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Having edited *Reading Job Intertextually*, the editors felt compelled to answer that book’s incessant, though implicit, call for a similar book on Ecclesiastes. The editors had seen the fresh insight that a group of scholars bringing a range of intertextual approaches and scholarly specialties could offer on a text as entangled in the intertextual web of the Hebrew Bible and world literature as Job. It was as if floodlights were aimed at the book from a series of new angles, illuminating elements that had long been obscure even while casting unfamiliar shadows, which enlightened in their own way. Job is often read solely in the context of a cordoned-off Wisdom Literature, but this intertextual approach brought it into a broader conversation, one the editors were pleased to share with their fellow contributors.

It is hoped that this book will do the same for Ecclesiastes, a book that offers similar possibilities for intertextual illumination, though joining them with its own distinctive challenges. Both the book of Ecclesiastes and its contribution to the intertextual dialogue in the Hebrew Bible and beyond are different to that of Job. Though the two books are often considered together as “skeptical” or “secondary” Wisdom Literature, they each contribute a unique voice to the broader canonical conversation. The editors hope that this book, like the earlier one on Job, will enable scholars and students of Ecclesiastes to hear this voice.

To the contributors, who have created their own intertextual dialogue in the pages that follow, the editors would like to express their gratitude. They would also like to thank the SBL International Wisdom Literature group for hosting a section on intertextuality in Ecclesiastes in July 2012, at which several of the papers to follow were initially presented. Finally they would like to thank Andrew Mein and Claudia Camp at Continuum/T&T Clark International for their continued support of this project.

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INTRODUCTION

Katharine Dell and Will Kynes

Whilst this volume was conceived as a companion to the volume on Job, and though we have taken a similar method, it has been interesting how an intertextual approach has shown up many key differences between the two books. This in turn feeds into the discussion of whether they should indeed be paired together as “wisdom in revolt,” both displaying skeptical tendencies, or whether in fact they demonstrate how different so-called wisdom books can be. Whilst Job seemed to lend itself very naturally to intertextual comparison, on a diachronic level with its pages being full of clear quotations, parodies and echoes of other texts, and on a synchronic level being an approachable subject matter with which a wide range of texts resonate, Ecclesiastes, like the author of its pages, has proved more elusive.

Part I of the book has Ecclesiastes in dialogue with the Hebrew Bible, not in its entirety but where useful parallels can be found. But our finding is that these allusions are more subtle and limited in scope than we found in Job, though they continue to illuminate the text in valuable ways. The volume begins with consideration of the most widely cited intertext with Ecclesiastes, Gen 1–11, and the parallels are looked at afresh. Indeed Katharine Dell’s finding is that, whilst many scholars have waxed lyrical over the connections, a more rigorous investigation finds the criteria used in such scholarship as ill-defined and often overstated. Dell calls for a more focused set of criteria for judging such intertextual links and for caution in overstating the connections that can indeed be found. In relation to Ecclesiastes the quest for intertextual links has often related to one or two verses only, as in Will Kynes’s essay on Eccl 11:9 and its links with Num 15:39, a link noted by the rabbis as a potential

1. For further reflection on the intentional mix of “diachronic” and “synchronic” intertextual approaches we have encouraged our contributors to explore, see the introduction to the Job volume (Dell and Kynes 2013, xv–xxiii).
contradiction and pursued by early translators who made verbal changes to bring the texts into agreement. Kynes looks at the wider context of the allusion by considering the wider story of the spies to which the Numbers text itself alludes and draws our attention to an important corrective to the idea that intertextuality is simply about “source-hunting.” Rather the contextual meeting-point should be of key concern with this method, and this applies to both texts, which leads Kynes to draw our attention to a second intertext with Num 15 in Eccl 5:5. This and the other allusion to Num 15 in Eccl 11:9 suggest that that chapter and the closely connected spies story flow as an undercurrent below Qoheleth’s turbulent message. Consideration of ch. 5 of Ecclesiastes leads us on to Levinson’s essay on “allusion” (a term he prefers to “intertextuality”) to Deuteronomy. He argues in detail that Eccl 5:3–4 deliberately reworked Deut 23:22–4, providing a clear diachronic connection between these two texts. It was not simply a matter of citation or proof-texting for the author, rather the reworking was a critique and a personal ownership of the issue in a wisdom context. Again the rabbis had got there long before us and it is interesting to reflect on how they used “harmonization with torah” as an important criterion for canonizing this book.

