

The Woman in Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1: The Women of Solomon or the Women of Samson?

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I. Introduction

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Qohelet maintains that his study and investigation of everything under the sun is through empirical observation. In Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1, he endeavours to investigate and understand the scheme of things and ended up making a rather negative evaluative comment about women. He describes woman as snares, traps and chains. Such observation makes him conclude that women are more bitter than death. Moreover, he maintains that entrapment by the woman is a form of divine punishment to the sinner. Qohelet's rather negative statement needs further articulation. Hence, this article will suggest the type of woman Qohelet might have observed in his study. While earlier studies associate this passage with Solomon's womanizing, this article will show how the three women in Samson's life fit in to Qohelet's negative appraisal of woman. The article will first provide an exegesis of Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1. It will be followed by a short discussion on the epistemology of Qohelet's proverbial saying. Third, there would be an

exegesis of the passages about Samson and his women. Lastly, I shall show how Samson's narrative in Judges 13-16 illustrates Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1.

II. Exegesis of Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1

1. Limits and Structure of the Passage¹

Contrary to Dominic Rudman who reads Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 as a literary unit,² the limits of the passage should probably include 8:1.³ Hence, the passage under study begins at 7:23 and ends at 8:1. It is observable that 7:23-24 (A) and 8:1 (A') function like book ends as short prologue and epilogue for this short passage. They form a literary inclusio for two literary grounds. First, both book ends contain the same theme on the tension of the pursuit of wisdom and understanding yet the inability to discover it. Second, these two book ends are expressed in the interrogative mood. They both employ an interrogative pronoun מִי (who) as linguistic markers and connections (רְחוּק מִה־שִׁהִיָּה וְעֵמֶק) [Eccl. 7:24] and מִי בִּהְחָכְסָה וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּתֶר דְּבָר [Eccl. 8:1]). These two interrogative questions, namely, who can discover wisdom? (7:24) and who is wise? who knows the explanation of things?

¹ The literary unity of the passage is debated by most scholars. The position of this article is not unique but stands on the research of Johan Pak, "Significance of אִשָּׁה in Qoh 7:26: 'More Bitter than Death is the Woman, If She is a Snare,'" in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 371-83.

² Dominic Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, JSOP Supplement Series 316 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 101.

³ Eric S. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 201-5. Christianson reads 8:1 with the succeeding verses until verse 17. Norbert Lohfink divides 8:1 into two, the first section is read together with the preceding while 8:1b is read with the instruction concerning obeying the king in Norbert Lohfink, *Qohelet*, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 102-3. Khalil reads 8:1 with 8:2-3 in his article entitled "Qohelet's Response to the Overconfident Preacher: A New Approach to Ecclesiastes 8:1-3" in *Word and World* 32 (2012): 277-85.

(8:1), are rhetorical questions with the obvious answer of "no one."⁴ More importantly, verses 25-29 (B) is the heart of the the passage under study. In the middle section, Qohelet describes what he has discovered and makes evaluative judgment.

2. The Meaning of חֲשָׁבוֹן (v. 25)

Dominic Rudman is correct to focus his study on the hebrew word חֲשָׁבוֹן found in the passage for this word is important in understanding this section. Although Qohelet claims he engages into many investigation, namely, wisdom (חֵכְמָה), planning (חֲשָׁבוֹן), stupidity of wickedness (רָשָׁע כָּסֵל) and madness of folly (הוֹלָלוֹת הַסִּכְלוֹת), what is perhaps unique and worthy of inquiry is his investigation on the planning (חֲשָׁבוֹן) as this noun is repeated at least three times in this section (vv. 25, 27, 29). Rudman writes:

It is perhaps significant that while Qohelet goes on to speak in more detail in 7:27-29 about חֲשָׁבוֹן which he mentions in 7:25, he appears to say nothing more about the 'wickedness and folly, foolishness and madness' that he mentions in the same verse. The hebrew phraseology of this clause in fact finds several echoes in the search that Qohelet undertakes in the so called 'Royal Experiment' in 1:12-2:26...⁵

Rudman also considers that חֲשָׁבוֹן has to do with humanity's motivations and their deeds.⁶ Longman reads "sum of things."⁷ Seow renders

⁴ According to Mark Sneed, the unattainability to comprehend deed done under the sun is equivalent to Qohelet's proverb that "what is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted," in Mark Sneed, *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes: A Social-Science Perspective* (Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 250.

