze tekst ook de absoluutheid en de zekerheid van de dood. In Prediker wordt het leven gedefinieerd in het licht van de zekerheid van de dood. Dit treedt ook naar voren in het terugkerende thema van het raamwerk van het boek, namelijk dat alles levendig (lij) van de mensheid. Als het licht van het leven is uitgedoofd en het stof tot de aarde is teruggekeerd, is het leven tot een absoluut einde gekomen. Met de dood keert de adem terug naar God (12:7). Dit houdt misschien de suggestie in (3:21 spreekt er twijfel over uit) dat de schepper niet Zijn schepping laten ophouden bij het moment van de dood. Toch blijft de onzekerheid die Prediker binnen de sfeer van de goddelijke schepping kan ervaren. Binnen deze sfeer blijft de dood de enige zekerheid. Daarom is het binnen de context van deze schepping dat elke moment van het leven optimaal moet worden benut.

Het realistische bewustzijn van de finaliteit van de dood geeft vorm aan de inhoud van en richting aan Predikers retoriek. Het is niet zozeer de dood dat een theologisch probleem voor Prediker is, maar de relatie van de dood tot het leven en de plaats van de dood binnen de schepping. Prediker argumenteert tegen een leven dat niet de dood serieus neemt, m.a.w. dat probeert het bestaan te verlengen ins Jenseits en daardoor het aardse Dasein in waarde vermindert. Het leven nu is belangrijk en men moeten profiteren van zijn aandeel in het leven, want er is niets meer te verwachten na de dood. Op deze wijze laat Prediker niet toe dat men wegvlucht van de werkelijkheid van dit leven naar een volgend leven. Uitstel gekoppeld aan een hoop op een beter nog te komen leven wordt van de hand gewezen. Een dergelijke waarneming van het leven en de dood is kenmerkend voor Prediker, maar vertegenwoordigt tegelijkertijd ook een legitieme stem binnen de HB. De nadruk die Prediker legt op het leven in het ondermaanse staat tegenover andere Bijbelse teksten die uitdrukking geven aan een theologie gebaseerd op eschatologische verwachtingen.

In hoofdstuk vijf worden de resultaten van de voorgaande exegetische hoofdstukken bij elkaar gebracht. In het licht van deze resultaten wordt beargumenteerd hoe de diverse, toch niet losstaande theologische stemmen in een creatieve dialoog met elkaar kunnen worden gebracht Een dergelijke dialoog betekent niet dat de diversiteit wordt prijsgegeven ter wille van theologische saamhorigheid en ook niet dat traditie wordt prijsgegeven ter wille van vernieuwend theologisch denken. Er begint een kritisch debat met de traditie en de spanning die daaruit ontstaat biedt ruimte voor dialoog.
De wijsheidstraditie van de HB, vroegere zowel als latere wijsheid, is gericht op het leven in het ondermaanse en toont weinig interesse voor denken over het voortbestaan na de dood. Dat geldt binnen contexten waar de vitaliteit van het leven wordt gevierd (Psalm 104), maar ook binnen contexten die worden gekenmerkt door een zoeken naar de zin van het leven (Job en Prediker). Een implicatie van deze diesseits-oriëntatie van de wijsheidstraditie is dat hoop niet is gebaseerd op een eschatologische verwachting. Wat men zou kunnen bereiken in het leven, rechtvaardigheid en gerechtigheid inclus, moet worden nagestreefd in het leven nu. Dit heeft zekere ethische implicaties voor het leven. De zekerheid en de finaliteit van de dood, hetzij positief of negatief beoordeeld, dwingt om het leven serieus te nemen. Er is geen uitvlucht in de hoop op een leven of een rechtvaardiging na de dood. Niettemin, de dood staat op zichzelf niet in oppositie tot de schepping. Hij is er een inherent onderdeel van. Ervaringen van de schepper en schepping dragen bij tot de wijze waarop de finaliteit van de dood wordt ervaren. Het is daarom niet de dood zelf, maar ervaringen van de schepping, schepper en de schepping-schepper relatie die als problematisch worden ervaren en als zodanig bijdragen tot het problematische karakter van de dood. Wanneer de wijsheid niet meer in staat is om zekerheden te bieden voor succes in het leven nu, draagt dit bij tot de problematische aard van de dood. De grenzen van de dood kunnen niet meer worden verschoven door de zekerheden die de wijsheid kan bieden.

Door de analyse van Psalm 104, Job 3 en Prediker 11:7-12:8 is in dit onderzoek geïllustreerd hoe schepping en dood als theologische thema's op uiteenlopende wijzen binnen de wijsheidstraditie worden aangesproken. Elke tekst toont een eigen perspectief, maar de analyse van deze teksten heeft ook de verwantschap met andere theologische tradities binnen het HB aangetoond. De hier uitgevoerde analyse van deze teksten heeft de noodzaak laten zien om exegetisch op een zorgvuldige wijze te bepalen hoe die teksten van bestaande theologische tradities gebruik hebben gemaakt in de presentatie van hun eigen theologische argumenten. Om deze argumenten in een constructieve dialoog met elkaar te brengen vraagt meer dan een passieve observatie, omdat theologen ook actieve deelnemers zijn aan een voortgaande theologische dialoog met de HB. De uiteenlopende en dialogische aard van de HB draagt bij tot de theologisch potentie ervan door alternatieve wegen voor theologische verkenning toe te laten. Dit draagt niet alleen bij tot een verrijking van theologische reflectie, maar voorkomt ook dat de theologie irrelevant zou worden. Een engagement met deze diversiteit houdt het theologische discours eerlijk en relevant.