

Says Qohelet!

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Ecc 7:26b – 27a

(BHS)

טוב לפני האלהים ימלט ממנה
וחוטא ילקד בה:
ראה זה מצאתי
אמרה קהלת

(RSV)

he who pleases God escapes her,
but the sinner is taken by her.
Behold, this is what I found,
says the Preacher

Line 1, you may remember that *tôb* = “good,” which here = “he who pleases.” “Sinner” is obviously a participle. In line 3, RSV’s “Behold” is the imperative of the verb “to see.” “Preacher” is a gloss of *qôhelet*, which means something like: the one who speaks in assembly, the Ecclesiastic.

Please read Ecc 7:25 – 29 now.

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Qohelet wrote some awful things about the ladies. What are we to make of this?

Ecclesiastes speaks in two voices. The main body is the words of Qohelet. They are written in first person by him as he autobiographically recounts what he has learned in his life under the sun. In 7:25 – 29 he speaks from personal experience. He has found no satisfaction in the area of sex and love.

The other voice is the editor’s, who arranged and published the words of Qohelet. He speaks of Qohelet in the third person. For example, see the first several verses. The editor also makes commentary in his synopsis at the end (12:8 – 14). He commends Qohelet’s words as valuable. They are astute—but

also wearisome. Beware, he says, of that sort of writing. But also learn from it. That is how I understand the closing paragraph.

Since the editor both opens and closes the book, he is sometimes called the “frame narrator.” Since most of what he writes is in the epilogue, he can also be called the Epilogist. (Tip for ordinands: at my ordination exam Presbytery asked, “Who wrote Ecclesiastes?” I said, “The frame narrator.” There were no further questions along those lines.)

Anyway, Qohelet’s philosophy brackets out revealed religion. He tries to define an honest appraisal of life under the sun without drawing on the traditions of Israel. There is no hint in his words that God has spoken. His description of life is worth pondering—although it is ultimately incomplete. The Epilogist basically sets Qohelet’s whole argument aside as being unable to answer the big questions, and instead defines human life in terms of what God has revealed (12:13 – 14). This is something Qohelet won’t do.

After the opening few verses and before the epilogue, Qohelet has the stage to talk about life all he wants. The frame narrator stays quiet and lets Qohelet have his say. *Except once*. There is one part of Qohelet’s musings that is so beyond the pale, so obviously his own idiosyncratic viewpoint, that the Epilogist can’t stand it and has to insert into the narrative, “Says Qohelet!” In other words, “Don’t blame the messenger! This isn’t what I think, ladies! I’m just reporting it!” He does this only here, where Qohelet complains about sex and love. This is not the place to develop a full-blown argument, but if you want a technical discussion, you may see my article [here](#).

Let me tell you how I understand this passage about the ladies. Qohelet in 7:23 – 29 is tied through the use of some Hebrew terms to the opening two

chapters, which are a reflection on Solomon's wise life. O yes, Solomon was wise—wiser than any man—except in one area. Women. His love for foreign women led him to worship their gods, which of course is the ultimate folly. His many wives became a snare to him in this way. And thus for Solomon, who was so very wise in all other ways, his weakness for women became his downfall. I argue that 7:25 – 29 alludes to this.

So what does that mean for us? Only this: true wisdom includes control of the venereal appetite. One's sex life is part and parcel of what it means to be wise. If you fail in that area, you are not wise. This failure led Solomon to worship other gods—and this failure in your life also leads to spiritual adultery, a wish for a world run by a god who will let you have what you lust for.

Jesus said that adultery begins with the heart attitude (Matt 5:28). To follow Jesus is to guard your heart in this respect. Do you wistfully read romance novels and yearn for another life? Do you wish you could start over with someone else? Do you feel trapped in an unsatisfying situation? Do you act this out?

The real snare and trap is dissatisfaction with the gifts your Father has given you. In the end, this is where the spiritual battle truly is.

Something to think about.