⁵ Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, 103.

⁶ Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, 110-11.

⁷ Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 202-3.

"accounting."⁸ Fox suggests, "solution."⁹ Bible versions like: NIV translates חֲשָׁבוֹן as "scheme of things"; NASB as "explanation"; NRSV as "sum of things"; NLT, JPS and NKJV as "reason for things" provide different renderings.

The above translations reflect how scholars and bible translators have difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of the word חֲשָׁבוֹן. If one were to consolidate the various renderings, what is common among these is the general and all-encompassing notion of "planning" which involves the above suggestions. This is in line with how חֲשָׁבוֹן is placed side by side with חֲכֻמָּה. NIV translates the same word חֲשָׁבוֹן in Ecclesiastes 9:10 as "planning." Insofar as the meaning of the word is not solely based on its lexical meaning but on its use and context. The use of the word חֲשָׁבוֹן for this particular section should be rendered pejoratively as will be further explained below. Hence, "scheming" or "scheme" might be a more accurate rendering rather than the neutral meaning of "planning."

3. Women as Snares, Traps, and Chains (v. 26)

Qohelet's investigation of the "scheming" חֲשָׁבוֹן zooms into the female gender. Qohelet describes אִשָּׁה woman as מְצוֹרִים (snares) and חֲרָמִים (trap) and אַסִּירִים (chains).¹⁰ These three descriptions do not exist apart from human planning. As a matter of fact, these include careful planning. Integral to snares, traps and chains is trickery and camouflage. They come in disguise. Otherwise, there will be no victim. In so far as the words have negative connotation, the planning here carry pejorative meaning. Thus, the above descriptions of the woman

⁸ C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 260-61.

⁹ Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, JSOP Supplement Series 71 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 268.

¹⁰ There is subject-verb and grammatical discrepancy. However, it can be explained as taking the singular as...

maintains that woman is a schemer. This provocative description of women renders some scholars, perhaps feminists scholars, to read Qohelet as a misogynist. However, a proper understanding of the genre of the verse as a proverbial saying understands that this is not a universal and absolute statement. Qohelet is simply saying that there are substantial number of such vicious women out there under the sun.¹¹

As we exegete the passage, what first needs to be unpacked is the identity of the woman described in verse 26. Scholars gave various suggestions. The suggestions include rendering this woman as a type, Woman Folly or "women in general." Traditional reading reads the woman as woman folly of Proverbs 5 and 7 or the wicked and foreign women of Solomon (I Kings 11:1-6). A reading that is sensitive to the proverbial genre of the verse renders the woman both having a specific and general reference. Generally, it may be said that the woman is representative of the female gender, women in general. Specifically, as this article will argue in the succeeding section, the women of Samson.

Women as Instrument of Divine Judgment. Rudman's study is valuable and persuasive. His study on the entrapment language namely מְצוּדִים (snares) and תְּרָמִים (traps) and אֲסָרִים (chains) is suggestive. His study on the use of מְצוּדִים (snares) in and outside Ecclesiastes shows that it is used figuratively to illustrate God's judgement and God as hunting (sinful) person (Job 19:6). According to him, תְּרָמִים (traps) refers to a fisherman's dragnet. Outside of Ecclesiastes, the term appears only in the prophets. It is used to image a weapon used by evil people to ensnare each other and divine judgment. The last term אֲסָרִים (chains) has a more neutral connotation of imprisonment and is sometimes used as divine chastisement. Needless to say, this article follows Rudman to argue that the entrapment language used here connote divine judgment and women as agent of divine judgment.¹²

¹¹ Johan Pak argues in his article for a rather rare translation of אִשָּׁה as "if" to mean conditional in order to maintain that although Qohelet's description is negative but he does not have to be misogynist or woman-hater for he recommends his young man to marry and love women in Eccl. 9: 9. Pak, "Significance of אִשָּׁה in Qoh 7:26," 371-83.