Another type of intertextual connection is made in Ecclesiastes between the figure of Solomon as he is indicated in the book and this same figure in the wider canon of scripture. This issue is addressed by Tremper Longman III, focusing on the intertextual relationship between 1 Kgs 1–11 and Ecclesiastes and on the traditional identification of Qoheleth as Solomon and hence on Solomon as the author of this book. He employs both a diachronic and a synchronic reading to reveal the literary strategy of deliberate association of the two figures of Qoheleth and Solomon, but not identification, and to explore the case of mistaken identity between the two that characterized early midrashim, again bringing us back to the rabbis. The following essay by Richard Schulz puts Qoheleth into dialogue with the prophet Isaiah, first on a diachronic, authorial level in which he questions, as Dell did with Genesis, some of the eager quest for author-intentional parallels, and secondly from a more “readerly” angle asking whether reading Isaiah through the lens of Qoheleth’s worldview might stimulate fresh understanding of the prophetic text. He focuses in particular on the connection between Eccl 10:16–17 and Isa 5:22, but broadens out to other texts from across the canonical Isaiah, including the fascinating servant song connections. From a major prophet, we move on to a minor one in the form of Jonah. In a Bakhtinian consideration of polyphonic narration as a helpful method for unlocking both texts from a readerly synchronic approach,
Mary Mills draws our attention to the narratival identity of each text through the narrative voice and its conversation(s) within the self. She writes, “Qoheleth’s reflections demonstrate how paradox takes shape as inner voices compete to control meaning while Jonah 3 utilises internal and external voices to create a message about the paradoxical nature of urban community.” Her findings are that each author employs different narrative conversations and each contains opposing voices. Our task is to hear them afresh.

Drawing us back to a very specific parallel is Tova Forti’s essay comparing Eccl 10:11 with Ps 140:12 on the topic of the snake charmer. Again the wider context of each verse is important. She argues for an unintentional intertextuality that links the fool and the wicked through the imagery of the snake. Whilst the snake charmer who prevents his snake from biting is a “fool,” the wicked are also like snakes, spreading venom and poison with their tongues.

The most obvious partners for intertextual comparison are perhaps the other “wisdom” books of Job and Proverbs, and in this context Thomas Krüger tackles the comparison with Job. Whilst he prefers a diachronic approach, he recognizes that authorial intent is hard to prove and prefers to use the language of “a sidelong glance.” He considers key sections of Ecclesiastes, such as 4:1–3; 5:12–6:6; 6:10; 7:15–20 and 8:10–15, showing at each point how Job could be a key example of a wider principle. It is interesting to compare this essay with that in Reading Job Intertextually by Schultz that looked at texts from Job and their partners in Ecclesiastes and note some overlap between the two studies, but by no means exactly the same examples or approach, with Schulz’s essay focusing more on verbal association than thematic resonance and only mentioning thematic concerns briefly at the end, whilst Krüger’s takes that as a main focus. This not only shows the subjectivity of intertextual approaches but also indicates that one’s “Vortext” influences one’s selection from the second text (or more) under consideration.

Arguably the closest and most significant “inspiration” for Qoheleth and his book was the book of Proverbs, the mainspring of the wisdom enterprise. There are two essays that cover this connection, the first by Milton Horne. He considers the Solomonic link between Ecclesiastes and Proverbs as enshrined in the superscriptions to both books, but then goes further to consider Solomon’s other reputation for “wealth” and the musings of both books on that topic and on economic matters. He draws a fascinating comparison with the Aristotelian notion of “use value versus exchange value,” opening up a fresh synchronic angle on the reading of both texts and finding a particular echo in Qoheleth’s sentiment.
that the real value of wealth comes from the ability to enjoy it. A rather
different angle is taken by Daniel Estes, who focuses on the vocabulary
of “seeking” and “finding” in both books. He notes how intertextual
links can vary from extensive allusion to just an echo and explores con-
nections at both extremes of the spectrum. He argues for diachronic links
with deliberate textual allusions of Proverbs from the author of Ecclesi-
astes, with some reversals of idea that supplement rather than subvert.

Another book with a Solomonic link to Ecclesiastes is the Song of
Songs, and Brittany Melton explores that link in relation to the literary
recalling of the Solomonic persona in the context of Solomon’s reputa-
tion for both wisdom and love. She looks at the exhortation to pursue
wisdom in both books and at the use of the language of “the lover” in
that context. Finally she considers the specific intertext of Eccl 9:9 with
various sentiments concerning wisdom and love in the Song of Songs,
preferring to use the language of “resonance” to describe such inter-
textual connections.

The final essay in Part I is a more introspective one, looking at the
“inner-textuality” of Qoheleth’s book, which Stuart Weeks sees as
essentially a “monologue” rather than a “dialogue.” It is a monologue,
though, with “contradictions,” as identified by the rabbis, and tensions
abound that are deliberately set up and not resolved by the author. Weeks
argues that Qoheleth often uses allusions in the service of his mono-
logue, allusions across his own work that are often self-referential and
repetitious. This forms an interesting antidote to our quest for intertextual
allusions across the rest of the Hebrew Bible and raises the question of
how far Ecclesiastes relied on such wider allusion to make his points.
Weeks argues that the book is self-sufficient and self-sustaining. This
links back to the opening reflection on how Ecclesiastes rather differs
from Job—one wonders just how self-sufficient, in literary terms, the
author of Job really was. In other words, whilst Ecclesiastes tends to look
inwards, Job is a more outward-looking, eclectic text. This may lead to a
questioning of the pairing of the two both within the “wisdom” corpus
and under its umbrella as a whole. However, the essays in Part I also
demonstrate that Ecclesiastes is by no means an isolated text without key
conversation partners. This reveals another tension about the book that
adds to its conundrums.

