The use of numerical sayings in Israelite wisdom has been researched and the results presented by W. M. W. Roth in his monograph, *Numerical Sayings in the O.T.* (SVT 13, Leiden, 1965). Numerical sayings are also to be found in extra-biblical wisdom material, some from the ancient Near East, such as the Words of Ahikar (*ANET*, p. 428), and some independent of it, such as the Analects of Confucius. Although numerical sayings are not one of Qoheleth’s most frequent literary forms, we find them in iv 1-12, a section in which he uses numerical statements to summarize his conclusions. Roth’s study does not deal with these sayings, and so it is important for us to consider them.

In i 3 Qoheleth informs us of the basic question with which he approaches life, and with which the book will deal. He asks whether there is any advantage (yitrôn) in a man’s life. His research leads him to respond that there is none (cf. i 2). However, he admits that one can find at least some reward, skr (iv 9, ix 5). His conclusions depend upon a method which we can describe as ‘scientific’ for it involves the empirical observation of life situations, from which certain conclusions are then drawn. To use Qoheleth’s own terminology, he first “observes” (rḥ), then “muses to himself” (‘āmaṭi ḫelībbi). This entire process is evident in iv 1-12. In addition to the introductions to his three observations (vv. 1, 4, 7), there are three conclusions. The latter all use the Ṭōb-Spruch (T-S) form (vv. 3, 6, 9). Thus we may divide this section as follows: iv 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12a, 12b. The fourth sub-section, introduced by ki, “for”, has three conditional clauses each of which supports the validity of the

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conclusions expressed in the T-S. The entire unit is then rounded off with an aphorism quoted further to support his empirically-derived conclusion.

What makes this unit unique is that each of the concluding T-S has a numerical cast; the three conditional clauses are built around the numericals "1" and "2", and the final aphorism is distinctly numerical. It is therefore a text which merits our attention not only for its unique form, but also because it expands our knowledge of the use of numerical sayings within OT wisdom literature.

I

Our first task is to appreciate the overall structure of the unit. The structure may be set out in the following schematic manner:

ii 1 wesabit əni wa'er'eh 'et-kol-hā 'ašúqím
ii 3 wesōb miššnēhem 'et xarter...
ii 4 wersēk əni 'et-kol-amāl
ii 6 jōb melō'... mimmerlō'...
ii 7 wesabit əni wa'er'eh hebel
ii 9 jōhim haš'ayim min-hā'ēhād
ii 10 ki 'im-yippōlī hā'ēhād...
ii 11 gam 'im-yišk'ōhā š'ayim...
ii 12 wes'ām-im yitqepō hā'ēhād...
whahēt hammēšūllāt lō? baḥērāh yinnātēq

The above diagram sets out clearly the three observations and conclusions which are gathered in this section, together with their common expressions. We also note the three conditional clauses which buttress the findings, and the final aphorism which completes the unit.

In addition to the structure, we should note that each of the observations relates to a different aspect of the human situation. The first has to do with oppression, the second with an aspect of the work ethic, and the third with the enigma of an apparently meaningless working life. The latter two sub-sections have something in common because both frequently use the key-words hebel (ii 4, 7, 8) and 'amāl (ii 4, 6, 8, 9).

II

ii 1-3. Qoheleth opens this sub-section with a phrase (wesabit əni wa'er'eh) found elsewhere only in this unit at ii 7, though it is similar to one he will use later in ix 11. His concern at this point is