¹² Pak, "Significance of אִשָּׁה in Qoh 7:26," 105-6.

Having described the women as snares, traps and chains, Qohelet makes two statements which connote the idea of divine judgement.

First, Qohelet's assessment by comparing women with death points to a form of judgment. He maintains that woman is more bitter than death.¹³ Death and the inevitability of death is an important theme in Ecclesiastes. Based on Qohelet's study and investigation, labor on earth and under the sun is meaningless because of death. Death is the evil that has come upon human beings (9:3). Wisdom does not have advantage over folly because both do not escape death (Eccl. 2: 12-16). Man and animals also share the same fate of death (Eccl. 3:18-23). Riches are meaningless because when one dies, one cannot take riches with them to Sheol (Eccl. 5:13-17). Being a good man does not have advantage over sinner because both will end up in death (Eccl. 9:1-6). In sum, death is an ugly reality Qohelet has observed. The strong language of bitterness (more bitterness than death) describes the intense pain and agony of entrapment by women. According to Qohelet, when one is dead, one ceases to feel the pain, but entrapment of woman is living in pain.

Second, in verse 26b "the one who pleases God will escape this woman but the sinner she will capture" is antithetical parallelism. It juxtaposes the fate of the one who pleases God and the sinner. Such vicious woman will not fall upon the one who pleases God but upon the sinner. The word used "capture" (לָכַד) which images imprisonment and loss of freedom, only adds to the already strong description of the woman as snare, trap and chain. Although it is strange to see the word pair used here as good (טוֹב)—sinner (חַוֵּטָא), rather than righteous—sinner, but the second line of the parallelism is clear that such woman is understood as a punishment to the sinner, while the one who pleases God experiences an escape, which can be rendered as a form of salvation. The woman plays a role as instrument of divine judgment.¹⁴

¹³ Norbert Lohfink unnecessarily renders the verse as "womankind is stronger than death." The Hebrew word מָר translated as "strong" instead of "bitter."

¹⁴ Pak, "Significance of אִשָּׁר in Qoh 7:26," 107.

4. Men Are Schemers (vv. 27-28)

One can only wish verses 27-28 is intelligible than what it is right now. It is obscure and is subject to many interpretations. NRSV renders it as "See, this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find חֲשָׁבוֹן, which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found." NIV adds "upright" twice in verse 28, perhaps getting the clue for the appended word from verse 29 with the hebrew word יָשָׁר (lit. straight).

Nevertheless, in verses 27-28, Qohelet again asserts that he seeks to discover חֲשָׁבוֹן. He discloses the results of his quantitative research. He explains that among a sampling of a thousand of people, including both men and women, he discovered חֲשָׁבוֹן, the scheming of a singular man but no woman's scheming have been found. In verse 28, the word אָרָם with the absence of definite article here is better rendered as male gender as it is contrasted by the female gender אִשָּׁה in the second antithetical line. Numerically speaking, the ratio is 1:0. What Qohelet seeks to say is that with a sampling of 1000, the male gender is engaged in scheming more than the female gender.

This reading may at first appear strange for one expects that this section will follow the pejorative appraisal of women. But typical of Qohelet's literary strategy, which he often pushes something forward two steps and pulls it back one step to create a layering. In Fox terms, Qohelet "tear down" women in the first section and builds up women in this section. This is similar to his "better sayings" strategy.

5. Human Beings Are Schemers (v. 29)

Typical of Qohelet's discourse strategy, after making a statement about the scheming of women (v. 26), and then the scheming of men (v. 27-28), he follows it up by balancing the two genders by making a general statement.¹⁵ "God made mankind upright, but they have gone

¹⁵ Examples found in Eccl. 4:2-3, 5-6, 7-12; 5:8-20.

in search of many schemes." Verse 29b should be read as antithetical parallelism with contrastive *waw* connecting the two lines.