Part II concerns the wider dialogue of Ecclesiastes with a wide variety
of texts across many historical periods. It opens with a comparison with
ancient Near Eastern literature by William Anderson. Because of the
likelihood of actual historical and literary links, a diachronic approach is
favoured here which is not simply comparative but looks at the fluidity
of ideas between comparable texts. Egyptian texts are considered, such as The Dispute between a Man and his Ba, the Instruction of Amenemhet, and the Song of Intef, along with the Babylonian Councils of a Pessimist and Dialogue of Pessimism. The multi-cultural Epic of Gilgamesh also provides a clear literary parallel, and the conclusion is drawn that there is allusion from the author of Ecclesiastes to other texts and also echoes that suggest that these texts breathed a shared cultural air. Turning to the Greeks, John Jarick offers a look at Hellenistic cultural parallels through the refreshing lens of comedy, rather than that of skepticism or pessimism. This is essentially a synchronic intertextual comparison that sets the question of dependence aside. Jarick looks at comic poets, notably Aristophanes and Menander, plus other fragments in the light of which Qoheleth’s “words of pleasure” (Eccl 12:10) may acquire a comedic tone that differs so markedly from the usual evaluation of this author as gloomy and pessimistic.

Extra-canonical material forms the subject of the next two essays on Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, companion wisdom books. Bradley Gregory looks in general terms at the relationship between Ecclesiastes and Sirach and at scholarly arguments for and against some degree of dependence, and then in depth at Eccl 3:15 and Sir 5:3, widely considered a case of textual allusion, but for Gregory revealing little more than an echo. He calls for a careful look at methodology when drawing such parallels and stresses the importance of context. Grabbe takes a more thematic approach to connections between Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon and notes their opposing views. The Solomonic link comes into view again along with key themes of wisdom literature—the contrast between the righteous and the wicked and the importance of knowledge. The question of a possible afterlife is a key difference, though both texts air ideas of the “soul.” The pious attitude to wisdom versus the skeptical is also quite different between the two books.

The consideration of links between Ecclesiastes and these early Jewish texts invites an examination of relevant Dead Sea Scrolls, notably those connected with the sapiential tradition. Although the evidence for any kind of connection is sparse, in fact a study of the thematic differences in outlook between Qoheleth and the world view of the Dead Sea sectarians is instructive. It is related to wider scholarly theories about the link between wisdom and apocalyptic—did one develop into another? Goff suggests that an intertextual reading opens up possibilities of engagement with the text of Ecclesiastes amongst the “sociolect” of the Qumran community. Consideration of Qumran leads naturally into re...
on inter-Testamental intertextuality. He airs the possible quotation from Eccl 7:20 in Rom 3:20, which is a starting point for a dialogue between the two works. More thematic links follow and Bartholomew calls us to develop a "literary sensibility" towards the riches that can be gained from an open intertextual approach.

The history of interpretation now opens up new vistas of understanding for the rest of Part II. Jennie Grillo (née Barbour) looks at Jerome’s *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten* and at his inherently "intertextual" method of interpreting the biblical book. She focuses on texts where Jerome speaks of Israel through Qoheleth’s eyes and on his intention to bring this into line with the larger textual picture of the biblical Israel, both its landscape and cities. Augustine is the subject of Susannah Ticciati’s essay on a dialogue between Ecclesiastes and an Augustinian tradition of the afterlife expressed both in *De Civitate dei* and *De Doctrina Christiana*. Her work also draws on intertexts from the Gospels to shed light on concepts of hebel and pneuma and on readings of Christ’s death through the lens of Ecclesiastes. Turning from Christian to Jewish sources, Michail Kitsos considers the midrashic text Ecclesiastes Rabbah and in particular its extensive use of citation of the Psalter to interpret Ecclesiastes. He also reflects at some length on method, making a distinction between monoform intertextuality and multiform intertextuality, both of which have sub-forms which he applies to this text and its psalmic allusions.

We end Part II by moving to modern times with Hugh Pyper’s essay on Kierkegaard and Ecclesiastes, which aims to shed light on both by the intertextual comparison. As he writes, “To read Kierkegaard reading Ecclesiastes, then, is to juxtapose one set of inherited interpretive traditions…to another…and observe their intersection.” Even Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonymity is paralleled in the Qoheleth/Solomon pseudonym. Pyper focuses on an “Upbuilding Discourse” that Kierkegaard bases on Eccl 12:1, which forms a clear precursor to intertextual methods. The final essay by Daniel Treier takes us into the realm of modern literature, focusing on Goethe’s Faust and Heidegger’s Being and Time and suggesting a Bakhtinian “polyphonic” theology of intertextuality as a means of bringing the ancient and modern texts together.

It is our hope that this volume, whilst showing the very different character of Ecclesiastes in comparison to its Joban companion, still demonstrates the endless freshness and variety of interpretation that intertextual approaches, of both diachronic and synchronic kinds, can unveil. It has revealed a web of interconnections that often take us from comparing
two texts to comparing three or more and can span different cultures, ages and a host of different presuppositions. It is also our hope that continued reflection on the intertextual method itself will generate further responses to this most elusive of biblical books.

Bibliography

1. Introduction

Ecclesiastes 11:9 is a microcosm of the interpretive problems that plague the interpretation of the book. Put more positively, the voices which clash in this verse are the same which call readers inexorably back to be lost in their seemingly endless dialogue. First, Qoheleth’s joy declares, “Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart (ḡĔḡ) and the desire of your eyes (ḡĜģĜĥ)” (11:9a). Immediately, Qoheleth’s piety responds, “But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment” (11:9b). But is this Qoheleth’s voice, or that of a pious redactor? Either way, in the juxtaposition of permissiveness and piety, we hear Qoheleth’s pessimism, as well. How can the young enjoy their lives if they know they will be judged for those very actions? Though Qoheleth does not declare it so, surely this is hevel as well.

As joy, piety, and pessimism all meet in Eccl 11:9, Qoheleth’s clamorous internal dialogue draws in a canonical bystander, Torah, in the form of Num 15:39, which states, “You have the fringe (ĭĩĜĩ) so that, when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and not follow after your heart (ĠĞĔĔğ) and your eyes (ĠĜģĜĥ), which you follow after unfaithfully.” Since, however, Qoheleth seems to endorse precisely the pursuit of personal pleasure that the

* I wish to thank Philip Yoo for his helpful comments when the present study was in its formative stages.
1. The view that different voices clash in Ecclesiastes has a long history. See Delitzsch (1891, 217) for a discussion of nineteenth-century views on the issue. For a more recent review of some prominent attempts to account for the voices in the text see Sharp 2004, 48–51.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references are from the NRSV.
fringe, or tsitsit, is intended to prevent, and since Numbers presents this libertarian behavior as the alternative to remembering and doing all the commandments of the Lord, it is little surprise that the rabbis pointed to this intertextual conflict as an indication of Ecclesiastes’ questionable canonical status. Some early translators even corrected the apparent contradiction with small alterations of Qoheleth’s words, and Ben Sira appears to reject them explicitly: “Do not follow your inclination and strength in pursuing the desires of your heart” (Sir 5:2).

Can these voices—joy, piety, and pessimism; Qoheleth and a purported redactor; Ecclesiastes and the canon—be brought into harmony, or should they be left to sing discordantly on? Interpreters often suggest later additions, unattributed quotations, and harmonizations (of which purported implied ironic intentions are the most sophisticated) for the contradictions that make reading the book, at once, so frustrating and fascinating. However, recently intertextuality has arisen as a fourth reading approach to attempt to make sense of Ecclesiastes.

Intertextuality itself is liable to its own measure of frustration and fascination. Though the approach has gained broad popularity in biblical scholarship over the past twenty years or so, its basic definition continues to be disputed, with the hermeneutical significance of authorial intent at the heart of the debate. I have made my own contributions to this debate elsewhere and will not recount them here. Suffice it to say that, though I see value in both “diachronic” or “author-centered” and “synchronic” or “reader-centered” intertextuality, I believe an approach that attends to authorial intent and focuses its efforts on identifying and

4. “R. Samuel b. R. Isaac said: The Sages sought to suppress the Book of Koheleth because they discovered therein words which tend towards heresy. They declared, ‘This is the wisdom of Solomon that he said, REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, IN THY YOUTH! Now Moses said, That ye not go about after your own heart (Num. XV, 39), whereas Solomon said, WALK IN THE WAYS OF THY HEART! Is restraint to be abolished? Is there no judgment and no Judge?’ But since he continued, BUT KNOW THOU, THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT, they exclaimed, ‘Well has Solomon spoken’” (Midrash Rabbah on Eccl 11:9; translation in Cohen 1951, 295–96).

5. Some LXX manuscripts read “walk in the ways of your heart blamelessly and not in the sight of your eyes…” The Targum reads: “walk in humility with the ways of your heart and be careful with what your eyes see that you do not see evil…” See Seow 1997, 349–50.

6. Wis 2:6 also may imply a rejection of Eccl 11:9a when it puts a similar sentiment in the mouth of the “ungodly” (1:16) (Barton 1908, 185).

7. For a summary of these approaches, see Fox 1989, 19–28.

8. See, e.g., Tita 1996; Schoors 2000; Fidler 2006; Barbour 2012.

interpreting allusions, which are a particular type of the broader concept of intertextuality that I define as “intentional implicit reference[s] to an earlier expression” (Kynes 2012, 31), offers the greatest insight into biblical texts. However, this approach has most value when it considers the broader interplay opened up between those texts—the “current of sense” running between them—by the allusions that solder them together. 10 I will refer to this below as the “intertextual context” of an allusion. This broader interplay may be indicated by recurring allusions to the same text, since “allusions often radiate out to contiguous allusions” (Alter 1996, 118). Intertextuality thus transcends earlier approaches, such as “source-hunting,” which merely seeks to identify the allusions, or “influence,” which considers primarily the effect of earlier texts on later writers, by instead considering how, through their allusions, later writers interpret earlier texts and incorporate them into their rhetorical aims.