I have found only this that God made mankind upright
but they have gone in search of many schemes. (Eccl. 7:29)

Contrary to verse 28, the word אָדָם with an article here is better rendered as "mankind" in general sense. The language used in this verse alludes to the Genesis story of Adam and Eve. God originally created and intended human beings to be straight and upright, but as the story progresses, human nature chooses otherwise. Eve chooses to be vicious first, then followed by Adam.¹⁶ "The Hebrew word for "straightforward" יָשָׁר in verse 29 can be translated "upright indicating that God made humans originally as morally pure, but they have strayed from this state."¹⁷ The next line is antithetical to the first line. Hence, both men and women are engaged in scheming, pejoratively.¹⁸

III. Epistemology of Qohelet

Qohelet's epistemology has received numerous attention from Qohelet scholars. Scholars like Michael Fox,¹⁹ James Crenshaw,²⁰ C. L. Seow and Ryan O'Dowd²¹ attempt to explain the method Qohelet used to understand and reflect on the world he is in especially as it

¹⁶ Bernard Maurer, "The Book of Ecclesiastes as a Derash of Genesis 1-4: A Study in the Old Testament Literary Dependency" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007).

¹⁷ Sneed, *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes*, 245.

¹⁸ The word "אָדָם" here refers to humanity in general.

¹⁹ Michael Fox, "The Inner Structure of Qoheleth," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Schoors, 225-38.

²⁰ James L. Crenshaw, "Qoheleth's Understanding of Intellectual Inquiry," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Schoors, 206-24.

²¹ Ryan O'Dowd, "Epistemology in Ecclesiastes: Remembering What It Means To Be Human," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Schoors, 195-217.

relates to Proverbs²² and Job. Scholars are in agreement that insofar as Qohelet himself explains his methodology in the book by referring to "I tested," "I said," "I tuned my mind", "I found," "I did not find," etc.; such method reflect empirical epistemology of Qohelet, although at its crudest form. "The people, events, and situations he described in the book are his personal observation and experience rather than a systematic and consistent empiricism of modern philosophy."²³ Fox elaborates, "Qohelet seeks both to derive knowledge from experience and to validate ideas experientially. He often reports his findings introspectively, communicating his discoveries as perceptions. And he conceives of knowledge as product of human thought."²⁴

Having personally observed and experience, Qohelet records the process and conclusions of his endeavour into the text understudy. One can only wish Qohelet was generous to provide more elaboration but the text understudy is necessarily succinct and profound as characteristic of wisdom proverbial saying. T. Hildebrandt defines a proverb as "created from a singular situation (I Sam. 10:12). An observed pattern is isolated and a general inference formulated. This inductively, deductively or analogically derived inference is then distilled into a concise, poetically crafted statement. The proverb is then detached from that original setting to be used as an intergenerationally traditional saying among the folk in a thousand diverse contexts."²⁵

Although Qohelet's observation concerning the woman may not be technically rendered as proverbial saying like that ones we see in Proverbs which is usually a two-liner, but the methodology behind

²² It is observed that in Proverbs, "hearing" is more prevalent than "seeing" found in Qoheleth.

²³ Michael Fox, "Qoheleth's Epistemology," *HUCA* 58 (1987): 137-57.

²⁴ Fox, "Qoheleth's Epistemology," 137-38.

²⁵ Ted Hildebrandt, "Proverbs, Genre of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove: IVP Press, 2008), 528-39.

Qohelet's discourse on women here is the same with proverbial sayings. It is coming out of an observed situation and wrote it in a concise wisdom sayings. Consequently, this paper seeks to do the reversed order, that is, using literary and synchronic approach to attempt to search out the woman described by Qohelet.

IV. Samson's Three Women

Following Jewish and Christian traditions, scholars have long associated Qohelet to be King Solomon. The reference to "son of David, king in Jerusalem" and the royal autobiography²⁶ in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 are reckoned as evidences to be Solomonic. Thus, Qohelet's numerous didactic observations are often read in light of Solomon's experience such as the text understudy.²⁷ While it is hard to disprove the long-standing consensus and the tradition of Solomonic connections, however, one is forced to face the fact that the text connections with Solomon's women is weak for there is a lack of narrative describing Solomon's women. Solomon's womanising is only briefly described by summary form in I Kings 11:1-6. Hence, the following discussion seek to show that Samson's narrative and womanizing fleshes out Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1 better. The Samson narrative records how three women became a snare and trap to him. His romantic relationships with these women make him vulnerable to the scheming of women.