Understood in this way, intertextuality has several advantages over the other approaches previously employed for explaining the contradictions in Ecclesiastes. Unlike positing and removing later additions, it offers more text to interpret rather than less. Unlike unattributed quotations, it provides context for the external voices intervening in the text. Unlike harmonization, instead of leveling hills and filling in valleys, it offers, often, an even more diverse terrain to traverse. However, like both later additions and unattributed quotations, it considers the text a clash of different voices, though unlike the former, and like the latter, it considers those voices (largely) under the author’s control. Like harmonization, it finds the solutions to the problems in the text in a space outside of it, though instead of in a higher level of abstraction, as is often the case, it looks to other texts. Thus, instead of removing voices from the choir that makes up Ecclesiastes as later additions, positing hypothetical singers, or minimizing tonal differences, an intertextual approach invites new actual members into the performance. The allusions to Num 15 in Ecclesiastes encourage us to listen to this text more closely to see if, by joining the chorus, it may resolve some of the dissonant chords in the book without making them into simple monotone, which would still fall short of harmony.

2. Follow Your Heart: Ecclesiastes 11:9 and Numbers 15:39

When scholars note what Thomas Krüger (2004, 196) calls the “provocative allusion” to Num 15:39 in Eccl 11:9, they rarely comment on the nature of the allusion beyond observing, like the rabbis, the way it

“blatantly contradicts” Numbers. The rabbis’ concern does seem to be with a potential contradiction in meaning and not necessarily Qoheleth’s direct allusion to and rejection of the Numbers text. One midrashic reading even justifies the necessity of the apparently self-evident command in Num 15:39 to choose “the right way” over “any way [one] likes” by arguing that it serves as a corrective to Eccl 11:9. The lexical connections between the two verses are indeed rather limited. “Heart” and “eyes” are common terms. However, even though the allusion is subtle, when combined with the strong thematic link, it is certainly recognizable, as its recognition by the rabbis and numerous scholars demonstrates. It appears the author of Ecclesiastes had Num 15:39 in mind when he wrote and that he wanted his readers to recall the verse as well.

Observing this contradicting allusion to Num 15:39 often leads into an interpretation of 11:9b as a correcting gloss intended to nullify Qoheleth’s skepticism. This gloss is then connected with 12:13–14 in the epilogue, with which it shares an emphasis on God’s judgment, as the ultimate correcting gloss to the skepticism of the entire book. However, like so many passages in Ecclesiastes, an alternative, almost completely opposite, interpretation has been proposed. In this view, the vav in 11:9b is seen as consecutive instead of adversative, so that the clause offers a motivation for 11:9a instead of moderating its joy-enjoining imperative.

11. Salters 1975, 341. For those who address the issue, the author of Ecclesiastes is generally assumed to be alluding to Numbers without any further discussion, perhaps due to assumptions about the relative dates of the two texts. Though the commonly accepted dates for both would indeed place Ecclesiastes (from the early Hellenistic or perhaps late Persian period) after Numbers (with a late date for P reaching the mid- to late Persian period), the continuing debate on the dates of both texts suggests this is flimsy ground for determining dependence. For more on recent attempts to date Ecclesiastes, see Tremper Longman’s contribution to the present volume. For Numbers, particularly arguments for a later date, see Römer 2008. The unlikely reference of the legal instruction to its negation more strongly supports this conclusion, though the possibility that Numbers is alluding to Qoheleth’s libertinism in order to curtail it cannot be definitively denied.


13. Both “heart” (Neill or ) and “eyes” (Neill) appear together with second-person suffixes in eleven other verses in the Hebrew Bible.

14. It is questionable how effective 11:9b is as an “orthodox correction,” given that the LXX and Targum translations mentioned above (n. 5) that alter 11:9a to make it more orthodox also include it (Krüger 1996, 116).


The verse would then be translated, “Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, and know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.” This would agree with the talmudic dictum: “Everyone must give an account before God of all things one saw in life and did not enjoy” (y. Qidd. 4:12).17

Neither interpretive framework has involved extended reflection on why Qoheleth would draw precisely this verse from Numbers in to his discussion at this juncture.18 For those who consider 11:9b a moderating response to the imperative, Num 15:39 is merely seen as a prooftext against pursuing one’s passions, which Qoheleth rejects. For the motivating interpretation, the connection with Numbers is more problematic because it would mean Qoheleth has called God in to support his apparent rejection of the Torah. As a result, perhaps, some who suggest this interpretation, such as Robert Gordis (1968, 335–37), pass the allusion by without comment. C. L. Seow (1997, 350) downplays the conflict between the two passages by using Egyptian parallels to argue that Qoheleth is using an idiom that “has nothing to do with how one makes ethical decisions (i.e., whether one follows one’s heart or obeys divine orders).” Eunny Lee (2005, 76), however, claims the “intertextual conversation” elicited by the similarity of Qoheleth’s language to Num 15:39 indicates that he “deliberately counters” the opposition between the desires of the human heart and the divine will in that passage. Thus, Lee claims, Qoheleth is making a statement about how ethical decisions are made: “gladness in the human heart redeems that inner space (cf. 5:19), making it and its desires an appropriate vehicle of moral agency.” This contributes to her larger argument that, in contrast to the age-old interpretive assumption, enjoyment and piety need not be pitted against one another, but that Qoheleth argues “enjoyment of life is a matter of religious duty” (2005, 125). However, though this changes the nature of the opposition between Ecclesiastes and Num 15:39, putting it to a positive instead of pessimistic purpose, a contradiction still remains, as does the treatment of Num 15:39 as little more than an isolated prooftext.19

17. See, e.g. Seow 1997, 371 (emphasis his).
18. The exploration of this question here is based on the intertextual method developed in Kynes 2012.
19. Ironically, given this scholarly proclivity toward reading Num 15:39 in an isolated fashion, Krüger (2004, 24–25) argues that in Qoheleth’s allusion to Num 15:39 he is opposing a “legalistic” obedience to the Torah, instead contributing to a broader understanding of Torah that does not see it “as a collection of individual commandments and prohibitions.”

Reading Num 15:39 in isolation is unfortunate because the verse itself invites a broader intertextual context. Jacob Milgrom (1989, 117) argues the tsitsit passage (15:37–41) is included at the end of the “miscellany of diverse laws” in ch. 15 to form a verbal inclusion with the spies narrative in Num 13–14. He writes, “In ‘scouting’ (tur, 13:2, 25; 14:34), the spies whored (zanah, 14:33) after their eyes and brought a false report. So by wearing tsitsit, Israel would be prevented from ever again ‘scouting’ (tur, 15:39) and ‘whoring’ (zanah, 15:39) ‘after their heart and eyes’” (1989, 127). In his view, the verse puts obedience to God’s commandments in opposition to following after one’s heart and eyes, and the spies narrative reinforces this lesson. Thus, Tzvi Novick (2008, 3–4), picking up on further lexical connections between the verse and the spies narrative, observes that seeing the tsitsit serves as “an antidote to the sin of the spies, who, having scouted out the land (טָסִיסִית), and having seen (שָׁנָה) tall men compared to whom they seemed, in their own eyes (יָדַעְתָּם) as grasshoppers, discouraged the Israelites, who strayed (יָדַע) from God and were punished (Num 13:32–33; 14:33).”

Novick’s comments, however, introduce a new dynamic into the interplay between the legislation in Num 15:39 and the spies narrative in chs. 13–14. The passage he refers to from the story is the spies’ “bad report” of the land given to discourage the people from entering it, in which they exaggerate its inhabitants’ size while minimizing its fecundity, calling it “a land that devours its inhabitants” (Num 13:32–33). Joshua and Caleb, however, claim, “The land that we went through as spies (טָסִיסִית) is an exceedingly good land (טָסִיסִית)…a land that flows with milk and honey” (Num 14:7–8), while assuring the Israelites its people are nothing to fear. Thus, Moses’s command to “spy out” (טָסִיסִית) the land and “see” (יָדַעְתָּם) what it is like (13:17–18) leads to two contradictory conclusions. It does not appear that “spying” after “your eyes” necessarily opposes remembering God’s commandments (after all, which other eyes could Joshua and Caleb use?). If the other spies are intentionally distorting the goodness of the land, which they also saw, to dissuade the people from invading in 14:32–33, it may even be Joshua and Caleb and not the other spies who are truly following their eyes. Joshua and Caleb’s emphatic description of the attractiveness of the land is, then, a rhetorical appeal to the people’s hearts. In fact, though the connection is not as close in the Hebrew as it appears in the NRSV translation, God declares that Caleb follows him with a different type of internal devotion than the rebellious people: “But my servant Caleb,
because he has a different spirit (דעת) and has followed me wholeheartedly (לבטל), I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it’’ (Num 14:24). This may explain the significance of the relative clause at the end of Num 15:39, ‘‘who you follow unfaithfully after’’), which George Buchanan Gray finds “a very pointless addition to the preceding,” apparently because he assumes that following one’s eyes and heart is naturally opposed to following God’s commandments. However, this relative clause may be necessary to distinguish the type of following after one’s eyes and heart that is in opposition to obedience to God’s commandments, the type practiced by the other ten spies and not Joshua and Caleb.

b. The Broader Intertextual Context of Ecclesiastes 11:9
With this context in mind, we can see Qoheleth’s use of Num 15:39 with new eyes. The Israelites’ sin was that they did not pursue the joy offered them in the promised land of Canaan, “an exceedingly good land…a land that flows with milk and honey.” It was for this that they were judged. This provides support for the motivating interpretation of 11:9b without it countering Num 15:39. Pursuing pleasure and obeying God need not be opposed to one another. This agreement would also be an argument for the authenticity of this reference to God’s justice in the context of pursuing joy. Like the motivating interpretation of Eccl 11:9, in the spies narrative, the Israelites must give an account for the good they had seen and did not enjoy.

This interpretation receives support from two phenomena elsewhere in the book. The first is Qoheleth’s widespread use of subtle intertextual allusions to both the law and history of Israel. For example, just in 4:17–5:6 [Eng. 5:1–7], which Anton Schoors (2000, 48) calls “a pericope which seems to present the most explicit example of intertextuality” in the book, links have been proposed with several passages. The nearly verbatim citation of the law on paying a vow in Deut 23:22 in Eccl 5:3 is

20. G. B. Gray (1903, 185) also claims this usage of לַעֲלוֹת has here “an altogether exceptional use” because it normally refers to “some illegitimate cult or superstition of those who practice it,” but he is overlooking its use in Num 14:33, where it does not refer to the cult, but to the “faithlessness” of the wilderness generation, as he acknowledges in his comments on that verse (1903, 163). This shared unusual use of לָעֲלוֹת further strengthens the connection between the legal and narratival passages.