²⁶ Martin A. Shields, "Qohelet and Royal Autobiography," in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, ed. Mark J. Boda et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 117-36.

²⁷ Peter J. Leithart, "Solomon's Sexual Wisdom: Qohelet and the Song of Songs in the Postmodern Condition," in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century*, ed. Mark J. Boda et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 443-60. Aron Pinker, "Ecclesiastes: Part I: Authorship," *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 41:2 (2013):81-88.

1. Samson's Woman from Timnah

Despite the parental warning and disapproval to marry a Philistine woman (Judg. 14:3), Samson decidedly married an anonymous woman from Timnah. The narrative records at least twice that Samson went to see the woman. The first instance records while on his way to see the woman, he ran into a lion, considered ceremonially unclean. He was mighty to tear a lion apart with his bare hands (14:5-7). The second time he went to see the woman in order to marry her, he saw the lion's carcass and saw honey and took some honey to eat and shared it with his parents (14:8-9).

The scheming of Samson's wife from Timnah happened when Samson held a wedding feast banquet typical of Ancient Near Eastern practice which lasts for 7 days (Gen. 29:22). During the feast, Samson introduced a bet and gave a riddle for the people to guess. He gave a riddle related to his just recent lion experience. The riddle is: "Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." Samson wanted the people to guess and will be rewarded thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes, accordingly.

Three days have passed and the riddle remained unanswered. Insofar as the woman is a Philistine woman, the people exhorts Samson's wife to help them with the riddle in verse 15 "On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, 'Coax your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?'"

Having received a death threat to herself and family, Samson's wife have two options. First, to do as the people asked her to do. Second, to ask for Samson's help to put an end to the threat of the Philistines. Apparently, Samson's wife did according to what the people told her. She coaxes Samson and engages in tricking Samson in verses 16-17: So Samson's wife wept before him, saying, "You hate me; you

do not really love me. You have asked a riddle of my people, but you have not explained it to me." He said to her, "Look, I have not told my father or my mother. Why should I tell you?" She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted; and because she nagged him, on the seventh day he told her. Then she explained the riddle to her people.

What we see here is that the wife used drama of emotional manipulation to make Samson tell her the answer to the riddle. Three schemes involved: She made Samson feel guilty by questioning his love for her. She used crying for seven days. She also nagged him to give him the answer. As a result, Samson was trapped in a situation and cannot bear any longer the torture and pressure of the Timnite wife. Hence, he self-revealed the answer (14:17). Only then he was free from the nagging of the wife.

2. Samson and the Prostitute

In Judges 16:1-3, there is a rather short record of Samson set up by a prostitute in Gaza. The prostitute is unnamed. Samson went to sleep with her while the people of Gaza were told "Samson is here." The question as to who reported to the people of Gaza about Samson's presence in the cannot be easily resolved due to the ambiguity of the text.

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and he went in to her. It was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson is here." They surrounded and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him." (Judg. 16:1-2)

BHS editors propose to add וַיִּתֵּן (It was told) or וַיִּתְּנָה (It was made known) before the prepositional phrase similar to the LXX in 16:2. Adding that additional passive verb does not help solve the question. Hence, scholars show their uncertainties by answering the question by another question or set of questions. K. Lawson Younger when he

writes "the people of the city discover his presence even though 'going to a prostitute' usually involves stealth. Is he so blatant in his approach to the prostitute that he gives himself away?"²⁸

Soggin likewise is unable to directly answer the question:

Although he (Samson) is freed of any danger to his affections, he is now confronted with the trap laid by his enemies in the city. Strangely, however, his enemies either do not know that Samson is staying in the woman's house, or if they do, they do not attack him there, for reasons which are obscure: is it for fear of his strength? Is it out of respect for the laws of hospitality, although this is the house of a prostitute? Do they want to act without any risks, as is shown by the ambush that they lay, however inadequate it may be? We are not told here, nor do we know from other sources.²⁹

Webb deduces and maintains that the reporters were not original Gazites but resident aliens. He writes, "Now he is betrayed by informers who have seen him go into the harlot's house. Those they alert to his presence are described as the people of Gaza. The expression is general, but can hardly refer to the inhabitants of Gaza as a whole, since when they respond by setting an ambush and lying in wait for Samson, it is clearly a particular group who are in view, presumably the leading men of the city or their representatives. the fact that they are called "Gazites," however, suggest that those who betrayed Samson to them on this occasion were not Gazites themselves but resident aliens... Whoever they were, they must have felt that it was in their interest to side with the Gazites against Samson, and effectively handed him over to his enemies as the men of Judah had done."³⁰

²⁸ K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Judges/Ruth*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 314.

²⁹ J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges*, Old Testament Library, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1981), 256.

³⁰ Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 394.

Insofar as the text is ambiguous and subject to many possibilities, I propose that the informer was the prostitute herself with to the following reasons:

First, building on Younger's background information that sleeping with a prostitute is customarily done in stealth, then it is likely that it was the prostitute woman who told the people of Gaza regarding Samson's presence in Gaza. The stealth nature of sleeping with prostitute also provides the reason for Samson to leave the city in the middle of the night to avoid being noticed.

Second, grammatically, the prepositional phrase with pronominal suffix third feminine singular "towards her" (לָהּ) at the end of verse 1 referring to the prostitute may suggest that the prostitute may also be the subject to the following to the phrase "to the people of Gaza saying 'Samson was here.'" In other words, the 3fs pronominal suffix may have double function. It first functions as the object of the preceding sentence and second, as the subject to the following sentence. Insofar as the pronoun 3fs suffix has the closest proximity to the following phrase, the prostitute as the informer cannot be easily dismissed.

3. Samson and Delilah

The Samson and Delilah episode is another story of betrayal and manipulation. 16:4 is straightforward to say that Samson loves (אָהַב) Delilah. However, the rulers of the Philistines conspired with Delilah to inquire of the source of the strength of Samson in exchange for monetary reward (16:5 The lords of the Philistines came to her and said to her, "Coax him, and find out what makes his strength so great, and how we may overpower him, so that we may bind him in order to subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver.") Consequently, Delilah manipulated Samson to expose the secret of his strength. The emotionally-loaded language used by Delilah is the typical way women use to manipulate Samson to reveal his secret.

So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me what makes your strength so great, and how you could be bound, so that one could subdue you." (Judg. 16:6)

Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have mocked me and told me lies; please tell me how you could be bound." (Judg. 16:10)

Then Delilah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me and told me lies; tell me how you could be bound." (Judg. 16:13)

Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you', when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me three times now and have not told me what makes your strength so great." (Judg. 16:15)

What is noteworthy and suggestive is how Delilah wants to bind Samson three times as seen above.³¹ The lexeme used is אָסַר which is the same lexeme used in describing women in Ecclesiastes 7:26.

Also, Delilah accuses Samson of lying at two counts because Samson refuses to tell her his secret at first instance. Lie for not telling his secret and lie for saying "I love you." "The rhetorical question must have particularly struck Samson hard since he is in love with Delilah (16:4)."³² Finally, we see Samson was so vexed to the point of death because of Delilah's constant pressing (צִרְקָה), he eventually revealed his secret. The reference to death is reminiscent of Qohelet's description of how death is better than woman. The revelation of the secret led to his capture, downfall and death.

³¹ J. Cheryl Exum, "Lethal Woman 2: Reflections on Delilah and her Incarnation as Liz Hurley" in *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible*, JSOT Supplementary Series 313, ed. Martin O' Kane (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 254-73.

³² Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 319.