21. Thus Stuart Weeks (2012, 84) argues that in Ecclesiastes “the pursuit of pleasure is not an alternative to moral or ethical behaviour, but an option open, in effect, only to those who please God.”
the most striking,22 but connections have also been noted with 1 Sam 15:22 (cf. 4:17) and the broader Saul narrative,23 the Solomon narrative in 1 Kgs 3–11,24 the Jacob–Bethel tradition (Gen 28:10–22; 31:13; 35:1, 7, 14),25 Deut 4:39 (cf. 5:1),26 Lev 5:4 (cf. 5:5),27 and the shegaga or unintentional sin legislation in Lev 4 and Num 15:22–31.

3. Do Not Say It Was a Mistake: Ecclesiastes 5:5 and Numbers 15:22–31

Once again, we encounter Num 15, which provides the second support for my interpretation of Qoheleth’s sophisticated interaction with that passage in 11:9. The intertextual connection in 4:17–5:6, “a sapiential handbook of religion” (Fidler 2006, 8), is as follows. In 5:5, Qoheleth declares, “Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake (יְֽהָֽאִלּוּ לְעַל שָׁוָא הָאָדָם); why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?” That Hebrew phrase is repeated exactly in Num 15:25, and only there, where it contributes to legislation on sacrifices for unintentional sin: “The priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the Israelites, and they shall be forgiven; it was unintentional (רְשָׁעָה לְעַל שָׁוָא הָאָדָם).”

Once again scholars who note the connection have been content to treat the passage in Numbers as an isolated law. The fact that it is placed in Num 15, not only the same chapter to which Qoheleth alludes later, but also the chapter following the spies narrative in Num 13–14, has been overlooked. However, this context is again illuminating for the interpretation of this passage.


The legislation in Num 15:22–31 addresses three related situations: (1) unintentional communal sin (vv. 22–26); (2) unintentional individual sin (vv. 27–29); and (3) intentional individual sin (vv. 30–31) (Novick 22. Recognition of this connection is widespread. Otto Kaiser (1995, 90) argues the fact that Qoheleth “cites” Deut 23:22 is evidence “he can hardly have broken altogether with the scriptural faith and legal piety of his people—an important insight into the writer.” Similarly Fischer 1997, 48. See also Bernard Levinson’s contribution to the present volume.
25. Fidler 2006.
27. Hertzberg 1963, 122; Gordis 1968, 44. Gordis discusses several examples of Qoheleth’s “creative use of traditional material” (43–45).
Intentional communal sin is not mentioned, likely because, as Novick notes, the rebellion of the community transgresses the bounds of any legislation. Three of those possible categories of sin are at play in the spies narrative. The ten spies who give a “bad report” are guilty of intentional individual sin, for which they die (14:36–37). The community’s level of culpability, however, is unclear. God declares the congregation “wicked” (הָרֹאשׁ הַמַּעֲשֶׂה) and sentences the entire generation to death in the wilderness (14:35). The deity declares they will bear their “iniquity” forty years (14:34), using the same word הָאַכְתָּבָא, which the legislation in ch. 15 uses to describe the guilt associated with intentional individual sin (15:31). This all points to the seriousness of their transgression. But, on the other hand, the legislation only offers “pardon” (מִנְזָא) for unintentional sin (15:25–26, 28), and “pardon,” again using the same word as in the legislation, is what Moses, playing the role of the interceding priest in the legislation (15:25), requests for the people and what God grants (14:19–20). Moses reports these things, presumably both the punishment and the pardon, to the people (14:39), and their response indicates an understandable confusion. After initially mourning (14:39), they admit they have “sinned” (בֵּית הַמַּעֲשֶׂה), perhaps reflecting the “sin offering” (וְּבֵית הַמַּעֲשֶׂה) still required of those who commit an unintentional sin (15:25, 27), but then they set off to invade Canaan as if the episode had never happened, only to face defeat (14:44–45). As 15:30–31 declares, an intentional sin leads to being cut off from the community and God’s promises. This is the punishment God declares on that generation. By attempting to enter the promised land, the generation acts as if their sin was only an unintentional shegaga. Their defeat demonstrates they are wrong. And yet, God does not immediately destroy them as he at first threatens. As Novick observes, the intentional communal sin pushes past the limits of the legislation; it enters an arena where God’s holy wrath and his merciful commitment to his people collide.

b. The Broader Intertextual Significance of Ecclesiastes 5:5

This broader context sheds new light on Qoheleth’s allusion to the shegaga legislation. Qoheleth warns his listeners not to let their mouths lead them into sin (5:5a). The sin of the congregation in the spies narrative was one they were lead into by their mouths, as the bad report of the spies led the people to grumble. Qoheleth then advises not to say before the “messenger” (עַלְמָא), likely a priest,28 that one’s action (the vow from

the previous verse?) is a shegaga (5:5b), supporting his admonition with a rhetorical question: “Why should God be angry at your voice (יִשָּׂ֖ע), and destroy the work of your hands?” Some find the divine destruction Qoheleth threatens out of proportion with the purported sin of failing to fulfill a vow (see Barbour 2012, 104), but when the people cry out with a loud “voice” (יִשָּׂע) upon hearing the spies’ bad report (14:1), and then later attempt to pass off their sin as a mere pardonable shegaga to Moses, perhaps playing the role of יִשָּׂע, they do indeed face destruction.31 Thus, Qoheleth concludes in the following verse, “Fear God” (5:6).32

4. Conclusion

Compared to Num 15, Qoheleth’s two allusions appear to contradict one another. In 11:9 Qoheleth appears to take Num 15:39 in a more lenient direction, while in 5:5 he takes the law on unintentional sin in a more restrictive one, denying its allowance for shegaga. However, if the connections between these laws and the narrative which precedes them are taken into account, then Qoheleth consistently encourages his audience to reject the disobedience of the spies and the people who follow them and instead embrace the joys of the land promised by God. Like the spies narrative, he presents both the dangers of disobedience and the benefits of obedience. It is little surprise, then, that in both passages where Num 15 is alluded to, retribution is also mentioned.

The mention of God’s retribution brings us back once more to the epilogue. It has been argued that the summarizing statement in 12:13, “Fear God, and keep his commandments (יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוֹ); for that is the whole duty of everyone,” must be from a later hand because in the body of the text Qoheleth never joins the fear of God and obedience to his commandments together (Wilson 1984, 178; Murphy 1987, 454). However, here, one final time, the connection with Num 15 is illuminating. If Qoheleth wanted to evoke the spies narrative, why didn’t he just allude

29. For this reading, see, e.g. Fox 1999, 55, 84, 232–33.
30. My translation.
31. Thus Krüger (2004, 25) believes, “Qoh 5:5 speaks against a playing down of guilt as a ‘mistake,’ as could be suggested by the cultic requirements in Leviticus 4–5 and Num 15:22–31,” but, in fact, Num 15:22–31 in its canonical location after the spies narrative already provides some protection against this lenient interpretation.
32. The rabbis also connect Eccl 5:5 with a narrative in Numbers, though it is Miriam’s slander against Moses in Num 12. They also see Moses playing the role of “messenger” based on Num 20:16, which refers to God sending a יִשָּׂע to deliver the people from Egypt. See Cohen 1951, 133.
to it directly rather than through the medium of Num 15? While the spies narrative does not mention יֵּאַֽנָּֽנָּֽו once, Num 15 repeats the word four times. Two instances come in 15:39 and the following verse, which is connected logically to it. The other two are found in the verses which introduce and conclude the shegaga legislation in vv. 22–31. Subtly, once again, Qoheleth has joined the fear of God and the obedience of God’s commandments, even as he has joined the laws of Israel and the nation’s history. This allusive incorporation of Israel’s history into Ecclesiastes would be a further example of the phenomenon Jennie Barbour (2012) argues is pervasive in the book.

Qoheleth’s two allusions to Num 15 encourage further reflection on the connections between his book and not only that chapter, but also its broader intertextual context in the spies narrative in Num 13–14, with which Num 15 is connected, redactionally, lexically, and thematically. When this is taken into account, Qoheleth does not appear to be rejecting Numbers but reinterpreting it, and perhaps even doing so along the lines intended by those responsible for the final form of Numbers, who placed the laws in Num 15 immediately after the narrative in Num 13–14. Qoheleth takes these communal laws and this national narrative and applies them to the individual. This reinterpretation suggests he does not see the pursuit of joy and the obedience of God’s commandments as in opposition with one another, but that he believes God has in fact commanded his people to pursue joy, offering them a figurative land of milk and honey, which they turn away from to their peril. He takes on the role of the spies as he “seeks out,” using the same verb, יֵּאַֽנָּֽנָּֽו, employed to describe the spies’ activity, the good God offers in the world (Eccl 1:13; 2:3; 7:25), and, like they do, he reports on what he has “seen” (יָֽתַּֽוָּֽו).37

33. Intriguingly, the word only appears one other time in the entire book, the final verse (Num 36:13), which also has a summative function.
34. “So you shall remember and do all my commandments (יֵּאַֽנָּֽנָּֽו), and you shall be holy to your God” (Num 15:40).
35. Barbour (2012, 171–72) also notes the confluence of fear of God and obedience to God’s commandments in 4:17–5:6 and similarly concludes, “This example opens up the possibility that the postscript of 12:13–14 is truer to the words of Qohelet than many allow.” Therefore, the connection of the two is not “rather jarring” (Wilson 1984, 183, 189) when one encounters it in the epilogue.
36. Olivier Artus (2008, 136) claims connections between Num 13–14 and 15 are the best illustration of the way the book uses legislative elements as keys to the interpretation of the narratives juxtaposed with them.
However, among the spies, he is a Caleb or Joshua. He does not reject the law and history of Israel, but, demonstrating an awareness of both, he draws them subtly in to support his call to invade a promised land flowing with joy. And yet, when death and meaninglessness loom large like Nephilim, we hear the other ten spies in Qoheleth, as well. Consistent with his general approach, he finds and exploits tensions in the Numbers text to draw his listeners into deeper contemplation of what living out this pursuit of joy motivated by God’s judgment means.

Bibliography


38. Gordis (1968, 43) and Hertzberg (1963, 46) both agree that Qoheleth had access to the Pentateuch in its final form. Barbour (2012, 171) has made an extensive study of Qoheleth’s “exercises in wisdom at work reading history.”