V. The Women of Samson and the Woman of Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1

1. The Women as Divine Judgment against Samson

While these women as described above are indeed vicious and manipulative in their dealing with Samson, Samson is not completely guiltless in these circumstances. There are at least two moral failures of Samson to deserve divine punishment.

Romantic and Sexual Relationship with Foreign Women. All the three women of Samson were foreign women from Philistines: the woman from Timnah, the prostitute from Gaza, Delilah from Valley of Sorek. Beside his sexual relationship with a prostitute, such mixed marriage was clearly prohibited in Deuteronomy 7:1-16, when the Israelites were clearly instructed not to intermarry with the Canaanite women as they dwell in the land of Canaan.

Breaking the Nazirite Vow. Judges 13 records the events leading to the birth of Samson. Samson was born to a formerly barren unnamed woman, the wife of Manoah. What is rather important in this chapter is the repeated reference concerning nazirite vow. The instruction given by the angel of the Lord was repeated at least three times in one chapter as evident below.

Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, (v. 4)

for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines. (v. 5)

but he said to me, "You shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death." (v. 7)

The angel of the Lord said to Manoah, "Let the woman give heed to all that I said to her." (v. 13)

"She may not eat of anything that comes from the vine. She is not to drink wine or s strong drink, or eat any unclean thing. She is to observe everything that I commanded her." (v. 14)

Although the instruction is directed to the wife of Manoah to observe, the same instruction is true to the son born, Samson. We see almost the same prohibitions of the Nazirite vow in Numbers 6. This repetitive reference to the nazirite vow in Chapter 3 is not accidental but a purposeful literary marker to prepare readers how Samson will fail to fulfil this vow.

Thus, in Chapter 14, Samson entered the vineyards of Timnah (14:5). Although it is not explicitly recorded that he drunk wine, but it is unlikely to enter to a vineyard without drinking the wine. In other words, the reference to the vineyard is purposeful as a metonymy of wine. Also, the wedding banquet of Samson presupposes wine was served as beverage.

Furthermore, Samson was exposed to lion's corpse and eventually ate honey from a lion's carcass.³³ Nazirite law has clear instructions on contamination and purification. Evidently, Samson did not perform the necessary purification process:

But if a man dies very suddenly beside him and he defiles his dedicated head of hair, then he shall shave his head on the day when he becomes clean; he shall shave it on the seventh day. Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the doorway of the tent of meeting. The priest shall offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him concerning his sin because of the dead person. And that same day he shall consecrate his head, and shall dedicate to the Lord his days as a Nazirite, and shall bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering; but the former days will be void because his separation was defiled. (Num. 6:9-12)

³³ Younger writes "Bees do not normally inhabit corpses; flies and maggots do. But int he this decay and decomposition, Samson discovers a 'swarm' of bees, not only existing but producing sweetness. Apparently God has provided this as a further means of "stirring" Samson. As an ordinary Israelite, Samson should have left the honey in the corpse alone; as a Nazirite even more so." Younger, *Judges/Ruth*, 302-3.

2. God's Determinism and Human Will

Although Samson's marriage with the woman from Timnah is Samson's personal decision albeit his parents' warning, the text also provides a parenthetical side comment in 14:4: "His father and mother did not know that this was from the Lord; for he was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel." The omniscient narrator uses this verse to suggest divine will and determination. Beyond Samson's defiant will to marry a foreign woman, God, at the same time, has orchestrated the whole marriage event in order judge the Philistines for ruling over his own people, Israel. Samson killed the Philistines as a form of revenge for taking his wife and by cheating on him concerning the riddle.

Furthermore, in the story of Samson and Delilah in Judges 16:30, it reports that using his last strength, Samson pushed the two pillars which bound him away such that the temple came down and killed the rulers and people of Philistines including him. The line that says "he killed many more when he died than while he lived" shows that the whole event, namely, the death of many Philistines, is determined by God himself, although Samson's entrapment to Delilah's trap was a result of his outright disobedience.

The two events and women in Samson's life is indeed a combination of the work of the divine and human. On the one hand, these two women were planned out by God to be a trap to Samson in order to stir Samson to revenge against the Philistines; on the other hand, Samson's decision to be involved in these two pagan women is sign of doing what was right in his own eyes which is evil in the eyes of the Lord; hence, deserving divine punishment as consequence.

This theological element is necessary to underscore for it conforms the overall theological theme in Ecclesiastes. Qohelet is adamant in various places to argue for God's determinism in human affairs (time for everything [Eccl. 3:1-8]) while human beings are fully responsible of their actions (obey God's commandment and fear God [Eccl. 12:9], sowing and reaping [Eccl. 11:1-6]).

3. Language of Entrapment and Bitterness

The following linguistic and conceptual connections are reminiscent of Qohelet's description of women as snares, traps and chains.

In Samson's story, the two women's method towards Samson is described using the same verbal lexeme פתה in 14:15 and 16:5 with a Piel binyan meaning "to seduce," "to deceive." This verb has a negative connotation to propagate beliefs of things that are not true, or partial truth. It involves pretensions and concealment. When one succumbs and yields to that deception, then one is rendered trapped or ensnared, a language we see in Ecclesiastes 7:25.

Also, it may also be said that the women have become annoyance to Samson because of their constant pressing. Two out of the three stories use the same verb (ציק) to speak of the women's vexation. In Judges 14:17, "...because she continued to press him (ציק)" and in Judges 16:16 "With such nagging (ציק) Delilah prodded Samson day after day until Samson was tired to death." The notion of associating woman's entrapment with death is another textual evidence of what we see in Samson's relationship with Delilah and Qohelet's description of woman as bitter than death.

Moreover, the story is developed in such a way that binding Samson becomes important. The hebrew lexeme אסר, meaning, "to tie up or to bind" occurs in 16:5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 21; "prison" in 16:21, 25. In addition, at the fourth and final attempt of Delilah to bind Samson, Samson said, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free."³⁴ The language and imagery here presupposes being bound and trapped. This is also the lexical word used to describe the woman in Ecclesiastes 7:26.

³⁴ "But this time he is not bound by anything but normality – no cords, ropes or loom and no Naziriteship. He has nothing to 'shake off' anymore." Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 406.

VI. Conclusion

Wisdom Literature uses proverbial sayings. Proverbs is characterised by its succinctness and often at the expense of clarity. Hence, in order for the proverbial saying to be intelligible to the readers, a narrative story helps unpack it out. The text understudy is traditionally associated with Solomon's women. Solomon's experience of women (wives and concubines) are recorded in I Kings 11:1-6. Insofar as there are no biblical story of the women of Solomon, this article looks to Samson's life story instead. The above discussion the story of Samson and his women help elucidate the enigmatic passage of Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1.

ABSTRACT

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Qohelet maintains that his study and investigation of everything under the sun is through empirical observation. In Ecclesiastes 7:23-8:1, he endeavours to investigate and understand the scheme of things and ended up making a rather negative evaluative comment about women. He describes woman as snares, traps and chains. Such observation makes him conclude that women are more bitter than death. Moreover, he maintains that entrapment by the woman is a form of divine punishment to the sinner. Qohelet's rather negative statement needs and further articulation. Hence, this article will suggest the type of woman Qohelet might have observed in his study. While earlier studies associate this passage with Solomon's womanizing, this article will show how the three women in Samson's life fit into Qohelet's negative appraisal of woman.

撮 要

在傳道書中，傳道者主張那些他在日光之下所研究調查的萬事萬物，都是透過經驗檢測而得的。在傳道書七章23節至八章1節中，他竭盡所能地調查與理解事物的組成，並在最後作出對女性相當負面的評價；他把女性說成「網羅、陷阱與鎖鏈」。這些觀察使他得出此一結論：婦人比死還苦。此外，他主張「被女人纏住」是神處罰罪人的一種形式。傳道者那相當負面且如謎一樣的敘述，需要更進一步的說明。因此，本文將提出在傳道者的調查中可能指涉的女性類別。雖然早期與傳統的研究將這段經文關聯於所羅門的嬪妃，但本文將論證在參孫生命中的三個女性如何與傳道者所負面評價的女性相稱。